

Consumer Decision Making in Restaurant Selection

(Volume I)

By

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***A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the University's
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy***

April 2015

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate consumers' decision of selecting a restaurant for leisure. It was based on research carried out in the South East of the UK. In line with the cognitive paradigm the importance of attributes was approached from the theoretical perspective of utility theory in which consumers pursue maximisation of benefits from the service which they are evaluating. This study follows a sequential mixed methods approach. It consists of a qualitative stage followed by a quantitative stage, each one adhering to the precepts of their own paradigms. The qualitative stage was based on data collected through six focus groups of four to six respondents. An interview guide was used in semi-structured settings and data was analysed using applied thematic analysis. The second stage employed an online survey generating quantitative data from 376 respondents. The theme of 'eating out occasion', such as a romantic dinner, was a key element of the decision-making process. This thesis presents a framework for examining the different stages of the decision using the stylised Engels, Kollat and Blackwell (EKB) model (Tuan-Phan and Higgins, 2005). Its stages delve into the influence of emotions, motivations and the consumer's regulatory focus in the decision. The methodological design with the possibility of selecting attributes, emerging from the qualitative stage, offers a contribution to the use of conjoint analysis for complex decisions. The study also proposes a new typology of restaurant attributes, with seven categories influencing perceived consumer value. The study's findings further indicate that price is a factor influencing the expectations from the other attributes. The study considers a number of implications for the industry, such as, the importance of service and consumers' willingness to pay more for a service that is friendly, welcoming and attentive. It also suggests many areas for further research.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis has been a quite a remarkable journey. And this journey was only possible because of the support, help and assistance of a large number of people. Because of limited space there have been unavoidable omissions from this list, but these are not absent from my thoughts of appreciation and gratitude. First of all, there were people who believed in me from the start and supported my application as a PhD candidate. Then there were a considerable number of friends, colleagues at Bucks New University and at University of West London and other acquaintances who provided valuable feedback for improving the research instruments. I am also grateful to all the respondents; some even kindly referred others to the online survey. Without their enthusiastic help this thesis would not have been possible.

A special word of gratitude goes to the Sawtooth Software team in Utah, USA. First of all, for the research grant that facilitated the use Adaptive Choice Based Conjoint (ACBC) and SSI software for the research, for hosting the survey and for the continuous support with technical queries. Many people in Sawtooth software were involved; particularly Brian McEwan and also the SKIM team in Rotterdam (the Netherlands), especially Stefan Ammerlaan who could guide me through questions in the use of ACBC and Hierarchical Bayes Analysis. Thank you so much for all the support received.

Special mention has to be made about my supervisors Dr. Ali Bakir and Professor Eugenia Wickens. I have been very fortunate to have them as my supervisors. They not only provided me with constructive feedback throughout this journey but also with words of support and encouragement. I am indebted for their care, commitment and expert advice and guidance during these four (4) years and for the interest shown in my topic long before I started the thesis. Also to Laura Bray who is the engine of the research unit and who is always there for us when we need help with anything related with the studies and research at Bucks New University.

Words of appreciation go to Jennie Liebenberg who helped me with the proof-reading and final editing of the thesis. Also to Jessica Hill who assisted with the hard work of transcribing the interviews. And finally, warmest words of gratitude and deepest love to my wife Yelitza and daughter Bernadette. Their support and care, and most especially their understanding was essential for me to complete this thesis.

Author's declaration

I, Pedro Longart, declare that the work presented in this thesis is original. It has been produced by me, except as acknowledged in the text, as the result of my own research. The material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Eating out of home has become an integral part of people's lives. This is because people have changed their attitudes about food and also due to an increase in disposable income (Capstick, 2011). Eating out normally takes place in restaurants which have become an important part of our everyday lifestyles and offers 'a place to relax and enjoy the company of family, friends, colleagues, and business associates' (Walker, 2014; p. 160.). Indeed, a restaurant takes a human need - the act of eating - and transforms it into a civilized ritual involving hospitality, imagination, satisfaction, graciousness, and warmth (Gunasekeran, 1992).

This need has been satisfied by the restaurant sector of the hospitality industry. The restaurant industry has become a massive business worldwide. In the USA, for example, about 50% of all money spent on food is consumed away from home where consumers eat up to five times a week (Walker, 2014). In the UK, where 77.1% of respondents of a survey conducted in 2010 revealed that they had visited a restaurant in that year, the market value of all restaurants is £19 bn.; with £8.5 bn. consumed at fast-food restaurants (Capstick, 2011).

The restaurant sector faces the challenge of intense competition. One of the reasons is the sheer number of restaurants in countries like the UK (over 100,000 restaurants). That can be explained by conducting a Porter's 5-forces analysis of the restaurant industry (Porter, 1985). Firstly, it is perhaps one of the easiest of businesses to enter, thus the threat of new entrants is permanent. Secondly, the force of the competitive rivalry which is fierce in this industry since it has all the features of a buyers' market, where price influences demand for many restaurant concepts. Thirdly, there is a great threat of substitutes (eating at home, supermarkets, street vendors). For example in the UK, there has been an increased competition with supermarkets that have begun to offer Ready-made meals that they have labelled: 'dine in' (Capstick, 2011). Therefore, the failure rate in this industry is considerably high, with a prudent estimate of 30% in the USA (Parsa *et al.*, 2005). A common view is that for a restaurant to be successful, it just has to offer good food. Unfortunately, it is much more complicated than that. This may be linked with the fact that restaurant service has an important element of intangibility. This complexity was highlighted by Levitt (1981) who argued that in the case of intangible products customers are not usually aware of being served well, but they do know when they do not

receive good service. In restaurant settings, Parsa *et al.* (2005) found that although food quality - a tangible element - is critical to restaurant success, it does not guarantee that success on its own; and the restaurant concept is much more than just the type of food served.

By the act of dining out, people 'show a willingness to cultivate and transpose the act of eating into a more socially complex and meaningful activity' (Finkelstein, 1989; p. 2). Thus, investigating the choice of food -extended to the choice of the place where to eat out- needs to be considered within a broader context that encompasses social psychological variables (Conner and Armitage, 2002). In that line of thought, Wood (1994b) reasons that as it is not sensible to ignore broader intellectual themes and concepts from areas outside the sociological domain, an eclectic approach was the way forward for the study of food and eating. This thesis has kept this advice in mind by conducting a careful evaluation of the theoretical underpinning for the decision to eat out in this context, within the multidisciplinary field of consumer behaviour.

1.2 Importance of studying consumer behaviour in restaurant settings.

Wilkie (1994) claimed that a great deal of the cognitive and physical effort for purchasing products ensue before the actual buying behaviour. Therefore, marketers of any type ought to know how consumers are influenced in the pre-purchase stage (Chen and Dubinsky, 2003). As discussed above the restaurant industry is highly competitive. In order to attract and retain customers, restaurateurs ought to have a deep understanding of the wants, needs, and perceptions of customers who most likely belong to the segment that will choose their establishment (Gregoire *et al.*, 1995). Mamalis (2009) added that detailed knowledge about the theoretical background and the saliency of the dimensions underlying consumer decisions will provide restaurant businesses with the required information to develop their marketing mix. It is clear now that it is important to study this topic in restaurants. However, the restaurant industry seems to be largely fragmented and formed by different types of establishments. For that reason a discussion of restaurant typology has been included.

1.3 Restaurant typology

Muller and Woods (1992) conducted a pioneer, very elaborate study of restaurant typology which classifies restaurants as quick service, mid-scale, moderate up-scale, business-dining and multi-unit. Although, some of the categories appear to hold relevance today, many of these

categories have blurred and restaurant concepts have evolved and others have been replaced over time. Ball and Roberts (2003) provided a simple but elegant basis for the classification of the structure of the restaurant sector using a combination of the following variables; concept, menu and market. Using that backdrop, Walker (2014) offered the following typology of restaurants: fine dining, casual dining and Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) examined below.

A fine dining restaurant is one where a good selection of menu items is offered with a high level of service. Mehta and Maniam (2002) claimed that fine-dining (or gourmet) restaurants are the most formal, fine dining experiences. Gastronomy, sophisticated service, elegant ambience, and spectacular views or location are the focus for restaurants of this category. The following types of restaurants are considered in the fine dining segment: theme restaurants, steak houses, ethnic, and celebrity-owned. Theme restaurants focus on the experience and in offering a social meeting place that appeals to customers who are nostalgic (for example 1950s themes) or that look for special decoration and atmosphere. Though some theme or ambience restaurants may be fine dining, they have specific characteristics that distinguish them from fine dining or gourmet restaurants. Theme or ambience restaurants have both a formal and an informal authentic, reconstructed atmosphere. There is an informal entertainment-theme and there is presentation that features authentic cuisine or décor. Unlike fine dining, gourmet, theme or ambience restaurants, family or popular restaurants are only characterised as informal, offering a pleasant informal dining atmosphere (Mehta and Maniam, 2002). Celebrity-owned restaurants have a combination of design, atmosphere and the thrill of the rare visit by the celebrity owning the place. Steak houses (usually belonging to restaurant chains) have meat as their main meal, although they may include other food items.

Casual dining is more relaxed and could be part of one or a combination of ethnic, family and midscale casual. Although most family restaurants are seen as casual dining, some operations are targeting a more upscale customer. Ethnic restaurants base their ethnicity on the type of food served: Mexican, Indian, Chinese, Spanish, Italian, etc. Casual Dining may include restaurants that are mid-scale in many countries (or considered as upscale in others) such as chains like TGI Friday's, Hard Rock Café, Frankie and Benny's.

Quick Service Restaurants (also called fast-food restaurants) have a limited menu and entail a large number of outlets of different types. These are normally chains that specialise in one of the following products: Hamburger (Mc Donald's, Burger King, Wendy's), Chicken (KFC), Sandwiches (Subway), Mexican (Taco Bell). Fast-food restaurants are informal, focusing on

offering meals to be consumed on site and/or off-site for customers who do not want to prepare meals for themselves, and who require a quick convenient economic meal with fast service and a moderate price (Mehta and Maniam, 2002).

The classification offered by Walker (2014), although originally applicable to American restaurants, seems adequate for chained restaurants and independent fine dining establishments. For instance, in a market report on UK restaurants, Capstick (2011) divided restaurants according to their format: quick service, pub restaurants, pizza/Italian, Asian and casual dining.

Another classification was offered by Kivela *et al.* (1999), with a division of restaurants into four categories based on their differentiation in price, location, theme/ambience, service level, cuisine and style. With such a variety of classifications it is very difficult to select one, for that reason, the determinant aspect is the scope of this research and thus the focus of the study.

1.4 Focus and context of the study.

It was very difficult to narrow down the scope of the study as to what type of restaurants to be focussed on. There are several influencing factors to make a definitive choice. In first place, eating out habits change. For example in the UK, pubs used to serve only cheese and pickled onions to stimulate thirst. They now represent the largest sector of the catering industry, with many customers, finding them to be family-friendly places for a meal out (Burnett, 2004). Nowadays, consumers view pubs as places to eat and drink, as opposed to the traditional perceptions of pubs (Capstick, 2011). Cultural differences about the perception of what a dining out occasion entails is another challenge when narrowing down the focus of this study. For example, the Dutch like 'cheap, but filling simple food in an informal setting' (de la Bruhèze and Otterloo, 2003). Furthermore, consumers may change their lifestyles and consequently their expectations. For example, in the 2000s there was a growth in casual dining which led to a decline in fine dining. This was because of an increased pace of life and people working longer hours (Ball and Roberts, 2003).

On the other hand, in some countries the restaurant market constantly changes with more restaurant chains - including fast-food restaurants - entering the fray. For example in Germany, the traditional German restaurant - serving schnitzel, bratwurtz, knackwurst,

sauerbraten, and large quantities of beer - is rapidly disappearing; with such establishments, now accounting for less than a third of the German catering market (Schlosser, 2001).

Therefore, it is considered that the critical aspect to discuss is the reason for eating out. A snack on the way to work could be considered as eating out. However, that can be considered as a low involvement, repetitive, routine customer decision. Eating out entails complex phenomena. Consumers give many reasons for eating out, and those reasons may be compatible with how they live their lives. For example, for some people, as Charles and Kerr (1988) found, a proper meal is an occasion in which table manners are adhered to. For a market segment, the act of going out to a local fast-food restaurant might be an occasion; for others that might be considered a snack.

This research is interested in eating out as social leisure, regardless of whether that leisure takes place in a rather fast-paced environment (in some countries eating out at McDonalds may be a special occasion), in a casual dining environment or in a more sophisticated, gastronomy-led outlet. Therefore, what is central for the research is to determine the intention of leisure as a main driver for eating out whilst narrowing down the context of the research in terms of restaurant types because an unduly wide range would lead to a multiplicity of price ranges will jeopardise the feasibility and focus of the study. When customers eat out for leisure it appears that the service staff may play a part that appeals to them (Edwards and Gustafsson, 2008) so it is considered that a minimum level of service is vital when catering for these customers. It can be observed that a minimum requirement is that restaurants are seated by a serviceperson; this incidentally is the case, even for casual restaurants like the well-known chain, Nando's. The interest of the research although confined to the particular geographical market of the United Kingdom, may apply to other locations because of the phenomena of globalisation which is a driving force in the restaurant market. That can be noted because of the appearance of global restaurant chains, apart from the well-known brands in the fast food sector.

1.5 Rationale of this study.

Hitherto, consumer research on consumer decision making in restaurants has been pre-occupied by a focus on restaurant attributes. These studies maintain a special focus on customer satisfaction and little consideration is made as to which attributes are evaluated, considering the context in which the decision is made and the decision-makers. One of the

earliest researchers in this topic, Swinyard (1977), explained what appears to be the rationale for that focus of interest in the literature of consumer decision making in restaurants. Swinyard commented that the most significant factors were those that were under management control; attributes such as food, service, atmosphere and price. Other attributes were shrugged off philosophically, at least for the time being. As a matter of fact, more attributes have been studied since 1977 but it appears that the focus has been on existing restaurant's attributes with little consideration of attributes that may affect the decision of selecting a restaurant. The latter, the researcher argues, should be considered by restaurateurs when designing the customer experience and positioning of their restaurants. Also, the way restaurant attributes are classified has a multiplicity of perspectives and some recent attempts such as the one of Kim *et al.* (2006) do not seem very enlightening. For instance, communication with customers is seen as a restaurant attribute rather than a promotional strategy and price is considered as a separate attribute, not linked to other attributes. Besides, it is about time that complexities and nuances in the process of decision making beyond the simple examination of restaurant attributes are investigated in depth. Furthermore, in many cases restaurant attributes are not clearly defined as, for example, the term location is interpreted differently in various contexts with several classifications of restaurant attributes that are in need of a new, up-to-date approach. To fill these gaps in research is the main aim of this study.

1.6 Research objectives.

To date, it seems that there has been no effort to integrate all the processes encompassed in the decision to select a restaurant. Most research has involved the investigation of restaurant attributes in different contexts and circumstances. For that reason, the first objective will be to investigate the processes antecedent to making choice sets involved in the decision process of selecting a restaurant and to provide an understanding of factors other than restaurant attributes that affect the composition of those choice sets. The second objective is to reach a clearer, up-to-date classification of restaurant attributes and to develop a model that integrates these attributes for the decision of selecting a restaurant. Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge that restaurateurs have a daunting task in working on a long list of aspects of their restaurants; therefore a prioritisation of attributes by ascertaining attributes' importance was pursued.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

This thesis has been structured around seven (7) main chapters. This introductory chapter is a discourse on the background and rationale for the research and the research objectives. Chapter 2 reviews the literature. It starts with key definitions about consumer behaviour and consumer decision making and concludes with specific studies of restaurant attributes and the linkage between customer satisfaction and the consumer decision process. Following the literature review is the methodology chapter (chapter 3). This chapter discusses the research philosophy and proposes a sequential mixed method approach. This consists of a qualitative stage followed by a quantitative stage, each one adhering to the precepts of their own research paradigms. The qualitative stage collects data through focus group interviews and approaches the analysis of data through Applied Thematic Analysis and Data Reduction. This stage and the literature reviews inform the quantitative stage as restaurant attributes are tested using Conjoint Analysis methodology, specifically discrete choice analysis. This chapter provides detail about how the data is collected and analysed and the software platforms employed, Nvivo® for Qualitative Data Analysis and Sawtooth Software® for Conjoint Analysis. Finally, a full discussion about issues related to the credibility of the research is included. Chapters 4 and 5 are about the qualitative data analysis and discussion of findings. It first looks into restaurant attributes comparing the attributes elicited in the interviews and in the literature review. This results in the proposal of a new classification of restaurant attributes and its interrelationships; and secondly, engages in a data reduction process in order to finalise a list of workable attributes in the second stage of the research. The qualitative stage also looks at the whole process of selecting a restaurant and this is examined applying the stylised EKB consumer decision model discussed in the literature review. Finally, the quantitative stage (Chapter 6) looks into attribute importance and preferences for attribute levels for different market segments and occasions. The final chapter is conclusions (chapter 7). This is a summary of the thesis structured around the main contributions to knowledge and addresses each of the research objectives. Chapter 7 also discusses the implications of the findings and reflects upon the limitations of the research and future directions of research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

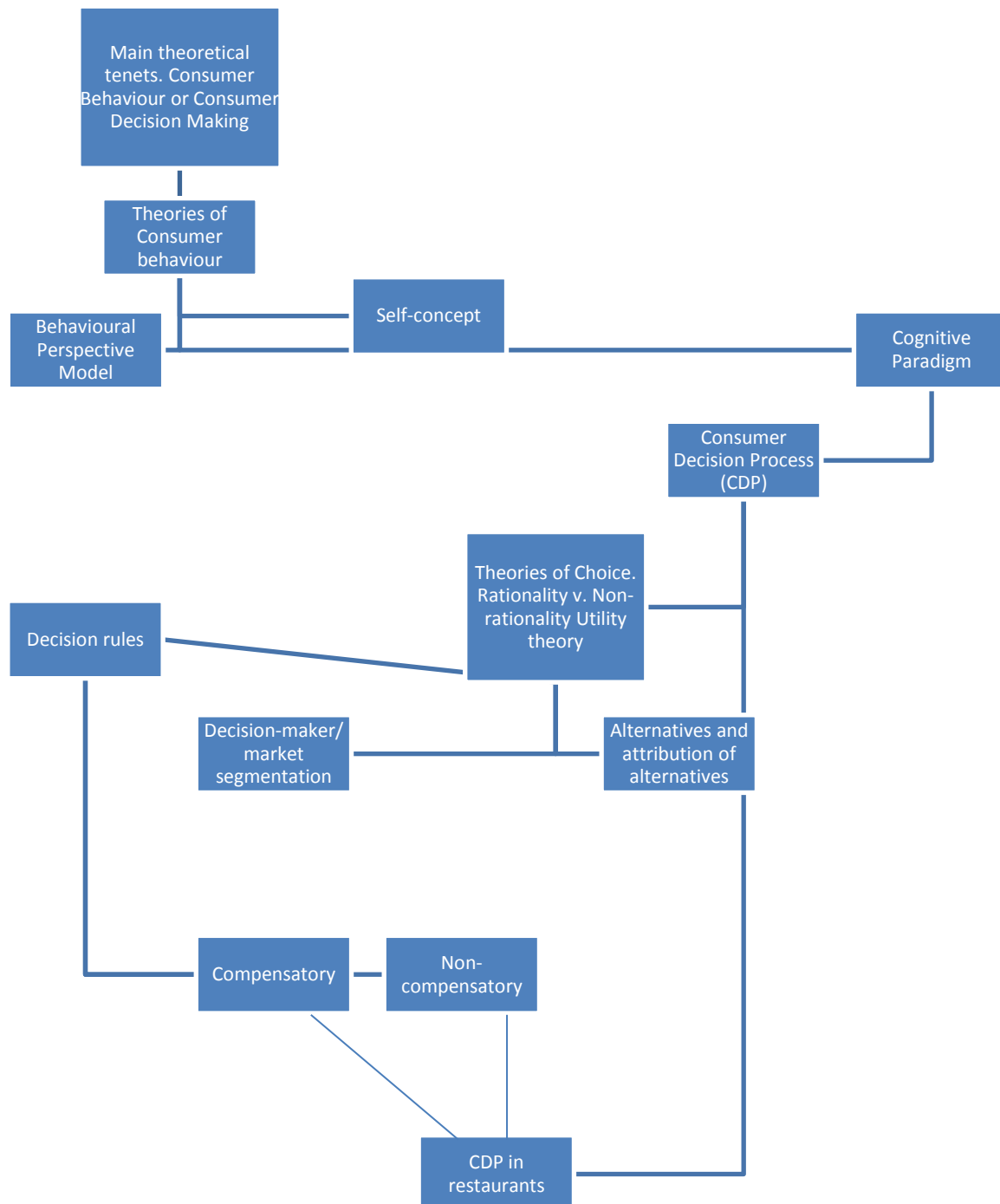
2.1 Introduction

Consumer behaviour has important implications for business. It entails complexity with an interaction of several social, economic and psychological factors (Pavleen, 2006). This literature review will delve into the complex aspects of consumer behaviour and consumer decision making. This literature review will also try to be as comprehensive as it practically can be, covering the key issues and theoretical underpinnings, it will strive to be practical and focused as well. Consequently, an aim of the section will be to justify the overall approach that the research adopted. On the other hand, an important consideration to make is whether consumer behaviour automatically involves consumer decision making and that purchases are always preceded by a decision process. If that was the case, this literature review would start considering consumer decision making rather than consumer behaviour. Olshavsky and Granbois (1978) discarded the idea that studying the consumer implies studying consumer decision making, not even on the first purchase by a consumer. They even protested that too much emphasis in research on decision making might be a cause for discouraging investigation of other important kinds of consumer behaviour, such as non-choice. Ursic (1980) criticised Olshavsky and Grambois's arguments and implied that their findings ignored the possibility of the existence of some pre-purchase decision-making process. Olshavsky and Granbois (1980, p. 334) riposted by stating that the consumer has 'a repertoire of purchasing strategies, some of which involve decision-making processes (compensatory and non-compensatory) and some of which do not involve decision-making processes (following recommendation of others, conforming to group norms, etc.) and some which involve a combination of the two'.

Furthermore, the view that a great majority of authors hold about the separation of consumer decision making from consumer behaviour is compelling. Certainly, most of the books written on consumer behaviour have a separate chapter for consumer decision making, with the notable exception of Horton's (1984) book on consumer behaviour. Nonetheless, there are aspects such as individual determinants of consumer behaviour, environmental influences on consumer behaviour, and marketers' influence on consumer behaviour which were discussed by Blackwell *et al.* (2006) separately from consumer decision-making. Thus, consumer behaviour will be deemed a broader field of study and discussion about consumer decision

making will follow the discussion about consumer behaviour and the paradigms of consumer behaviour will affect the way consumer decision making is studied and approached.

This chapter can be represented schematically as follows:



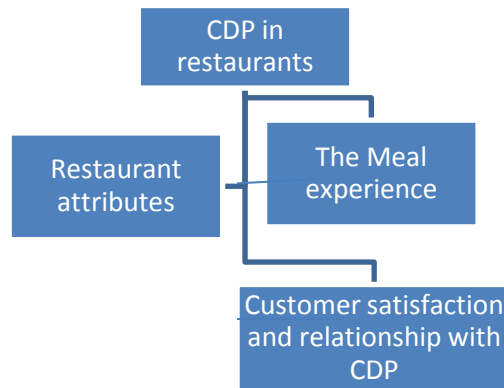


Figure 1: Schematic diagram of the Literature Review

Theories of consumer behaviour are critically analysed and justification for adhering to the cognitive paradigm is examined. After that and aligned with the cognitive paradigm, the consumer decision process and consumer decision models are evaluated, particularly the EKB model. This is followed by discussion on theories of choice and the dichotomy of rationality versus non-rationality. These theories of choice look into the decision maker, decision rules, alternatives and attribution of alternatives (based on utility theory). This is based on the premise of a rational consumer but emotional aspects are explored as well. Within the approach of rationality, the issue of maximisation of utility that consumers pursue is evaluated. This is done in the context of choice and the aspect of the appraisal of product/service attributes is discussed. This appraisal has been abundantly researched in the form of studies of restaurant attributes in different contexts and several geographical locations, from different perspectives and the literature review attempts to present a thorough discussion of these studies. The study of attributes has been viewed from the perspective of customer satisfaction (post-purchase considerations). The literature review examines the connections between post-purchase and pre-purchase considerations as well.

This literature review has been conducted through secondary research of consumer behaviour texts, and specialist journals, e.g. the Journal of Consumer Research, and secondly by exploring literature in service industry contexts, including the context of tourism, hospitality and leisure, texts and research papers.

2.2 Definitions of consumer behaviour.

One of the simplest and most appealing definitions was offered by Horner and Swarbrooke (1996), who regarded consumer behaviour as an investigation into the reasons that explain why consumers buy the product they do, and the processes involved in how they make their decision. This definition was criticised by Williams (2002). He considered that this definition stresses the exchange of consumption, which is too limited a view. Wilkie (1994, p. 132) deviated from that focus by defining consumer behaviour as 'the mental, emotional and physical activities that people engage in when selecting, purchasing, using and disposing of products and services so as to satisfy needs and desires'. Blackwell *et al.* (2006, p. 4) defined consumer behaviour as 'activities people undertake when obtaining, consuming and disposing of products and services'. It is worthwhile to note that this definition put decision-making under the umbrella of consumption. This confirms the view assumed in this thesis that consumer decision making is just a facet of consumer behaviour.

Solomon (2007, p. 7) stated that the field is indeed broad: 'It is the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires'. Another definition focuses on the different types of activities of the consumer: 'The mental, emotional and physical activities that people engage in when selecting, purchasing, using and disposing of products and services so as to satisfy needs and desires' (Statt, 1997; p. 6).

This vast array of definitions offers an opportunity to use some of these definitions in order to direct attention to the focal points of this research. It is focused on the selection (from Wilkie, 1994), of individuals (from Solomon, 2007) - as opposed to groups - and with a particular interest in how they make their decision (from Horner and Swarbrooke, 1996).

2.3 Theories of consumer behaviour.

Solomon (2007) stressed that there is hardly a field that is more interdisciplinary than consumer behaviour that ranges from psychophysiology to history and literature. Solomon approached consumer behaviour as a field of study from the perspectives of the research issues in the field. According to Solomon, those issues can be divided into two big categories. There is micro consumer behaviour with a focus on the individual and there is macro consumer behaviour that focuses on the social aspects/implications of that behaviour. Solomon then equated consumer behaviour to consumer research. Solomon added that consumer research

can be approached from two distinct research philosophies: positivism and interpretivism. Positivism is seen as a paradigm that regards the world as 'a rational, ordered place with a clearly defined past, present and future' (p. 35). Interpretivism casts doubts on these assumptions. Interpretivists consider that consumer behaviour is too complex for such an approach because individuals construct meanings based on socially shared experiences. This view regards the act of buying as a small part of a consumer's activities (Statt, 1997). In support of this interpretivist view, Arnould and Thompson (2005) attempted to unify the different aspects of consumer interactions by means of what they call Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). Arnould and Thompson define CCT as 'a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings' (p. 868).

One of the various positivist perspectives is the economic approach. The economic approach to human behaviour assumes maximising behaviour; that means for example, trying to maximise the utility of function of the individual (Becker, 1976). Becker proposed a wider view of what the economic approach entails, including the understanding of how preferences are formed. Becker expanded the utility of goods and services to other aspects of life such as health, prestige, etc., which do not always bear a stable relation to market goods and services. Maximising behaviour implies making rational decisions. In this line of thought, Henderson and Quandt (1958) postulated the premise of a rational consumer. According to this premise, the consumer:

- a) Unequivocally knows which of two alternatives to choose.
- b) There are only three possibilities. Two are related to the preference of one over another; the remaining one is indifference between the two.
- c) If a consumer prefers Choice 1 to Choice 2 and Choice 2 to Choice 3, then he/she will prefer Choice 1 to Choice 3.

These statements define a rational consumer in economic terms. These compelling propositions simplify the study of consumer behaviour. In an attempt to integrate irrational behaviour to economic theory, Becker (1962) noted that it is not possible to separate rational from irrational behaviour when conducting consumer research and that economic theory considers rational behaviour as one pursuing a certain utility or profit. In this line of reasoning, economic research appears to support empirically the notion of cognition as the key driver of consumer behaviour. This rationality may suggest that if an individual satisfies a basic demand

or the utility for or from a needed product then there would be no need for more supply of the product, or a different one. Nonetheless, this notion is arguable as put forward by schools of thought that have approached consumption as an area of investigation. Veblen (1899) was the first thinker to criticise consumerism and conspicuous consumption, an accepted way of living for society today. The mind-set of a conspicuous consumer is that of someone who does not derive satisfaction from the intrinsic use or objective properties of a product, for example a pair of shoes. That consumer also desires the cachet that wearing those shoes implies; thus the importance of a brand that represents that cachet in the mind of this consumer. Baudrillard (1998, p. 43) rejected the notion of consumerism as an evil to society, or wasteful: 'All societies have consumed beyond what is strictly necessary for the simple reason that it is in the consumption of a surplus, of a superfluity that the individual - and society - feel not merely that they exist but that they are alive'. Baudrillard opposed the rational view of a consumer that attempts to satisfy needs and views consumption as a socio-cultural construction. Society, thus, produces needs through socialisation and thus manages consumer demand and consumption accordingly. It can be argued that at an individual level, if the socio-cultural approach is accepted, the consumer still tries to arrive at a decision that is aligned with that socio-cultural construction, and thus it can still be perceived as a rational decision.

The pioneer work of Veblen was the first major contribution to the literature on consumption (Corrigan, 1997). It initiated the study of consumers and consumers' needs covered by what at the beginning of the 20th century was a new field of study: marketing. As a matter of fact, as Horton (1984) put it, Veblen was a pioneer of marketing as a study subject, as it was just after the publication of Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* that marketing courses first appeared in universities such as Michigan, Ohio State, Harvard and Wisconsin. It can be interpreted that the act of eating out in a restaurant falls in the category of conspicuous consumption as the consumer is not just satisfying a basic need (hunger) but indulging in a hedonistic experience.

On the other hand, Statt (1997) studied consumer behaviour from the viewpoint that human behaviour is acquired over a period of time. That implies that consumers *learn* how to buy. Statt referred to two major schools to the study of learning: the behaviourist approach and the cognitive approach. Williams (2002) linked the cognitive approach with positivism, meaning a rational or cognitive consumer. However, Williams differed from Statt in its interpretation of learning. According to Williams, learning is linked to the behaviourist approach, and adopted an interpretivist view of the consumer. Furthermore, Williams added a third school of

thought: experiential which he links to post-modernism. This line of thought was examined by Gabbott and Hogg (1998). These authors considered that aspects such as choice, focus of this research, are postmodern constructs and that consumption is beyond explanation or prediction.

This perspective of consumer behaviour arguably can also be viewed from the cognitive paradigm that supports the notion that the consumer acts rationally. As pointed out by Horton (1984, p. 7), 'Since a rational consumer maximises satisfaction subject to resource limitations, if that consumer derives satisfaction from the adulation or even the envy of others, then conspicuous behaviour is rational behaviour'. Therefore, it can be concluded that the economic perspective does not explain fully the aspects of consumption related to eating out in a restaurant.

Having consulted a number of texts, it has been found that the dominant view is that most authors classify consumer behaviour as approached from either the cognitive or behaviouralist paradigms. The focus of this thesis is on individual decision making, thus social constructs such as the one examined by the experiential (postmodernist) approaches are beyond the scope of this piece of research. For these reasons, this chapter will mainly focus on these two schools of thought (behaviouralist and cognitive).

2.3.1 The cognitive approach

Wagner (1997, p. 15) linked cognition to understanding and learning: 'The Cognitive approach examines information processing and decision making behaviour'. Thus, the assumption underlying this approach is that consumer behaviour is preceded by a sequence of mental information processing. The dominant tradition in consumer research is the cognitive paradigm. In the 1970s, it was so dominant that Jacoby (1978) complained that other models had little influence in those years. Foxall (2010, p. 1) stressed that 'many of its underlying assumptions and methodological tenets were taken for granted in the earliest stages of the development of modern consumer psychology'. The most well-known models of consumer behaviour assume that consumers have considerable capacity for receiving and handling quantities of information. The consumer is also assumed to process information in a rational way (Teare, 1990).

Historically, cognitive theories have gained the favour of researchers. Payne *et al.* (1993) appeared to be ambivalent on their support for the cognitive approach. Payne *et al.* viewed

the consumer as making decisions rationally. Nonetheless, rationality encompasses flexibility as well in the sense that human beings are very adaptable in how they respond to a range of decisions. For instance, Payne *et al.* argued that strategy selection is contingent upon the problem (task variables and context variables); the person (cognitive ability and prior knowledge) and social context (accountability and group membership). Bagozzi *et al.* (2002) pointed out the fact that most research has dealt with the bases for action taken by consumers (for example how consumers search for information; or information processing theory to be discussed later). They identified three leading theories of action that are based on the cognitive paradigm of consumer behaviour. Bray (2008) labels them prescriptive models distinguishable from analytical models (to be discussed later). The first of these prescriptive models is the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). See figure 2 below:

Theory of reasoned action

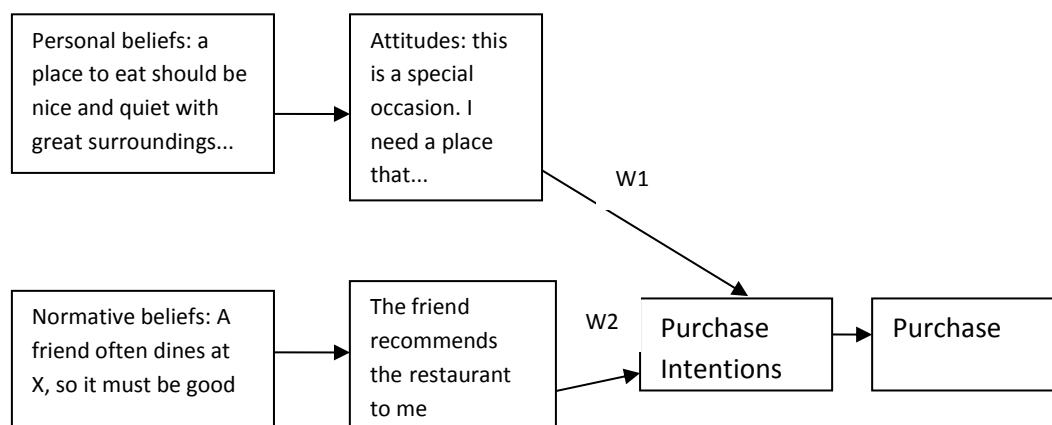


Figure 2: High involvement purchases: The Fishbein and Ajzen model applied to the decision to eat out in a restaurant (adapted from Jobber, 1998)

Put simply, personal beliefs about attributes of a product or service, e.g. value for money, are the basis for consumer attitudes towards that product or service. These attributes are weighted against a particular set of criteria. Attitudes can be defined simply as the degree to which someone likes or dislikes that product or service (Jobber, 1998). Normative beliefs refer to influences from third parties (suggestions, recommendations, advertising, etc.). It seems that this model is particularly relevant for this research as it seems that eating out in a restaurant (a high involvement purchase) is influenced by personal beliefs about what a restaurant should offer, but also by a great number of outside influences, most particularly positive-word-of-mouth (Longart, 2010) and many others such as restaurant guides, restaurant

reviews, consumer reviews, advertising and so forth. The second model is the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985). It adds perceived control as a third determinant of intention. Perceived control is about the beliefs that the consumer decision maker holds about the opportunities for action which are based on the environment and the consumer's abilities. The third model is better known by the initials MODE (motivation and opportunity as determinants of how attitudes influence behaviour) (Fazio, 1986, 1990). The model rests on the assumption that behaviour is sometimes spontaneously displayed when a particular attitude is activated. The cognitive approach has been adopted by many researchers and authors who have studied consumer behaviour from various perspectives. A variety of the cognitive approach is the cognitive psychological approach (Wagner, 1997). As explained by Wagner (1997) the key aspect of the cognitive psychological approach is that motivation and cognition are treated as separate entities. Wagner devised a model (figure 3) based on the basic tenet of the theory of reasoned action and the works of Thorngesen (1994, p. 155-9).

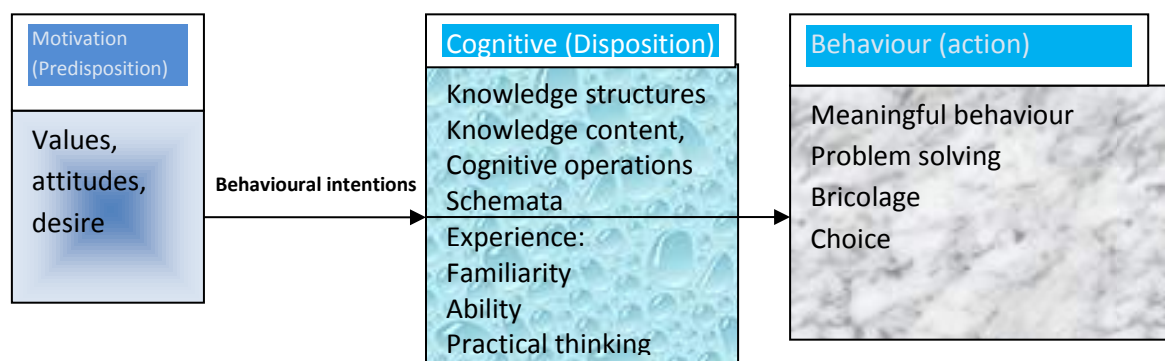


Figure 3: Cognitive psychological approach (adapted from Wagner, 1997)

As can be noted above, this is a linear process and feedback does not flow back either from behaviour to motivation or from cognition to motivation. On the other hand, as indicated by Gardner (1987), the process ignores other psychological variables. But most notably it appears to ignore the effects of normative beliefs (see Figure 1, Model of Reasoned action). These overviews show evident flaws in this model which nonetheless gives great insight into cognitive processes.

So far focus has been made on the consumer. The question now is whether environment factors affect the consumer. Some authors have proposed that situational factors affect the cognitive process. Indeed, an analysis of consumers' personal and lifestyle characteristics

indicates that purchase and consumption are seldom reached in so straightforward a manner as the cognitive models suggests. Components of the situation are, according to Belk (1975, p. 159):

- Physical Surroundings: *They encompass* location, decor, sounds, aromas, lighting, weather, and visible configurations of merchandise or other material surrounding the stimulus object.
- Social Surroundings provide additional depth to a description of a situation. Other persons present, their characteristics, their apparent roles, and interpersonal interactions occurring are potentially relevant examples.
- Temporal Perspective is a dimension of situations which may be specified in units ranging from time of day to season of the year. Time may also be measured relative to some past or future event for the situational participant. This allows conceptions such as time since last purchase, time since or until meals or payday, and time constraints imposed by prior or standing commitments.
- Task Definition features of a situation include an intent or requirement to select, shop for, or obtain information about a general or specific purchase. In addition, the task may reflect different buyer and user roles anticipated by the individual. For instance, a person shopping for a small appliance as a wedding gift for a friend is a different situation from shopping for a small appliance for personal use.
- Antecedent States: These states are momentary moods or momentary conditions rather than chronic individual traits. They are states immediately antecedent to the current situation which the individual brings to the situation, as opposed to states of the individual which result from the situation. For instance, a person may select a certain movie because he feels depressed (an antecedent state and a part of the choice situation), but the fact that the movie causes him to feel happier is a response to the consumption situation. This altered state may then become antecedent for behaviour in the next choice situation encountered, such as passing a street vendor on the way out.

Within the cognitive paradigm, consumer research can be divided by three areas: information processing, consumer culture theory, already briefly discussed and behavioural decision

research (Bartels and Johnson, 2015). Consumer culture theory seems appropriate mainly for interpretive studies focusing on social and cultural processes, mainly through an interpretivist lens, whereas this thesis holds mainly the positivist tenets of explaining and predicting. Krishnamurti *et al.* (2012) explained that behavioural decision theory (BDT) complements other studies of consumer behaviour. This research holds that idea and BDT can indeed be used alongside other perspectives. Information processing theory has been developed extensively (Johar *et al.*, 2006). Because of this extensive treatment in the literature information processing is the cognitive approach to be discussed first and foremost in this chapter.

Information processing models focus on the interplay of affective and motivational processes on cognitive process (Johar *et al.*, 2006). Several models in information processing theory have been developed, labelled as “analytical” models by Bray (2008). Three of these major comprehensive, analytical models of consumer decision making are the EKB model (Engel *et al.* 1973), the conceptual model of Howard and Sheth (1969) restructured by Farley and Ring (1970) with endogenous and exogenous factors, and Nicosia’s dynamic model (1966). These models trace the psychological state of individual purchasers from the point at which they become aware of the possibility of satisfying a material need by purchasing and consuming a product to their final evaluation of that consumption. Both Howard and Sheth’s conceptual model and Nicosia’s dynamic model entail elaborate flow charts. They have a large number of factors that make empirical research extremely difficult. They are not presented here, following the advice of Kassirjian (1982) who demanded a comprehensive theory rather than another flow chart.

The EKB model was developed by Engel, Kollat and Blackwell in 1973. The model represents ‘a road map of consumers that marketers and managers can use to help guide product mix, communication and sales strategies’ (Blackwell *et al.*, 2006; p. 70).

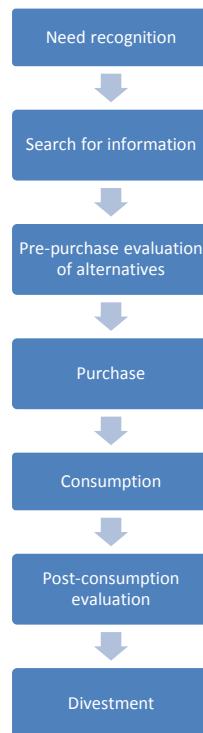


Figure 4: EKB Consumer Decision Process Model (Blackwell, Miniard and Engel, 2006)

Information processing models' although quite influential are not free of criticisms, and as such there will be a separate examination of these criticisms in this chapter. They look at consumer decision making as the basis for the study of consumer behaviour. The EKB model has been so influential that it has been modified and enhanced (see below).

Fletcher (1987) debated whether the cognitive process with a formalised decision sequence was indeed followed. He suggested that sometimes consumers are not prepared to commit to this formal process and that they may just apply internal simplifying techniques to arrive at a satisfactory, rather than an optimum solution. He thus did not part with the cognitive theory; rather he appeared to have subscribed to Simon's (1956) bounded rationality view. In this view, if a consumer has to face the constraints of a complex environment and limited capabilities to make decisions, then decisions may not be optimal but just satisfactory as the consumer is unable to maximise satisfaction given those constraints. Statt (1997) explained that it meant that consumers will not be really trying to find the 'best possible' alternative but 'a good enough' alternative.

In his review of psychological theories of consumer choice, Hansen (1976) conducted a review of choice and decision-making models and stated that people undergo a number of conscious and unconscious brain processes which suggest that:

- a) A conflict is present
- b) Cognitive activities occur.

It is important to highlight the view that the cognitive paradigm does not equate to full consciousness. That means that cognitive processes still occur although the consumer does not consciously engage in them. It has been pointed out that 95% of all cognition processes occur below awareness (a relatively unconscious process) and at most 5% occur in high-order consciousness (Zaltman, 2003). Cognitive theory attempts to find objective measures in consumer research. This is associated with the research philosophy of positivism. Interpretive theories largely dismiss the notion of objectivity in consumer research and in marketing research.

One of the cornerstones of the cognitive paradigm and most theories of choice is the presumption of a rational consumer. Hargreaves-Heap *et al.* (1992) started with the main conundrum for studying choice: what makes a choice rational? They explain that rationality is a matter of means, not ends. It portends that it is the way to reach a reasoned decision. According to Hargreaves-Heap *et al.* (1992) the most developed model of individual rational choice identifies the individual with a number of objectives and views the action as rational because it is most likely that a rational action will satisfy these objectives. They explain that the powerful idea of rationality lies at the roots of economics. Simon (1977) warned that it may help static and relatively simple problem situations, but that it does not work when an explanation in complex and dynamic circumstances is required.

In support of rationality, Crouch (1979) elicited the example of an amusement park in which a customer can choose amongst a variety of rides that they can enjoy within an eight-hour period. A rational individual would compare all the combinations of rides available and try to evaluate them through a set of objective criteria which may include completion time, reciprocating motion, circular motion, excitement, tameness, and so forth. The individual will then compare rides and pursue a combination that would maximise their enjoyment. In order to stress the point, Crouch mentions that even his six-year old son can solve the problem, and thus other patrons of amusement parks also can.

Bettman (1979) built a theory based on the premise that in order to achieve these objectives, the rational consumer will devote attention to the information available to him/her (information processing theory). On the other hand, Foxall (2005) examined the importance of a framework of motivation to the rational approach represented by cognitive psychology which has been integrated into the information processing perspective.

These rational actions can be represented as those of individuals seeking to maximise utility - or expected utility (Hargreaves-Heap *et al.*, 1992). If a consumer is hungry, and he/she has two choices, he will most likely go for the choice that will better satisfy hunger. Utility can be defined as the measure of how the hunger is satisfied. If I have objective measures such as calories; and I have the information about the caloric content then there is objective utility involved. However, in many cases utility is subjective; then it depends - amongst other things - on preferences. This is the topic studied by the theory of subjective expected utility (SEU) that according to Simon (1986) is central to the body of prescriptive knowledge about decision making. SEU theory is a sophisticated mathematical model of choice that deals only with decision making; for this reason it is very relevant for this research. Although, rational choice can be assumed, most of the time the utility of the purchase of a product or a service - such as eating in a restaurant - is not known with certainty. That realised utility depends on many factors. In conditions of uncertainty like this, the result can be generalised. It means that the individual decision maker acts so as to maximise *expected* utility. Hargreaves-Heap *et al.* (1992) explain that the uncertainty surrounding decision making can be approached by using probabilities which determine the relation between actions and outcomes. That representation of uncertainty is many times referred in the literature as 'risk'.

The traditional utility model, according to Hansen (1972) rests on a number of assumptions. The first one is that the consumer knows about the possible alternatives. The second is that an evaluation of all alternatives is performed. The third assumption relates to the rationality of the consumer. Some criticisms to this assumption will be discussed.

2.3.2. Criticisms about the cognitive theory of consumer behaviour.

An early and ongoing critic of the cognitive paradigm, Foxall (1986), argued that theoretical progress which runs contrary to the fundamental assumptions of the cognitive paradigm was impeded by the success of this paradigm. Teare (1990) clarified that as the consumer decision process is shaped by the nature of the service activity and perceived benefits of the service to

be purchased, the objections of Foxall are less valid in the service sector than in a manufacturing context. In support of this argument, Moutinho (1982) found that tourists engage in planning their holidays (pursuit of leisure similar to selecting a restaurant); indicating that the purchase linked to their holiday resulted from a cognitive decision making process.

Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005) pointed out that our understanding of consumer decision making which has historically been dominated by information processing theory and, more recently by behavioural decision research, is inadequate. They acknowledge that whilst these two perspectives have offered important insights into the cognitive processes underlying consumers' decisions, they are nevertheless limited. They argued that the motivational dimension of consumer decision making is missing in those perspectives; and that decisions take place in the context of: goals that consumers are pursuing, needs that they seek to fulfil and drives that colour their thoughts. They developed further Higgins's (1997, 1998, 2002) 'regulatory focus theory' of motivation which has been gaining prominence in consumer research, as a theory more suited to understanding consumer decision-making.

This theory draws a fundamental distinction between two modes of self-regulation in consumer decision making: promotion and prevention. For this theory, motivation is generally conceived as being driven by the approach of pleasure and the avoidance of pain – basic idea of the hedonic principle. According to Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005) there are three different perspectives to this theory:

- a) The principle of regulatory anticipation: motivation arises from people's expectations or anticipations about the outcomes of their actions. The standard economic theory of choice models choice as a function of expected utility as formulated from the principle of regulatory anticipation.
- b) The principle of regulatory reference: this uses a point of reference in terms of what the desired state is.
- c) The principle of regulatory focus theory is conceptualised in terms of strategic means for self-regulation. The means can be approach oriented (promotion-focused) or avoidance-oriented (prevention-focused). A healthy lifestyle seems to be linked with this as consumers consciously avoid non-healthy options. Jasinka *et al.* (2011) called this self-control which as a key aspect of adaptive decision-making allows the consumer to pursue the deliberate goal to be healthy by overcoming more automatic

and immediate-stimulus tendencies such as the cravings for a particular type of food that conflict with the goal of being healthy.

The literature displays some empirical support for the theory. Forster *et al.* (1998) used curious tasks like the solution of anagrams and strategic eagerness was assessed with behavioural signals (for example arm-pressure during arm-flexion –a sign of eager approach). Secondly, Crowe and Higgins (1997) also used what can be deemed as psychological experiments, lacking a context of decision-making like the one pursued in this thesis.

On the other hand, Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005) acknowledged that these propositions are organised along the traditional stages of the decision-making process. Moreover, Tuan-Pham and Higgins also recognise that most propositions still await formal empirical testing in consumer research. Since then, authors like Yoon *et al.* (2012) have found that regulatory focus influences selective information processes. This implies that regulatory focus may have an effect on the stages of the stylised EKB model. Also, motivational theory appears to be useful for shedding light on impulsive purchasing such as overspending or overeating. For instance, Vohs and Faber (2007) use the self-regulatory resource model to good effect to explain why people spend money impulsively. Likewise, Vohs *et al.* (2008) stated that self-regulation can explain and predict consumer behaviour when people deviate from rationality.

Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005) proposed a stylised model of consumer decision making based on the one proposed by Engel *et al.* (figure 4). The application of regulatory focus theory entails a new perspective to the information processing process approach (figure 5).

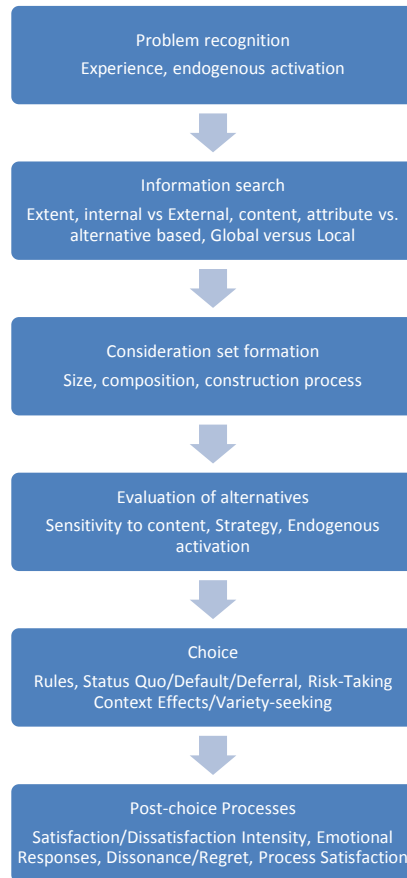


Figure 5: Stylised EKB model. Adapted from Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005)

As for the first stage, Bruner and Pomazal (1988, p. 56) highlighted that “a consumer problem cannot be adequately addressed until it is properly delineated”. Problem recognition is a crucial stage and is differentiated between an actual state (looking for a restaurant for leisure) and desired state (finding a restaurant that satisfied the need of the restaurant goers) with aspects affecting either the desired and/or the actual state. As for the second stage, there are several aspects of information search (Bettman, 1979; Hoyer and MacInnis, 2003). These are: extensiveness of the search, direction (internal or external), type of information searched and the structure of the search (alternative-based v attribute based). Consumers then have to simplify the way they make decisions with a consider-then-choose decision process (Houser, 2014). The third stage is about narrowing down the available set of options, starting with a consideration set. The evaluation of alternatives (fourth stage) refers to an examination about attributes in order to make summary evaluations. Once the alternatives have been evaluated

then the fifth stage (choice) starts. This stage deals with the aspect of decision rules. The last stage is about a post-choice assessment of the decision.

Many studies have criticised the consumer decision model. Olshavsky and Granbois (1979) pointed out that for many purchases a decision never occurs and if the process actually happens is indeed very limited. Rickwood and White (2009) argued that the EKB model is more suited to the purchasing of goods. Fisk (1981) argued that this process is not a linear one as in the EKB model but one that entails a multiplicity of factors and activities. Rickwood and White (2009) suggested a model that looks into the pre-purchase phase that encompasses three components: internal factors, external factors, and risk. Nonetheless, although it can be agreed that linear processes rarely occur in reality, it is also important to simplify the process so as to provide a guide to how the process occurs.

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) pointed out the weaknesses of the prevailing 'information processing models', as several issues were neglected. However, they do not suggest a digression from cognitive models, but to supplement them with a mixture of the experiential perspective. Khan *et al.* (2005) pointed out that consumers are often faced with choices that are at least partly driven by emotional desires rather than cold cognitive deliberations. Kahneman (1991) lamented that much of the pioneering work in behavioural decision theory has largely focused on the cognitive aspects of decision making without exploring its emotional dimensions. They proposed a self-attribution model, where they saw choices as a hedonic pleasure which can be moderated by a negative attribution (for example, social values). These negative attributions may be labelled as 'vices' whereas some social values are 'virtues' and a consumer's decisions are moderated by those attributions (Dhar and Wenterbroch, 2011). In the context of restaurant decision-making research it may be difficult to foresee how choices routinely made by consumers for selecting a place to eat out may be moderated by 'vices' or 'virtues'. Rather than critiquing the models, Shiv *et al.* (2005) presented an integrative affective-cognitive framework for the interplay of emotions and cognition in consumer decision making. Their framework is based on neurological and psychological theories of affect. The main aspects of this theory are that they link cognition with emotions and that they differentiate between lower order and higher order emotions. It appears that decisions to eat in restaurants are 'higher-order emotions' as these occur through a more deliberative process whereas lower-order emotions occur spontaneously through automatic processes. The main problem with this theory, however, is that it is largely unsupported by empirical research. Also

Shiv *et al.* acknowledged that: 'more research is needed to examine both the managerial as well as the conceptual ramifications of these findings' (p. 176).

Concerning emotions, another debated issue is whether cognition precedes emotion. Zajonc (1980) explains that in a typical information-processing model of affect the higher order encoding leads to a cognitive representation of stimulus that turns into an affective reaction that influences judgment. Zajonc's (1984) argued that affect can be aroused without the influence of cognitive processes and that affect had primacy over cognition. O'Shaughnessy (2003) posited that emotion is always a factor in decision-making and that rationality will always be invaded by emotional influences. O'Shaughnessy also states that there is too much inter-dependence between the cognitive and the affective for a division to be possible. He also refers to the myth of pure rationality which implies that the decision maker is a calculating machine. In the same line of thought, Kahneman (1997) complemented the argument by stating that the line between logical and substantive analysis is often a fuzzy one. Kahneman explained that utility can be anchored in the hedonic experience of outcomes. Isaacson and Hunt (1971) explained that the hedonistic philosophy entails an intuitive and simplistic concept: man seeks to maximise pleasure and minimise pain. The concept can be traced back to the ancient Greek philosophers who implied that cognition preceded those pursuits. Higgins (1997) observes that there has been a heavy reliance on the hedonic philosophy as an explanation for motivation. Furthermore, Kahneman (1997) argued that rational people may have other objectives than the maximisation of pleasure.

Soscia (2007, p. 874) posited: 'research has supported the cognitive approach to emotions by demonstrating strong relationships between emotions and cognitive appraisals structure'. The cognitive appraisal approach (Watson and Spence, 2007; Johnson and Stewart, 2005 and Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999) is also based on the notion that emotions can be cognitively reconstructed (Smith and Ellsworth, 1985).

Furthermore, cognitive theories of consumer decision making never imply that there is a fully conscious and rational process. Statt's (1997) approach to consumer decision making is influenced by cognitive theory. However, Statt makes an important distinction between rationality and the cognitive approach by stating that perfect rationality is unrealistic and that in the absence of complete rationality, heuristics seems to be the answer (see decision rules for a detailed explanation). Heuristics are simple rules (or rules of thumb) that decision makers use as they cannot look for an optimum solution (concept of bounded rationality). It is

accepted that the principle that emotions are part of any decision can hardly be disputed. Bagozzi *et al.* (2002) studied the effects of emotions on cognitive processes, as a constituent of these processes rather than a completely different matter. In support of this argument, Zaltman (2003, p. 8) affirmed: 'emotions contribute to, and are essential for, sound decision making'.

Graves (2010) went farther than just criticising the cognitive theory of consumer research; he questioned the whole notion that consumer research would always produce meaningful answers. He discoursed that there is a considerable distance between the conscious and the unconscious and that any consumer research that presupposes that consumers know what they think and that it can predict behaviour is fundamentally flawed. He asserted that any type of research and more particularly consumer research does have serious limitations. Graves (2010, p. 31) continued: 'this does not mean that there is no place for consumer research, but there are significant ramifications for what form the research should take and what faith should be placed in research collected through the interrogation of the conscious mind'. Graves produced copious anecdotal evidence, but no empirical evidence, in his criticism of market research. Although Graves's views can be appraised as groundless for not being based on empirical, there is a point about market research that has currency today. Graves pointed out that neither sample size nor reliability of a survey are the real issues but whether the process has a chance of gathering meaningful information for the purpose of the research. Therefore, Graves pointed out that although a piece of research could be methodologically sound, its results are doubtful because it is not investigating the real issues. This epistemological conundrum is taken into account, and in this thesis the researcher will attempt to critically evaluate the research instruments before research is actually conducted. Authors like East *et al.* (2008, p. 6) argued that "although rational decision models might suggest what people ought to do (normative), they are a poor guide to what people actually do (descriptive). This leads to a focus on behaviour. In this line of thought, Foxall (2010) proposed the Behavioural Perspective Model (BPM). He identified two ways in which BPM contributes to 'marketing science': firstly, it addresses the issue of situational influences so that the model provides a means of conceptualising those influences on consumer behaviour. He stated that although cognitive decision models do not omit external influences, they do not stress them either. Secondly, BPM represents a new way of understanding marketing strategy. Foxall (2010, p. 23) states: '... but no model of purchase and consumption has emerged that is both based on empirical principles of human behaviour and relevant to marketing management.

The applied contribution of the BPM is its ‘elucidation of marketer behaviour’. He continued: ‘The interpretation also elucidates marketing practice’. These claims deserve detailed analysis, and their assumptions are interesting and are worthy of discussion.

2.3.3 Behavioural perspective model (BPM)

This model sees purchasing as ‘behaviour with both reinforcing and punishing consequences, outcomes, that is, that are likely to increase the probability of it being repeated and others that have an inhibiting effect’ (Foxall, 2010; p. 4). BPM is based on Skinner’s theory of behaviourism. Skinner (1953) put forward the proposition that the consequences of behaviour may “feedback” into a person. And as they do so, they may change the probability that the behaviour which produced them will occur again. He referred to consequences such as reward or punishment that would influence behaviour as ‘operant conditioning’. Foxall appeared to have come with a proposal that is partly based on the ideas of Cohen (1968). Cohen argued that independent variables such as personality are important in the understanding of consumer behaviour. Cohen’s model consists of a number of variables affecting consumer behaviour: the antecedent variable, the dependent variable and the independent variable. Foxall extended the model and in the BPM model the central theme is the Consumer Situation; that situation could be, for example, the decision to renew or not renew car insurance or as in the context for this thesis the selection of a place to eat out (figure 6).

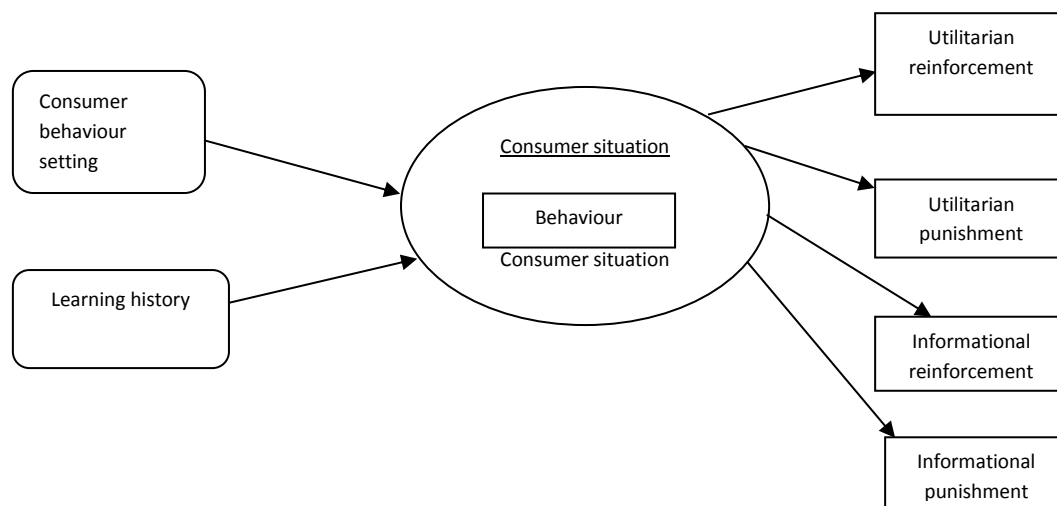


Figure 6: Schematic representation of BPM (adapted from Foxall, 2010)

For this model, the physical and social environment shapes the reinforcing and punishing consequences of human behaviour. Foxall (2010) identified two types of settings: Relatively closed settings and relatively open settings. For relatively closed settings, the marketer can manipulate consumer behaviour. In the case of public monopolies where obtaining a service can be restricted, consumption can be controlled by influencing supply or prices. Relatively open settings are those in which the consumer has access to a variety of brands or choices that make it very difficult (or impossible) to specify why a customer makes a particular selection. In this case, Foxall (2010) implicitly acknowledged that cognitive psychology may provide an interpretation of the behaviour based on the analogy of computer-based information processing. This may imply that consumer decision making as a key aspect of consumer behaviour, can be approached more appropriately with a cognitive perspective.

According to the model the response depends on environmental circumstances that control the frequency of that response. BPM conceptualises behaviour not only for an individual purchase, but for the whole sequence of pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase. The model thus relates the intensification or elimination of responses to those environmental influences that either reinforce or punish them. Hence the aim is similar to the cognitive approach: to predict behaviour. The approach has interesting practical implications as the nature and application of reinforcements can be deduced from the behaviour and its consequences. For example, reduced consumption of a product on the part of a consumer suggests an aversive stimulus, and increased consumption suggests a reinforcement.

Reinforcements are of two types, according to BPM: utilitarian or informational. Utilitarian reinforcers relate to states that are internal to the individual, e.g. pleasure, satisfaction, positive affect, etc. On the other hand, informational reinforcements are linked with external consequences of behaviour, which may have stimuli based on socio-economic influences such as prestige or status. Both informational and utilitarian reinforcers are also connected with the consumer's learning history. Thus some of these reinforcers can be more salient than others, highlighting the fact that reinforcers can be significantly different from individual to individual. This may have interesting marketing implications in terms of customisation of products, but in general may also be considered as challenging at the practical marketing research level.

In this situation the setting could be a hotel's restaurant. The learning history may encompass, for example, having experiences in hotels' restaurants. The utilitarian reinforcement for the hotel seller (a duty manager, for example) may be selling the customer the benefit of

convenience (the seller will book the table, safe environment, restaurant bill added to the total bill, etc.). The informational reinforcement has to be directed through a number of media in the hotel to reinforce the benefits of eating in the hotel's restaurant.

Apart from Foxall, the BPM perspective enjoys very little support from other authors. There are also only few empirical works applied to consumers' verbal and emotional responses (Foxall, 1997; Foxall and Greenley 1999, Foxall and Yani-Di-Soriano 2005); and to product and brand choices (in Foxall *et al.*, 2007).

2.3.4 Other perspectives: the self-concept approach

Most scholars seem to agree that self-concept denotes the "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to the self as an object" (Rosenberg 1979, p. 7). Sirgy (1982) clarified that the self-concept is not an alternative to the cognitive paradigm or the BPM model but an approach to consumer behaviour that is grounded on psychoanalytic theory, behavioural theory, organismic theory, symbolic interactionism and even cognitive theory. The literature about the self-concept in consumer behaviour was characterised as fragmented, incoherent, and highly diffused (Sirgy, 1982). Given the multiplicity of perspectives and difficulty to express unity, the self-concept theory has hardly been discussed any further. Sirgy (1982, p. 297) lamented: 'It is disheartening to conclude that, compared to consumer attitude research; consumer self-concept research is in its infancy stage'. The self-concept approach has been followed by researchers investigating more complex issues related to consumption, such as brand identification. Aaker (1997), in a study of brand personality, attempted to identify variables of brand personality and mentions sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Aaker warned that cultural differences may indeed affect the perceptions of dimensions of brand personality. Aaker (1999) found that the self can be 'malleable' as it can be influenced by situations. Aaker argued that these findings may have profound implications for the globalisation of brands. Other authors like Fournier (1998) used the self-concept approach to study how consumers form relationships with brands. Larsen *et al.* (2010) also used the self-concept approach in their study of music consumption. They link the self-concept with symbolic consumption. Arguably, this is part of the wider research tradition of consumer culture theory of Arnould and Thompson (2005). Schiffman and Kanuk (2010) stated that consumers seek to depict themselves in their brand choices. That means that they normally approach products with images that could enhance their self-concept and avoid those that do not.

At present it seems that the self-concept has had application in consumer goods where consumers establish a long-term relationship with brands. In the context of restaurants, the increasing number of restaurant brands makes the self-concept approach an appealing concept that may gain favour in the near future.

2.3.5 Rationale for adhering to the dominant cognitive paradigm

In addition to the careful consideration of the alternative approaches to the cognitive paradigm above, it is important to examine briefly the roots of this paradigm. The words: 'Cogito ergo sum' summarise a philosophical school of thought proposed by Rene Descartes (1644). The meaning is: 'I think therefore I exist' and might be considered to be the foundation stone of rationalism; which arguably is the philosophical tenet of the cognitive approach to consumer behaviour. The rationality element of decision making does not preclude the emotional element which makes us appear less rational. But even in so doing, the human being makes a decision to go with their emotions rather than with structured and/or justified reasoning. This dichotomy of the rational versus the emotional is explained by Weber, whose work in 'Economy and Society' was carefully revised by Whimster (2004). Weber explained that social action can be determined by two types of rationality: instrumental rationality and substantive rationality. The former underpins objective and quantifiable actions with premeditated aims and purposes. The latter underpins emotional, value-laden actions that derive from ethical, aesthetic, religious or cultural considerations. This elegant explanation dismisses the notion of 'irrational' actions and seems better suited to explain consumer decision-making than, for example, Baudrillard's (1998) post-modernist propositions about the socio-cultural construction of consumption.

BPM appears to overstate the case for external influences on consumer behaviour; that is the idea that consumers can be seen as audiences greatly affected by utilitarian reinforcements. Weismann (2000) argued that if consumers are considered an 'audience', they are not helpless receivers of information but that the effect of that message is limited in most cases. It implies rejection of the idea that human behaviour is conditioned. BPM focuses on behaviour not on antecedents to behaviour, such as thinking. Gardner (1987) criticised the behaviourists' sole focus on behaviour. There is very little consideration on the individual in BPM. Gardner argued that this narrow view entails eschewing topics such as mind, thinking or imagination and dismisses any notion of plans, desires or intentions. Gardner added that for behaviourists, all

psychological activity can be adequately explained without embarking upon 'these mysterious mentalist entities' (p. 11).

Furthermore, many theories that have been widely accepted in consumer behaviour such as Fishbein's model are based on a cognitive theory of verbal learning and concept attainment (Ryan and Bonfield, 1975). Ryan and Bonfield explained that Fishbein's work is based on Dulany's theory of propositional control. This theory differentiates between intentions and behaviour, referring to the first as behavioural intentions and to the second as overt behaviour. That means that a positive brand attitude will not necessarily lead to the formation of a purchase intention (Teare *et al.*, 1994). However, it assumes that intentions and behaviour are all part of a cognitive process that is influenced by many external and internal factors.

The influence of situational factors on the cognitive process was examined. That supposes that cognition processes are affected by the environment but not as in the BPM model where it seems that the environment conditions behaviour. In fact, Hansen (1972) claimed that the fact that the environment may, in some ways, disrupt behaviour implies the existence of cognitive processes as well. Furthermore, Hansen stated that cognitive processes rule over other considerations. Hansen claimed that there are three types of cognitive processes:

- Cognitive processes governing the behavioural responses (thus behaviour is a consequence of cognition)
- Cognitive processes occurring in choice processes (to be studied in this thesis)
- Cognitive processes accounting for disruptions in behaviour.

Some analysts have cast doubt on the principle of rational, cognitive action by providing examples of what appears to be non-rational behaviour. Granovetter (1985) supported the notion that economic action such as purchasing is 'embedded' in social relations. Granovetter provided a compelling argument for the need to research consumer behaviour pragmatically: 'whilst the assumption of rational action must be problematic, it is a good working hypothesis that should not be abandoned. What looks to the analyst like non-rational behaviour may be quite sensible when situational constraints, especially those of embeddedness are fully appreciated' (p. 504).

Criticisms of the rational choice models like the ones put forward by East *et al.* (2008) stem from its application to offering a broad explanation to complex interrelated socio-political and

economic decisions. Other criticisms have been dealt with in the concept of bounded rationality. Zey (1992, p. 11) clarified that rational choice models cover an eclectic and broad spectrum of approaches with implications that are well beyond individual preference. There is obviously an overlap, but procedural, descriptive models of how decisions should be made should not be confused with rational choice models. It is important to remember that this thesis deals with the first. Zey (1992, p. 10) differentiates clearly between rational choice theory and decision making as a process of reasoned choice. Rational choice models encompass 'socio-political-economic relations and institutions as instruments created and used by rationally self-interested agents as they seek to maximise the degree to which they can successfully pursue their particular ends and satisfy their particular preferences'.

Zey's clarification can be summarised as follows:

- a) The individual must be considered as antecedent and independent of the group. Ben-Akiva and Lerman (1985) stated that their research interest resides in the behaviour of a large number of individuals expressed in terms of aggregate quantities such as the market demand for a commodity or service. They perceived aggregate behaviour as the result of individual decisions. Zey (1992, p. 13) argued that rational models fail to acknowledge that 'our utility may be a result not only of our own welfare but also of the welfare of those for whom we care' that is because our own welfare depends on the welfare of those for whom we care. In the eating out context, it can be argued that the egotistic view of the decision maker does not apply. Having said that, utility theory can still be applied, by looking at the decision as looking towards the maximisation of the expected utility of a group, including the decision maker.
- b) Assuming that utility is subjective. Zey (1992, p. 19) dismissed the idea that non-rational behaviour can be explained by invoking 'whatever source of utility needed to rationalise that particular behaviour'. Zey continues: 'If I were to posit that some action is based on emotions, a plausible position for the rational choice would be to argue that the emotion has some utility'. The first argument starts from the premise that the consumer could act irrationally. And although it might happen, it would be the exception to the rule as discussed in previous sections. The second objection can also be dismissed, as emotions are part of the decision making process; and it only can be seen as part of it, not having any intrinsic utility.

If all the arguments explained above are examined, it is easy to appreciate the simplicity and appealing logic of the cognitive paradigm. According to Chisnall (1995), cognitivists reject the proposition that human behaviour rests solely on stimulus-reinforcement (the basis of BPM, for example). After all the support for a cognitive approach, the thesis will follow the cognitive paradigm but acknowledges that decision-making processes cannot be confined to a purely rational approach since emotions also play a part in reaching decisions. This is consistent with the notion of cognitive reconstruction of emotions (Smith and Elmsworth, 1985) and the cognitive approach to emotions (Soscia, 2007).

The cognitive paradigm of consumer behaviour underpins information processing theory. Within information processing theory, the EKB model developed more than 40 years ago remains very popular in academic research. More recently, a number of papers have used the EKB model in different contexts. The model has been used to study online consumer behaviour (Lin *et al.*, 2010; Darley *et al.*, 2010). Hsieh (2011) integrated social cognition theory and the EKB model for discussing relationships between green marketing and customers' attitudes towards purchasing and payment. Wen *et al.* (2014) proposed to develop measurement scales of service quality in e-commerce (e-quality) based on the EKB model, in order to understand online shopping behaviour; with managerial implications as to how to improve service delivery. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that the EKB model has a number of limitations, particularly the omission of the motivational perspective. The application of a newer version of the EKB model (the stylised EKB model of Tuan Phan and Higgins (2005) is claimed to make up for those limitations. This model acquires more relevance because of the consideration of regulatory focus theory. The latter theory is widely accepted in the academic community -see for example: Higgins (1997), Higgins (1998), Higgins and Crowe (1997), Baas *et al.* (2008), Higgins (2006), Brockner and Higgins (2001), Avnet and Higgins (2006)-.

2.4 Behavioural decision theory: Theories of choice

Human beings are constantly facing the dilemma of making choices like selecting a restaurant. The question now is to try to explain how these decisions are made. It has been asserted that the cognitive paradigm of consumer behaviour will guide this thesis concerning the study of choice in consumer decision making. Within the cognitive paradigm, behavioural decision theory has two connected aspects: normative and descriptive. The normative aspect refers to the courses of action that fits better the decision maker's beliefs. The descriptive facet describes beliefs and values and the way in which individuals incorporate them into their

decision (Slovic *et al.*, 1977). This chapter focuses mostly on the descriptive aspect, particularly judgment, heuristics and choice. The basic aspect of choice can be seen as the fifth stage of the stylised EKB model of consumer.

Bell *et al.* (1988) clarified that decision making is multidisciplinary with two main contributors. First, the decision theorists – mathematicians mostly - who study how people should make decisions as if following certain fundamental laws of behaviour. The second group is the psychologists. These are interested in how people *do* make decisions (even if not rational); and in determining the degree to which that behaviour can be considered as rational. This section incorporates the contributions of both contributors to decision theory.

2.4.1 Principles of theories of choice

In this thesis, the interest is in investigating the behaviour of a large number of individuals making the particular decision of eating out and choosing a particular restaurant. The aggregate behaviour of restaurant patrons is the result of each individual decision. As postulated by Ben-Akiva and Lerman (1985) a theory of behaviour should be:

- a) Descriptive: It means that it is about how human beings do behave and not how they should.
- b) Abstract: It can be formalised in terms which are not specific to particular circumstances. For this reason the context of the decision should be carefully constructed.
- c) Operational: It results in models with parameters and variables that can be subject to measurement or estimation.

Ben-Akiva and Lerman explained that there is no universally accepted theory of choice that satisfies the requirements laid out above. A choice, they continue, is a sequential decision-making process that includes the following steps:

1. Definition of the choice problem
2. Generation of alternatives
3. Evaluation of attributes of the alternatives
4. Choice
5. Implementation.

In this context, the choice problem is that of a consumer deciding where to eat out, not for convenience, i.e. lunch between working hours. His place of residence or stay will define the alternatives (restaurants available). The next step is about evaluation of the alternatives, and a discussion of alternatives will be included later in this literature review. The consumer needs to collect information about relevant attributes of that restaurant. In order to do that, the consumer applies a decision rule to arrive at a choice. Then implementing the choice is obviously the meal itself. Thus as Ben-Akiva and Lerman point out, any specific theory of choice is a collection of procedures that encompass the following elements: the decision maker, alternatives, attribution of alternatives and decision rule. The last element has been explored sufficiently; the other three elements are described in detail below.

2.4.2. The Alternatives

Wright (1975) found that decision makers try to simplify their decision making and when studying models of decision making, a clear example is that of how alternatives are elicited. Shocker *et al.* (1991) characterised decision making as based upon hierarchical alternatives. Ben-Akiva called them a choice set. Thus, the terms 'choice set' and 'alternative set' can be used interchangeably. Shocker *et al.* (1991) called it a model of individual choice and it is illustrated in Figure 7.

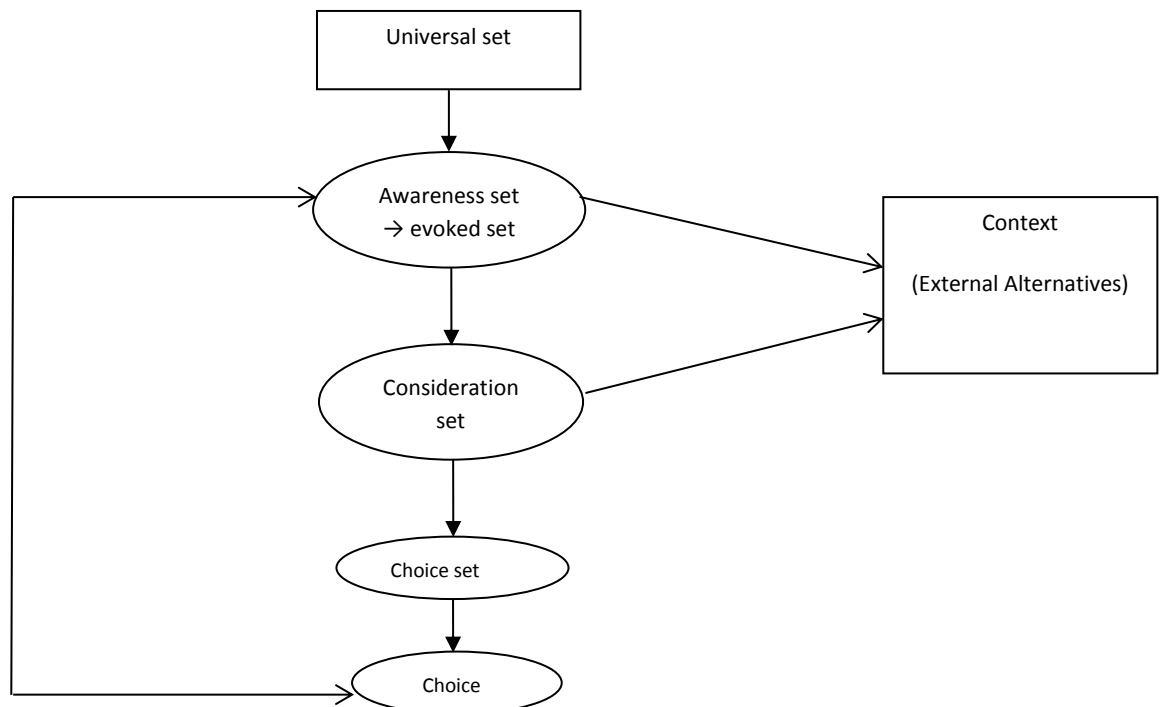


Figure 7: Model of individual choice (Shocker *et al.*, 1991)

The universal set refers to the totality of all possible alternatives; which in this case may be the restaurant in a certain location, i.e. London. This set is just a starting point as it is impossible to consider thousands of alternatives such as in the London restaurant scene. Then, there is a set that springs to the customer's mind; that means that they may remember them unaided. This has been called the evoked set (Howard, 1963), which comes from the awareness set, which is composed of evoked sets, inept sets and inert sets (Narayana and Martin, 1975). The model of Shocker *et al.* only considers the evoked set which it is called the consideration set. They could also possibly be drawn from a list or restaurant guide (see External Alternatives). The definition from Shocker *et al.* appears to be more complete in separating awareness from consideration, indeed an important difference for marketers. In the context of restaurant decision making, it can be argued that the distinction is important and for that reason Shocker *et al.*'s model will be preferred.

The consideration set is a reduction from the awareness set to a smaller set of alternatives (Gensch and Soofi, 1995). Horowitz and Louviere (1995) warned that 'using a consideration stage may lead to a misspecified model that would provide erroneous forecasts' (p. 40). However, in the case of restaurants, it is sensible to assume that consumers engage in an extensive information search to arrive at a decision. This is linked with information processing theory which is an approach in which 'the consideration set is formed and used by the consumer for subsequent purchase operations (Roberts and Nedungadi, 1995). The choice set has a very strong influence upon the individual intention to choose a particular restaurant. This was evidenced by the study of Davis and Warshaw (1991). Davis and Warshaw suggested that consumers employ screening procedures using non-compensatory rules to reduce the consideration set to a manageable size.

2.4.3 Alternative attributes

The attractiveness of an alternative is evaluated in terms of a vector of attribute values (Ben-Akiva and Lerman, 1985). They explained that attribute values are measured on a scale of attractiveness that can be ordinal (quiet vs. bustling ambiance in a restaurant) or cardinal (the cost of a meal). In the case of restaurant decision making, consumers –acting as decision makers- may have different choice sets (sets of restaurants), evaluate different attributes and assign diverse values for the same attribute of the same alternative. Then attributes will be composed from models that attempt to provide an explanation of the meal experience.

At this point, it is important to discuss terms of reference for determining the attractiveness of an attribute. Those terms are salience, importance and determinance. Alpert (1980) defined each of them. Salient attributes are those more noticeable to customers. Important attributes are those that presumably carry a lot of weight when making the decision. Importance in many situations equates with determinance, but Alpert considers that the term importance is loose and thus the focus should be placed on determinant attributes, which are those that determine whether the decision is based on the consideration of that particular attribute. Alpert explained that a consumer may consider attributes as equally important, but one of them may be the determinant, the one that makes the difference in the choice. Arguably, the discussion of these three terms in the restaurant context is largely semantic. In a previous paper, Myers and Alpert (1968) argued that attitudes towards those characteristics which are most closely linked to preference or to the actual consumer decision are said to be determinant. Those attributes are the focus of the study; however special care should be taken so that the research also explores the salient and important factors as long as respondents consider these attributes critical to their decision.

2.4.4 The Decision Maker

It can be argued that the unit of decision making for eating out in a restaurant can be an individual person or a group of people. Indeed, as Ben-Akiva and Lerman (1985) pointed out, variations of within-group interactions affect the outcomes. An explanation of that influence on consumer decision making was discussed in Figure 1 (theory of reasoned action). Thus, decisions to eat out are either left to an individual as a gatekeeper or are taken with the participation of several individuals, either decision makers or influencers.

Decision Makers can have different needs and expectations. They can belong to different groups of the society or to different market segments. For that reason, market segmentation will be a matter for discussion in the next section.

This research entails a study of consumers. The question now is what type of consumers are we investigating? An explanation will be attempted by using a market segmentation approach. This will lead to investigating how markets - and particularly the restaurant market - can be segmented.

2.4.5 Decision rules

The concept of utility is inextricably linked to decision rules. That means that consumers consciously or unconsciously assign values to the alternatives. That could mean the utility maximisation of satisfaction and minimisation of cost (or maximisation of value for money).

Typically consumers can only consider a small part of all the information available to them about a specific service. Heuristics are 'rules of thumb' (Shah and Oppenheimer, 2008) that individuals unconsciously apply to reduce the effort involved in decision making.

Decision rules have been traditionally seen as completely unrelated to impulsivity. Yet, as pointed out by Hsee and Tsai (2008) they are closely intertwined as most decision rules are antidotes to impulsive behaviour and entail some sort of self-control mechanism.

There are critics of the use of decision rules. Amir *et al.* (2005) argued that authors such as Prelec (1991), Ainslie (1992), Baron (1994) and March (1994) suggested a decision-making style that whilst maintaining independence from tastes and preferences still makes use of legal rules in matters of self-control and identity maintenance. They explain that they refer to higher order principles, acquired via moral or social context but they do not lead to a certain course of action. Amir *et al.* (2005) presented a 'decisions-by-rules perspective' which is related to two other theories of individual decision-making: reason-based choice and heuristics. They differentiated between reason and rules. Rules can provide reasons and function as reasons, but reasons seldom become rules. It is important to note that these criticisms seem to be context-specific. For example, Amir *et al.* (2005) proposed that the reason-based choice view may be useful at a low level of thoughtfulness; furthermore, the authors dispute the common view held by both marketers and decision scientists that individuals make decisions according to a set of preferences by searching for an optimum or close to optimum estimate. They suggested that this view cannot always be maintained. They clearly established that it may happen that decision-rules based on moral or social norms (or on behavioural guidelines) take precedence over preferences. And although an interesting concept for discussion, the possibility that decision rules are based on personal, social, cultural or moral conventions, takes the discussion beyond the scope of this review on decision rules.

Despite the criticisms, heuristic processes serve to limit the amount of information processed or the complexity of the ways in which information inputs are combined (Frederick, 2002). Frederick argued that heuristics are said to "work" at the service of preferences; this means

that they are aimed at maximising the latter under a certain set of constraints (cost of thinking, time and effort). Likewise, Hsee (1999) demonstrated that people are more likely to choose the “better deal” option; this implies the “value-seeking” rule rather than own preferences.

On the other hand, Reynolds and Olson (2001) formalised an approach to consumer decision making called ‘The Means-End approach’. It is based to a great extent on the elucidation of decision rules. Their approach looks for implications for marketing management practice. They state that in order to understand consumer decision making managers must address the following two issues:

- a) Consumers’ choice criteria to evaluate and choose.
- b) Reasons of salience of these choice criteria.

Reynolds, Rochon and Westberg (2001) put this concept to the test when they studied the decision-making process of the key customer for Mary Kay, a cosmetics company. Beauty consultants purchased the products from Mary Kay and were paid commissions through direct or indirect sales. They were considered the key customer. Understanding how they made decisions entailed decision rules that comprised two parts: what choice criteria consultants used to distinguish amongst their job options; and the second part was to understand why the choice criteria were personally relevant to the consultants. The means-end approach appears to be an interesting concept because it focuses on practical implications for understanding heuristics processes.

As for the choice criteria, Devetag (1999) distinguished between two types of heuristics: compensatory and non-compensatory. A heuristic is said to be compensatory if good values on some attributes can compensate for poor values on other attributes. On the contrary, a heuristic rule can be defined as non-compensatory if that compensation does not have effect. These important concepts will be examined below. The reasons of salience for attributes are the subject of research on restaurant attributes and will be discussed later in this literature review.

2.4.5.1 Compensatory decision rules

According to Statt (1997) the consumer uses more than one criterion to evaluate a product or service and there are two versions of this type of rules. The first and simpler version has the consumer as unconsciously adding the pluses and minuses of each alternative and the one

with the most pluses wins. In the more complex version, the relevant attributes are weighted according to their importance for the consumer. This discussion will be developed and expanded when multi-attribute attitude models are discussed.

2.4.5.2 Non-compensatory decision rules

Solomon (2007) described these rules as 'choice shortcuts' in which people eliminate all options that do not meet the consumer's basic standards. These rules can be classified as:

- a) The lexicographic rule: In this case the brand which is best on the most important attribute is selected. For example, if all the choices are assessed as equal on that attribute, then the second most important attribute is considered until a decision is reached.
- b) The satisfaction rule: this is the minimum level that the customer expects from the service. That could be the example of cleanliness and hygiene. An alternative can be eliminated if it does not meet that criterion.
- c) Elimination by aspects rule. Ben-Akiva and Lerman (1985) considered that the elimination-by-aspects rule laid out by Tversky (1972) is simply a combination of the first two rules explained above. If an aspect is not covered then the consumer does not consider the choice. For example, if a restaurant does not sell alcohol it may be discarded as an option for a consumer who wants to have wine with the meal. Another example could be the consumer creating upper limits for the cost of a meal in restaurant A compared to restaurant B; if restaurant B is thought to be superior in food quality but its cost is above the upper limit set by the decision maker, then restaurant A will be preferred.
- d) The conjunctive rule: In this case the consumer establishes minimum cut-offs for each attribute. If one of the choices does not meet the cut-off point even for one attribute then it is discarded. If all the alternatives are rejected then the consumer may readjust the cut-off points or refrain from making a decision altogether.

2.5 Segmentation theory

This research attempted to investigate consumers. These consumers patronise restaurants, and they are very diverse. For that reason, a good understanding of how the market is segmented is necessary. Hence, the basic concepts underpinning market segmentations are examined in this section.

2.5.1 Basic concepts

Market segmentation is 'the dividing of a total market into its constituent parts using some method' (Cahill, 2006). The importance of segmentation in the hospitality industry has been highlighted by many marketing researchers, even for fast-food restaurants (Kara *et al.*, 1997).

On the other hand, Oh and Jeong (1996) linked the concept of segmentation with customer satisfaction and claimed that by knowing what different segments consider when making selection decisions, and what satisfies their expectations is central to accessing new or growing markets and to achieve customer loyalty. Kivela (1997) highlighted the importance of market segmentation when analysing customer preferences for restaurants. Kivela explained that the evoked set may be determined by the dining occasion and ambience for customers from a particular income segment. However, choice from the evoked set is influenced by how the overall restaurant's "package" appeals to a particular segment (p. 122).

According to Cahill (2006), there are two main categories of market segmentation: lifestyle and non-lifestyle market segmentation. In contrast, Wisenblit (2008) suggested a more powerful way to see market segmentation. Wisenblit distinguished between facts and cognitions. Whereas the first can be determined from direct questioning, the second ones are complex and have no universal definitions. He also makes a difference between consumer-rooted segmentation which comprises the consumers' traits, versus consumer-specific segmentation which is about usage behaviours (usage rate, etc.). They can relate to facts like age of consumers, how knowledgeable consumers are about food, and frequency of eating out in restaurants.

2.5.2 Benefit segmentation

Among the different bases for segmentation in the restaurant context, Swinyard (1977) suggested concentrating on segmentation by benefit and by volume. Admittedly, it is possible to distinguish between heavy users, those who frequently patronise restaurants, and occasional users. However, that consideration is not of interest to this thesis. On the other hand segmentation by benefit sought is an appealing concept explored by some authors in the restaurant context. For example, Yüksel and Yüksel (2003) found that tourists who patronise non-fast food restaurants can be divided into five different categories: Value seekers, service seekers, adventurous food seekers, atmosphere seekers and healthy-food seekers. Value seekers are those for whom food is the most important factor but that has to offer good value

for money. Service seekers: they prioritise service quality over any other attribute. Adventurous food seekers: they seem to correspond with tourists visiting places and who want to try something new, normally local and exotic. Atmosphere seekers: their preference is for a convivial place, with less concern for price, and Healthy-Food seekers, for whom food is also the most important but is connected with the concept of a healthy lifestyle, thus pursuing food with health benefits.

As for benefits pursued by tourists and residents when choosing a restaurant, Choi *et al.* (2009) conducted a study in the tourist destination of South Florida (USA) and found that in the selection preferences for full service restaurants there were no significant differences between residents and visitors. Benefit segmentation is related to the concept of restaurant attributes which is one of the objectives of this research, hence its relevance.

2.5.3 Segmentation by age, life cycle and gender

In a large study of restaurant patrons in Spain, Ribeiro-Soriano (2002) found that customers with different ages perceived the relative importance of restaurant attributes differently. However, there were no significant differences between male and female consumers. Harrington *et al.* (2010) conducted a study of restaurant attributes according to age and gender and also added a third component: dining frequency. The latter attribute did not appear to reveal any differences between customers who eat out more frequently and those who patronise restaurants less frequently. Contrary to Ribeiro-Soriano's findings, they found that the female market segment requires greater emphasis on quality indicator attributes, restaurant setting requirements and dietary considerations. Female consumers mirror the perceived importance of attributes of older customers who also place a greater importance on marketing efforts, enticing promotions and convenient access to the restaurant. Kivela *et al.* (2000) linked age with income, which is also called the 'life cycle' and discovered that people (males in particular) in the 35-44 age group and older people in the over 65 age group are most likely affected by their income. This is because the segment 35-44 are likely to have a heavy financial burden rearing their school children, hence there is less disposable income for restaurants which results in lower return rates. Moschis *et al.* (2003) focused on a very particular market, mature consumers and found that factors such as value for money are particularly important for restaurant selection in this market segment.

Regarding the young consumer segment (below 30 years of age), few studies on restaurant settings have focused their attentions on them. Studying this market segment separately is important because empirical research has suggested that formative experiences have a significant impact in forming specific consumer preferences, values, and beliefs (Harrington *et al.*, 2011). In order to remedy this deficiency these authors conducted research on this segment, which they call 'Generation Y'.

It is clear that restaurateurs also position their offer to segments by age, gender and lifecycle. For example, a simple observation to the type of customers for a Sunday lunch in a restaurant (families and older customers) confirms this fact.

2.5.4 Segmentation by purchase occasion

Reynolds and Gutman (1988, p. 816) advanced the idea that "consumption differs by occasion". Based on the idea of individual needs, Spears (1991) suggested that segmenting customers into groups with similar product needs is a necessity in the foodservice industry. Mehta and Maniam (2002) conducted a survey of restaurant attributes based on market segmentation, which considered only two variables, leisure or business, for the purchase occasion, or reasons for dining. Mehta and Maniam assert that professionals who attend restaurants for economic benefits and meeting with clients comprise what they call the business market. These customers aim at impressing a client, closing business deals, or achieving intangible or tangible benefits from co-workers. In contrast, the leisure segment consists of those who are visiting a restaurant to entertain friends and/or relatives, or for special celebratory occasions (a birthday, a wedding, or other special occasion), or just for pure convenience. These consumers are concerned with satisfaction for themselves or for the close group of friends/relatives who accompany him/her. Kivela (1997) elaborated on a model for dining satisfaction based on restaurant occasion as the basis for market segmentation using the following markets: celebration, social occasion, business needs or quick meal/convenience. However, their model also used other basis such as dining frequency and customer characteristics (demographics). Lewis (1980, 1981) also used purchase occasion, as the chief basis for segmentation with three main categories of restaurants: family-popular, atmosphere and gourmet. Several authors have examined purchase occasion in the restaurant setting differently. June and Smith (1987) also conducted a similar study changing the type of occasion, in this case intimate dinner, birthday celebration, business lunch and family dinner.

From the above it can be seen that occasion may be a key consideration and worthy of research in this thesis.

2.5.5 Segmentation by social class/income

Tomlinson and Warde (1993) conducted a segmentation analysis of people who eat out and found strong differences between socio-economic groups. Kivela (1997) studied segmentation of restaurant patrons in Hong Kong, using several bases for segmentation including segmentation by income; divided simply as Low, Medium and High. The rationale for establishing these three levels of income was unfortunately not revealed in that study.

These studies only confirmed the difficulty for segmenting a market, as customers can normally fit into more than one category, and thus using demographics and/or purchase occasion as bases for segmentation may result in unavoidable overlapping and lack of clarity. For that reason; there is a need to examine lifestyle as a basis for segmentation.

2.5.6 Eating out and lifestyle segmentation

Warde (1997) based the case for lifestyle segmentation on the fact that the focus of everyday life has shifted from occupation to consumption, with lifestyle becoming a basis of social identity, displacing social class as a principle for the organisation of social life. Despite its obvious appeal, lifestyle market segmentation has earned criticisms. Lastovicka (1982) discovered that there is little empirical evidence for lifestyle segmentation but cemented this rejection on the inference that researchers had not attempted to validate findings rigorously. Bryant (1986) adopted a practitioner approach and finds that lifestyle segmentation aids marketers significantly in delivering a more targeted message. More importantly, Bryant claimed that lifestyle segmentation research can be used to gain an insight into consumer motivation; which is indeed a powerful reason for using it in this thesis. Barnett (1969) criticised the notion of consumer segmentation and argues that focus should be made on the characteristics of products (objective perspective) that customers prefer rather than on the customer itself (which Barnett considers as a subjective perspective). Indeed Barnett showed some support for the argument; nonetheless it is hard to comprehend how customer characteristics can be dissociated from preferences. In support of the latter line of reasoning, Cahill (1997) dismissed the idea of 'objective' reality proposed by Barnett and pointed out that perception rather than behaviour counts much more in the particular context of services.

In the context of eating out, it appears that the advantages of lifestyle segmentation are just too obvious to ignore. Plummer (1974) listed seven benefits of lifestyle segmentation. Amongst them, the redefinition of key targets has an obvious appeal to marketers. In this study, it facilitates an understanding of the consumers to be investigated.

Lifestyle market segmentation encompasses demographics (age, gender, sexual orientation, income, etc.) with geographic segmentation, i.e. where people live, together with a number of more difficult to define characteristics. Lifestyle market segmentation is based on the presumption that people who do similar things will purchase similar things (Cahill, 1997). This combination of psychological traits with demographics/geographics has also been described as psychographics. Cahill (2006) used the acronym AIO to explain this concept. A: a person's activities (what we do), I: person's interests (what we want) and opinions (what we think).

Dychtwald (1989) pointed out that segmenting the mature market based on lifestyle and behaviour patterns can be more valuable than using age alone. Arguably, this argument may apply to segmenting the eating out market overall. That can be further understood after examining the characteristics of people who eat out as a leisure activity.

2.5.7 Eating out as social leisure

Concomitant to lifestyle market segmentation is the family leisure/family lifecycle concept proposed by Rapoport and Rapoport (1975). These authors claimed that 'the family cycle is geared to both age and sex variables but it encompasses something more' (p. 23). Thus, in their view family life is the key determinant of leisure activities. Although Rapoport and Rapoport did not envisage eating out in restaurants as a leisure activity and view leisure in a more traditional way, it is clear that the concept of leisure in society has evolved. For Roberts (1970) leisure is a matter of choice, so eating out is a perfectly valid leisure activity if an individual engages in it (the pluralist approach). In this same line of thought, Parker (1976) defined leisure as 'the time which an individual has free from work or other duties and which may be utilised for purposes of relaxation, diversion, social achievement or personal development' (p. 18). Parker alluded to Maw's (1969) and Kaplan's (1960) classification of types of leisure, in which dining and drinking out (Maw's) are equivalent to the 'Movement' category in Kaplan's classification. However, eating and drinking out can be likened to 'Talking, parties' (Maw's) or 'Sociability' (Kaplan's). It can be concluded that eating out has become an important leisure activity.

On the other hand, Warde and Martens (2000) found that the reasons for eating out can be divided into three main categories: pleasure, leisure and necessity. In a study of 1,001 UK consumers, Warde and Mart also discovered that pleasure is associated especially with getting a change from routine, with socialising and celebrating special occasions. They also found that eating out in Britain is an important leisure activity, with many consumers defining a meal as the main purpose of the occasion. A more recent characterisation of a particular group with an interest in dining out and in food matters is provided by MacClancy (1992). MacClancy coined the term 'foodies' who are 'members of the aspiring middle class and knowledgeable about food.' They are 'individualists, though they are, as a matter of fact, members of a social movement, one of their own making' (p. 209-210).

2.6 Consumer decision making in restaurant settings

The decision of eating out in restaurants has been examined by different authors for different purposes. This section discusses the main theoretical underpinning and application of other concepts discussed in this literature review in the particular context of restaurant settings.

2.6.1 Dining out: a high involvement purchase

Eating out in a restaurant has been considered a high involvement purchase. Blackwell *et al.* (2006) explained that customers' involvement means the actions consumers take towards minimising risks and maximising benefits. The higher the involvement, the more the consumer perceives risks in the pre-purchase context and therefore, the more he/she will engage in an information search into the product/service (Murray, 1991). Bloch and Richin (1983) elaborated more on the issue of consumer involvement: 'involvement constructs serve as motivational states resulting from perceptions of importance and as predecessors of overt action' (p. 85).

According to Blackwell *et al.* (2006) the degree of involvement is dependent upon three different factors: Personal, Product and Situational. Personal factors are varied and involve activation of need and drive triggered by considerations of self-image, health, beauty and physical condition. Product factors are linked with the concept of risk to be discussed below. Situational factors may include whether the occasion is for personal use (an intimate dinner), or to be consumed with others (Business dinner, dinner party, or a celebration with friends).

2.6.2 Risk and the decision of eating out

Cunningham (1965) recognised that risk has two main components: importance and risk. In restaurant settings, firstly, dining out is not an unimportant purchasing decision because of diversity of price, market, style, ambiance, service level and quality (Fattorini, 2000). Secondly, Statt (1997) identified six forms of risk of which five are relevant to this context. These are referred to below with examples in restaurant settings:

- Performance: Will it do what it is supposed to do? (Will Food be as good as I have been told?)
- Financial: Will it be worth the money spent on the meal?
- Physical: Will it be safe? (Will I be OK after eating that unfamiliar food?)
- Social: Will my friends like the place?
- Psychological: Will my friends/acquaintances be impressed by my choice?

Hugstad *et al.* (1987) found that perceptions of risk clearly affect consumers' information search behaviour. This sounds true for restaurants, because of the growing prevalence of messages about food and restaurants in different types of media (Randall, 2000). In support of this argument, Barrows *et al.* (1989) found that people are active when seeking information about where to dine out, therefore it can be concluded that the perception of risk is fairly high when choosing where to dine out. Tuu *et al.* (2011) found that because of the higher the risk perceived by customers, it is more difficult to achieve customer satisfaction and thus the risk of defection is higher. For this reason Tuu *et al.* suggested that loyalty programmes could make customers feel reduced risk in the purchase. In a study that involves risk perception using role-play as a methodology, Lutz and Reilly (1974) found that information search behaviour is significantly affected by perceived risk, for example: consumers use more sources of Information when faced with increasing degrees of perceived performance risk and personal experience with a product or service is generally preferred to any secondary source of information. In contrast, in a study of information search activities when looking for restaurants, Pedraja and Yague (2002) found that there is a lack of significance of the effect of perceived risk on activities associated with the external information search in general or on the majority of the activities related to it. However, it should be noted that information search is just one facet of a high involvement purchase; for that reason it is possible to conclude reasonably that perceived risk in choosing a restaurant is relatively high, confirming the

impression that restaurant selection is a high involvement purchase, worthy of a thorough and complex investigation.

2.6.3 Restaurant attributes.

Cousins *et al.* (2002) pointed out that restaurant consumers base their decision for eating out on the type of experience that is sought. It can be argued that this experience has transcended the mere necessity to eat as discussed below. Macht *et al.* (2005) conducted a study on the hedonic pleasures of eating and concluded that indeed those pleasures are beyond food and nutrition and are shaped by features of the environment, social factors and emotions. According to Mittal *et al.* (1998) the components of a service are evaluated by consumers separately. Several attempts have been made to establish what these aspects are within the restaurant setting. Campbell-Smith (1967) developed the concept of the meal experience with five different components; that were later refined by Cousins *et al.* (2002). These components are: Food and Drink, Level of Service, Cleanliness-Hygiene, Value-for-Money and Ambiance. This model, as asserted by Wood (1994a) has been very influential. Wood commented that the model has had a considerable effect on education in the hospitality industry and also that it has initiated the application of practical marketing concepts in that industry.

The concept of the meal experience has been subject to criticism. Clark and Wood (1998) argued that the notion of a holistic experience when eating out should be revised, but did not offer an alternative model. Morgan *et al.* (2008) also disapproved of the possibility of a management-controlled meal experience and proposed that the experience has to be co-created by consumers. This is aligned with the notion of symbolic consumption put forward by Baudrillard. Morgan *et al.* did not agree with the management view of diners as audience. Instead they propose the view of consumers as actors participating in the “drama” of eating out in a restaurant. This is associated with the criticisms to the information processing models. Morgan *et al.* stated that food has symbolic meaning for all cultures and religions.

However, the pursuit of leisure can arguably be inferred as having consumer utility. For this reason, it is maintained that consumers pursue the maximisation of attributes that satisfy their needs and expectations. The different models of the meal experience attempt to offer an explanation of those factors which consumers may evaluate prior to making the decision to choose a particular restaurant. Indeed, research conducted on the meal experience has

attempted to ascertain the relative importance of factors as considered by consumers since these may influence their decision. Several studies of these factors have brought about varied results. It should be noted that these investigations have conveyed different aims and objectives and have adopted different approaches. Whilst there are some similarities between attributes in the fast-food restaurant sector, there are also very important differences. To illustrate this point, in a study of fast-food restaurants, Mamalis (2009) found that the key critical success factors are: adaptation to locality, food quality, service, facilities, 'Place to be' and sales incentive programme. Adaptation to locality may be critically important when restaurant chains have to cater to local tastes. Food quality, service and facilities are also elements of the meal experience in a fine dining restaurant, but key performance objectives of the operation such as speed are obviously more important in fast-food operations. Place to be refers to elements of ambiance, and includes elements of safety, which have not been mentioned in less casual dining environments. The last factor, the sales incentive programme, is particularly important for price-sensitive segments, such as the ones who regularly patronise fast-food restaurants. The implications of Mamalis's study may also affect sectors other than the fast-food industry, particularly for the increasing trend of globalisation of restaurant chains and the targeting of a customer who is brand conscious, even for dining out occasions. Another aspect is that of ethnic restaurants, those which portray a particular type of Cuisine: Italian, Chinese, Greek, etc. Authenticity has been referred to as an attribute that is specifically linked to Ethnic restaurants. Authenticity relates to both food and the environment and the degree to which it reflects the genuine taste and culture of the ethnic origin (Jang *et al.* 2010). Liu and Jang (2009) found that authenticity affects customer satisfaction, particularly when it relates to the perception of the food being authentic. Sukalakama and Boyce (2007) extended the number of attributes that affect perceptions of authenticity to aspects such as interior décor, music, staff clothing, greetings, tableware/silverware and menu design.

There is extensive research on restaurant attributes, in different geographical areas and with different customer segments. Some of these studies deserve attention, albeit briefly. Amongst these Dulen (1999) and Susskind and Chan (2000) suggested that food, atmosphere, and service are three major components of the restaurant experience. Ribeiro-Soriano (2002) studied four main attributes: Food, Service, Cost and Place (a combination of ambiance, location, facilities such as car parking and cleanliness-hygiene). The study confirms that Food was the highest ranked with consumers over 60 years of age, ranking it significantly higher than any other attribute. Law *et al.* (2008) conducted a study of attributes for tourists in China

and used the following classification of attributes and sub-attributes: food and beverage (portions, variety, quality, presentation); service (operating hours, diversity, speed and server's attitude); value for money; environment (atmosphere, cleanliness, comfort, location and decoration) and they included an additional attribute; attraction (image, novelty, word-of-mouth, advertising). There was little elaboration in that research paper about the last attribute and it is arguable whether it is a restaurant attribute at all, as attraction may be considered to be a consequence of other restaurant attributes. Meng and Elliott (2008) referred to relationship marketing and communication as predictors of retention of loyal and satisfied customers based on the model of Kim *et al.* (2006). The latter authors proposed a measurement model of predicting relationship quality for luxury restaurants in South-Korea and used the following classification for attribute dimensions: physical environment, customer orientation (service), communication, relationship benefits, price fairness, relationship quality. Narine and Badrine (2007) researched consumers eating out in Trinidad, West Indies, and they found similar aspects of the meal experience. In the study, food choices were influenced by health/nutritional benefits (60.8%), safety/sanitation (60.0%) and price of menu (55.8%). The celebration of a special occasion (60.8%) was the most popular reason for "eating out". In a research of attributes in Quick Service Restaurants (QSR); Harrington *et al.* (2010) supported other studies that indicate the general importance of the following restaurant attributes: 1) Food safety, 2) Cleanliness, 3) Food quality, 4) Speed of service, 5) Perceived value of the food and drink items, 6) Quality of service, 7) Staff friendliness, 8) Price, 9) Variety of menu and 10) Close travel distance. On the other hand, in a study of online customer reviews on restaurants (from the UK, USA, India, Germany, Italy, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and Spain), Pantelidis (2010) found that the most mentioned factors for customer satisfaction were food (96%), service (92%), ambiance (51%), price (29%), menu (27%) design/decor (10%). An aspect worthy of investigation is the combined effects of restaurant attributes. So far, only Wall and Berry (2007) have addressed this topic in a study of the combined effects of the physical environment and employee behaviour and found that the human element was significantly more important, as to an extent these 'humanistic clues' can make up for deficiencies in what they call "mechanistic clues". Andaleeb and Conway (2006) suggested that to satisfy customer expectations, restaurateurs ought to focus their efforts on service quality, price, and food quality, in that order. Nonetheless, these authors acknowledged that this order is partly induced by the design of their methodology which is heavily focused on service quality. Gupta *et al.* (2007) conducted a study that gathered a set of data regarding factors

that most affected customer satisfaction from three hundred (300) outlets of a known restaurant company in the US and found that the order of significance to the consumer is food quality, price, greeting, and service. In another study, Namkung and Jang (2008) also ranked food first, followed by the physical environment and service. However, ‘their study failed to consider price—an unfortunate omission- in the midst of an economic recession, given the likelihood that restaurant guests would have greater price sensitivity’ (Pantelidis, 2010; p.485).

From this discussion, it can be noted that the number of studies about restaurant attributes is overwhelming. For the constraints of space referred to above, only an excerpt of the most influential – and/or cited - work regarding restaurant attributes is discussed below.

2.6.4 Past research on restaurant attributes

June and Smith (1987) used other factors to break down the meal experience: Liquor availability, Service, Food Quality, Atmosphere and Price. June and Smith find that those factors are dependent upon the occasion for eating out (see table 1 below).

Table 1: Key variables influencing restaurant choice in different contexts (adapted from June and Smith, 1987)

Rank/Occasion	Intimate Dinner	Birthday celebration	Business Lunch	Family Dinner
1	Liquor availability	Liquor availability	Service	Service
2	Service	Service	Price	Price
3	Food quality	Price	Liquor availability	Liquor availability
4	Atmosphere	Food quality	Food quality	Food quality
5	Price	Atmosphere	Atmosphere	Atmosphere

Clark and Wood (1998) commented that June and Smith’s (1987) findings are curious, particularly, the low ranking established for Quality of Food which suggests that results based on a small sample of wealthy consumers was less than conclusive. Also ranking importance by customer segment, Lewis (1980, 1981) considered five elements: Food Quality, menu variety, price, atmosphere and convenience. He classifies the order of importance of these factors based upon the market segment to which the consumers belong. The preferred attributes per customer segment is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Key variables influencing restaurant choice (adapted from Lewis, 1980, 1981)

Rank/Occasion	Family-popular	Atmosphere	Gourmet
1	Convenience	Food Quality	Food Quality
2	Menu variety	Atmosphere	Convenience
3	Price	Menu variety	Atmosphere
4	Food Quality	Price	Menu variety
5	Atmosphere	Convenience	Price

The family popular restaurant is deemed to be unpretentious, and relaxed; the kind of restaurants to take the family or friends for a casual meal. In this category, previous reservation of tables may not be necessary. These restaurants are normally well known operations. The atmosphere restaurant has something special because of history context, special artefacts or theme. Theme restaurants or historic restaurants in London such as Rules (founded in 1798) or Simpsons-in-the-Strand (founded in 1828) may correspond to this category. It is likely that customers dress up more in this type of restaurant than in the family-popular category. The gourmet restaurant is the most sophisticated of the three in terms of food, service and atmosphere. It is unhurried and relaxed, the type of restaurant for very formal or special occasions. Lewis (1980) acknowledged the inherent limitations of the study, firstly the fact that it comes from a limited sample of 400 respondents and more importantly because it is taken from data collected in terms of intentions rather than actual behaviours. This important limitation has to be carefully weighed up when designing the research methodology.

More recently, Gustaffson *et al.* (2006) developed the Five Aspects Meal Model (FAMM). Although, their focus is on the operational aspect of the food service, the model is very similar to the marketing-based model of Campbell-Smith. Strangely enough, Campbell-Smith's contribution is notably omitted in Gustaffson *et al.*'s paper. The FAMM model consisted of: the room where the meal will take place (*room*), where the consumer meets waiters and other consumers (*meeting*), and where dishes and drinks (*products*) are served. Backstage there are several rules, laws and economic and management resources (*management control system*) that are needed to make the meal possible and make the experience an entirety as a meal (*entirety – expressing an atmosphere*). In relation to the latter, Gladwell's (2000) entirety

concept can be seen as ‘the power of context’. Gladwell asserts that human beings are very sensitive to their environment, with this sensitivity being underestimated most of the time. Gladwell highlighted the importance of ‘tipping points’ because they can improve the likelihood of people remembering products and services stickiness of products or services in people’s minds. Anderson and Mossberg (2004) also approached eating out as a multidimensional experience and assess the relative importance of six aspects of the dining experience: food, service, fine cuisine, restaurant interior, good company and other customers. Anderson and Mossberg approach eating out as a pursuit for needs, following the Maslow model. An important difference between dining and lunch customers was found with social needs being important for customers in the evening and more basic physiological needs being important for lunchtime customers. The absolute and relative importance of factors is shown in table 3.

Table 3: Key factors influencing restaurant choice during lunch and evening (adapted from Anderson and Mossberg, 2004)

Rank/Occasion	Lunch	Dinner
1	Food	Good company
2	Fine cuisine	Service
3	Good company	Other guests
4	Service	Food
5	Restaurant interior	Fine cuisine
6	Other guests	Restaurant interior

It is important to highlight that the sample of dinner customers was particularly smaller than the sample of lunch customers (N=55 v. N=255). The notion of having fine cuisine as a separate category from food seems confusing as customers may perceive fine cuisine as synonymous with quality of food.

Hanefors and Mossberg (2003) distinguished factors of the meal experience as evaluated by consumers before, during the experience and after the meal. These factors are motivation and expectation (before), interaction and involvement (during) and satisfaction (afterwards). Concerning motivation, the salient factors are ‘de-routinisation’, meaning to break away from the normal routine of consumption (something consumers are too familiar with) and pursuit of escape (for example, from house chores or problems). According to this line of thought

consumers expect: no script (contrary to a fast-food experience, for instance), curiosity (evidenced by a menu the consumer has not seen before) and capacity to act (in which the consumer feels freedom to customise their meal or experience - a degree of flexibility).

Auty (1992) conducted research –seemingly ignoring June and Smith’s (1987) work- and found that the most frequently cited priorities for eating out are Food Quality and Food type. Auty’s work was conducted on a cross-sectional representation of three demographic market segments and evoked three types of contexts, albeit less clear in terms of occasion than June and Smith’s classification of occasions (see table 4 below).

Table 4: Ranking attributes for three occasions for eating out (adapted from Auty, 1992)

Rank/Occasion	Social	Celebration	Speed/Convenience
1	Food type	Recommendation	Food type
2	Food Quality	Food Quality	Food Quality
3	Value	Food type	Value
4	Image/Atmosphere	Value	Speed
5	Location	Location	Location
6	Recommendation	Image/Atmosphere	Image/Atmosphere Opening Hours

Cousins *et al.* (2002) cautioned that restaurant operations should not focus all their attentions on the core product (Food and Drink) and neglect the total package, regardless of customers’ priorities. This seems to be founded on the authors’ observations in the industry rather than based on empirical evidence. Cousins *et al.* also suggested that a better understanding of customers’ expectations or the nature of customer demand will help the restaurant operation to develop a product that meets those expectations or that type of demand. Cousins *et al.* (2002) also suggested that in the absence of appropriate market research, restaurateurs should establish priorities, depending on the core concept offered, as shown in table 5.

Table 5: Ranking attributes for three occasions for eating out (adapted from Cousins *et al.*, 2002)

Ranking/Core concept	Night Out	Gourmet	Cheap Meal
1	Atmosphere	Food and Drink	Value for Money
2	Food and Drink	Service	Food and Drink
3	Service	Atmosphere	Cleanliness & Hygiene
4	Value for Money	Cleanliness & Hygiene	Service
5	Cleanliness & Hygiene	Value for Money	Atmosphere

It is also important to note that relative importance of factors may vary according to the local environment and socio-cultural factors. To illustrate this point, Upadhyay *et al.* (2007) conducted a study of restaurant attributes for consumers dining out in India, and found a significant number of attributes (see table 6).

Table 6: Ranking attributes for eating out, adapted from Upadhyay *et al.* (2007)

Ranking/Core concept	Attributes
1	Quality of Food
2	Safety
3	Menu
4	Location
5	Less time in serving
6	Parking facility
7	Convenient operating time
8	Separate place for family
9	Ambiance
10	Cuisine tariffs
11	Separate bar
12	Innovative recipe
13	Specialised cuisine facility
14	Only vegetarian cuisine availability
15	Popularity of chef

These authors have attempted to present a comprehensive list of all factors affecting the decision. However, with a high number of factors, it is very difficult for respondents to rank factors regardless of the methodology employed. Besides, it has the important limitation of not considering a wider range of restaurants, other than fine dining.

Hansen *et al.* (2005) conducted a study in à la Carte restaurants using focus group interviews to ascertain the factors of the meal experience. The elements identified were the core product, the restaurant interior, the personal social meeting, the company and the restaurant atmosphere. The core product was deemed to be more than just the food and to encompass the individual total experience of food combinations with beverages that together created social reactions and interactions with the surroundings (other guests, interior, staff, etc.). According to this interpretation, elements of service such as the waiting staff skills are part of that core product. The Restaurant interior was divided into four identifiable categories: Colours, centre objects, furniture, and remote objects. Hansen *et al.* elaborated on these elements and suggested that colours were an important component of the restaurant concept. Piqueras-Fiszman *et al.* (2013) studied the colour of plates and found that it affected consumer's perception of food presentation, how appetizing the dish was and the colour intensity of the dish. In the personal social meeting, two categories emerge and entail the interactions between customer(s) with other customer(s); and customer(s) with members of the restaurant staff. In the first category, the relationship consists of politeness, attention, and esteem. The latter relationship consists of attention, complaint handling, and trust. Hansen *et al.* found that although the interactions amongst customers were not central for the meal experience itself, they could influence the meal experience if the other customers behaved inappropriately according to the customer's perceptions about appropriate behaviour. The company (also called the social setting) consists of the customers sitting around a table to eat together, which did not include the interactions between customers referred to in the previous paragraph. This social setting entails three categories: Conversation, business, and private. Hansen *et al.* interpreted the restaurant atmosphere as an individual's emotional response to the entire experience with the social interactions and feelings of comfort and intimacy. The importance of the sensory reactions is highlighted and they illustrate this with the example of the effects of music on customers. Hansen *et al.*'s research is an in-depth study on a small sample of consumers in Scandinavia. However, its main value is in the originality of the research methodology and details of the factors of the meal experience that are evaluated by customers.

Harrington *et al.* (2011) differentiated between key attributes for positive and for negative experiences in consumers below thirty years of age. This study was conducted across three types of restaurants: quick-service restaurants, casual dining and fine dining. With reference to attributes, this study used a synthesis of descriptions found in the relevant literature rather than conducting primary qualitative data analysis. A total of 29 attributes were compiled. Interestingly, this research found that key positive experience drivers (quality of food/drink, quality of service, friendliness of staff, atmosphere of the restaurant, speed of service) were different compared with the key negative drivers (quality of service, speed of service, quality of food/drink, friendliness of staff, cleanliness of the restaurant) for restaurants overall. In all, the top five attributes described as drivers of positive experiences are (a) quality of food/drink (20.7%), (b) quality of service (14.4%), (c) friendliness of staff (12.4%), (d) atmosphere of restaurant (12%), and (e) speed of service (11.2%). The top five attributes described as drivers of negative experiences are (a) quality of service (24.2%), (b) speed of service (18.1%), (c) quality of food/drink (16.5%), (d) friendliness of staff (10.9%), and (e) cleanliness (5.2%). Another important finding was that young consumers described quality of food or drink in casual dining and quick service restaurants environments as a less frequent determinant of positive experiences when compared with fine-dining restaurants. It is to be noted that aspects of service such as quality of service are seen as different from speed of service, when theoretical frameworks of service quality consider speed as another dimension of service quality.

It is clear that the number of factors analysed by different authors vary greatly, but that variety is caused by different approaches, different market segments or different contexts. This richness may influence the different outcomes. This concurs with the comments of Law *et al.* (2008, p. 347): 'in relation to the important attributes for a restaurant selection, the findings of prior studies have not been analogous to each other'. Pantelidis (2010) seemed to agree by concluding that efforts to prioritize expectations or set them in a hierarchy have been inconclusive. And in respect to the variety of restaurant attributes discussed, they all appear to be, to some extent, variations of the meal experience model. Arguably a large number of attributes will entail an extensive, detailed discussion of each of them. It is not the intention of this research to be so specific, as focus will shift from decision making to the study of attributes. For this reason the factors influencing the decision will be examined, following the

classification of Cousins *et al.* (2002), which in turn is a variation of the original model of Campbell-Smith (1967).

2.6.5 Elements of the meal experience

Hitherto, there has been a discussion about ranking of factors; now, it is important to examine whether consumers follow compensatory or non-compensatory rules when considering those factors. For that reason, a thorough discussion of the five factors of the meal experience and their interconnections will follow.

2.6.5.1 Food and Drink

According to Clark and Wood (1998), Food and Drink is the most significant of all the aspects of the meal experience. This may be because people forgive poorer service more readily than poor food quality (Denove and Power, 2006). Pantelidis (2010, p. 488) also confirmed the importance of food-drink as a main trigger for negative comments from customers: ‘if the restaurant fails to deliver its primary product, the experience will be tainted, and subsequent comments will be negative’. This confirmation has been repeated by several studies that have found that restaurateurs must make food quality its main priority (Mehta and Maniam, 2002; Longart, 2010). In this category, unlike other authors, Sulek and Hensley (2004) included food safety and food appeal, although food safety is mentioned marginally (once) in the focus group interviews, this research will focus on the second aspect of food appeal, which has elements of food quality.

Peri (2006) understood food quality as a set of requirements that consumers evaluate in terms of their performance. These requirements are: nutritional, safety, sensory, functional aesthetic, ethical and convenience. Nonetheless, ascertaining what makes people perceive food as being of ‘quality’ seems elusive and vague (Shaharudin *et al.*, 2011); and dependent on cultural influences (Rozin *et al.*, 1999; Lennernäs *et al.*, 1997). Van Rijswijk and Frewer (2009) conducted a qualitative study in Europe about definitions of food quality. They found that it was defined using the imprecise label of “Good Product”, or in the better defined terms of taste, natural/organic or freshness. To name just one of the authors that investigated food quality; Sulek and Hensley (2004) found that features of food appeal were taste, presentation, textures, colours, temperature, size of the portions and entrée complexity. Of these, portion size is examined later and entrée complexity may be examined from the perspective of menu variety. Namkung and Yang (2008) concluded that there is no consensus on the particular

attributes that constitute food quality; their thorough review of the literature revealed that the main features of food are:

- Presentation
- Taste
- Freshness
- Temperature
- Healthy options

With regard to presentation, Hansen *et al.* (2005) found that the appearance of the dish is “the moment of truth”. This means that presentation affects the evaluation of food quality insofar as it signals that, given the standard and style of the restaurant, the food did not meet the expectations of the customer. Shahrudin *et al.* (2011) conducted a study in fast food restaurants and found freshness to be the food quality attribute with the highest importance, followed by presentation and taste. Delwiche (2004) found that temperature influences the perception of taste, smell and flavour. Auvray and Spence (2008) conducted a literature review on the perception of flavour and found that it is about the combinations of taste, smell, the trigeminal system (sensory nerves in our brain) and touch, to which auditory and visual cues are added. It all points towards a close interrelationship between these factors. The daunting task of describing taste has been examined many authors like Brillat-Savarin (1825) because of the many combinations that there could be, hence reducing taste and combination of flavours to just ‘agreeable’ or ‘disagreeable’ to consumers.

Regarding healthy options, particular attention should be given to nutritional aspects. Some studies have found a strong correlation between Body Mass Index (BMI), which is an indicator of obesity, and preference for certain types of restaurants. In a study of Latino families eating out in outlets, including fast-food restaurants in USA, Duerksen *et al.* (2007) found that mean child and parent BMI were both lowest in families choosing Mexican restaurants, while mean child BMI was highest with fast food chains and mean parent BMI was highest with American restaurants, although the differences were only marginally significant. It is imperative to note that Duerksen *et al.*’s (2007) study had the purpose of highlighting the issues regarding obesity and its prevention. In addition to healthy options and seemingly related to obesity is the issue of portion sizes. Vermeer *et al.* (2010, p. 109) pointed out: “large portion sizes of energy dense

food are problematic because they can lead to increased consumption". The World Health Organization (WHO) refers to the problem of obesity as a visible, yet neglected public health issue. These constant alerts from the WHO have influenced respondents to consider nutrition connected with the availability of healthy options which was also found to be connected with a feature of food quality (Namkung and Yang, 2008). Portion sizes seem to have increased over the years. In support of this argument, Condrasky *et al.* (2007) conducted a study of chefs' attitudes towards portion sizes and found that chefs aged 51 years or older served significantly smaller portions than younger chefs. The question now is what customers expect in terms of portion size. In their qualitative research, Vermeer *et al.* (2010) found that there is unanimous consensus towards the idea that large portion sizes offer more value for money than small portion sizes. Its importance seems to vary according to type of restaurant and context with Key *et al.* (1994) considering it an attribute of little importance. However, it seems that decisions over portion sizes may be influenced by what restaurateurs and more particularly chefs perceive as appropriate sizes (Condrasky *et al.*, 2007).

Regarding customisation of meals, Cousins *et al.* (2002) concurred with by Hanefors and Mossberg (2003) on the importance of flexibility for special orders as part of the evaluation on Food and Drink. Kincaid *et al.* (2010) bundled food with other tangible aspects such as staff, accessibility and focus on the variety and presentation of food and beverage offerings, and the quality of the menu. According to these authors, restaurateurs should concentrate efforts on ensuring an interesting variety of food and drink offerings presented in interesting and unique ways. These findings confirmed what has been mentioned in several sections of this literature review about the importance (or determinance) of food and drink as an attribute in restaurants.

2.6.5.2 Ambiance

Kotler (1973) pioneered the study of 'atmosphere' in service settings and defined it as 'a quality of the surrounding space' (p. 50) that can be described in sensory terms. The dimensions of an atmosphere, he suggested, are visual, aural and olfactory. In restaurants, as an example, Kotler suggested that restaurants could have a busy atmosphere, a good atmosphere or a depressing atmosphere. Namkung and Yang (2008) also found that ambiance-atmosphere arouses a number of feelings such as excitement, pleasure, or relaxation.

Finkelstein (1989) suggested that Ambiance-Atmosphere is as important as Food and Drink in customers' evaluations: 'the restaurateur has long accepted atmosphere as a feature of dining out equal in importance and sometimes more important than the food itself' (p. 59). In support of this argument, Babin *et al.* (2005) proposed that an increased emphasis on the physical environment plays a critical role in enhancing positive consumer outcomes. Harrington *et al.* (2011) also found that restaurant atmosphere, in general, is an important driver of positive experiences amongst young restaurant patrons. To illustrate the point further, Josiam *et al.* (2007) found that for South Asians, atmosphere in an Indian restaurant is very important, as they see it as an extension of themselves, and as a showcase of their culture. To delve into the topic of atmosphere is indeed challenging as it is obviously made up of and affected by numerous factors; some are considerably more controllable than others (Milliman, 1986). The less controllable factors may be part of what Gladwell (2000) called the 'Power of Context'.

On the other hand, some scholars have also found a relationship between ambiance, or the role of the physical environment and quality of services provided. Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1999) used the concept of the marketing mix, with the dimension of physical evidence to illustrate the point and state that in the absence of a material product customers rely upon tangible cues; the more intangible the product is perceived to be, the more the reliance is placed upon these cues. A tangible cue is background music or smells. Milliman (1986) found that background music, a normally highly controllable factor that ranges from loud to soft, fast to slow, vocal to instrumental and so forth, can significantly affect the behaviour of restaurant customers, who consumed more alcoholic beverages in a relaxing atmosphere to which music was an important contributor. Jain and Bagdare (2009) stressed the importance of conducting adequate research into collecting information on detailed customer profiles in order to understand their characteristics and preferences in music, as these are deemed to have important implications for consumer behaviour. Slow-tempo music appeared to have a positive influence and the opposite could be said of loud music, which if ill-suited could become a condition to be avoided. Mattila and Wirtz (2001) tested the combined effects of scent (olfactory) with music (aural) in a shopping environment and found that consumer evaluations of the experience were enhanced with matching combinations of scent and music. Likewise, in a study of the influence of classical music being played in a fine dining restaurant, Magnini *et al.* (2008) conclude that since music can influence consumers' perceptions, restaurateurs and hoteliers should always play some type of music.

Other studies have emphasised the role of the restaurant interior or design of a restaurant, which may influence how long customers stay in the restaurant (Wakefield and Blodgett, 1996), and environmental design which has an impact on service satisfaction (Andrus, 1986). This is particularly true in 'destination restaurants', which are seen as special places to go, with an atmosphere that combines elegance and restraint, with the restaurant interior being trendy and designed to last; to become a classic (Colgan, 1987). On the other hand, Lambert and Watson (1984) found that if consumers have the perception of an improvement in restaurant design they also tend to rate service quality higher. Katsigris and Thomas (2006) explained that colour and lighting work together to enhance the restaurant environment and that certain colours are popular for certain periods of time, or 'colour cycles'.

In addition, Ambiance/Atmosphere has been found to be a defining factor when choosing between two restaurants that are similar (Kivela, 1997). The literature shows that ambiance/atmosphere has a number of interrelated facets and issues that may have an undeniable effect on consumers' attitudes and behaviours.

2.6.5.3 Value for Money/Perceived consumer value

Marney (2001) argued that customer perceived value is sometimes a better predictor of customer behaviour or market outcomes than customer satisfaction. Zeithaml (1988) distinguished extrinsic and intrinsic attributes of either lower level or higher level. Zeithaml found that lower level attributes affect perceived value and perceived quality and that high level attributes affect perceived value only. Teas and Agarwal (2000) found that extrinsic cues such as brand and price affect perceived quality and perceived value. Bolton and Drew (1991) clarified that even though service quality and value are not identical constructs, perceived service value is a richer, more comprehensive measure of a consumer's overall evaluation of a service than service quality. It is a higher construct more individualistic and personal than quality. In a seminal paper, Woodruff (1997) emphasised that consumers make decisions in a means-end way, looking for value. The means are the linkages between attributes that exist in products. These means result in consequences which are provided by the attributes which then provides value to the consumer according to their personal values (Reynolds and Gutman, 1988). This is called attribute value-theory. Sweeney *et al.* (1999) distinguished between technical and functional aspects of the service which affect perceived value for money which is also affected by the perceived product quality and perceived relative price.

In the context of this research, Parsa *et al.* (2005) claimed that negative consumer perception of value - a mismatch between price and service delivered - is one of the reasons why a restaurant may not succeed. It suggests a relationship between price and expectations of price (Anderson and Mossberg, 2004; Gustaffson *et al.*, 2006). Ha and Jang's (2012) based their research on attributes, consequences and values in restaurant segments. This is because perception of value varies according to the types of establishment and operation (Cousins *et al.*, 2002). This research delves into respondents' perceptions on the considerations of value for money and attempts to establish whether considerations of several attributes are underpinned by expectations based on how much they are willing to spend. Hence, attribute-value theory appears like an interesting perspective to analyse how the categories of attributes are interrelated. One of these relationships was investigated by Tse (2001) who supported the interrelationship of value, quality and satisfaction and claims there is a trade-off between price and service quality. The theory underpinning this assertion is exchange theory. Tse conducts a trade-off analysis between price and Service Quality using a technique called Conjoint Analysis (to be discussed in the methodology section). Tse's research found that whilst 'service is an important factor in restaurant selection; customers are nevertheless unwilling to pay an extra amount for a higher level of service, while other things are being held constant' (p. 15).

With relation to the aspect of perceived price, sales incentives appear to be relevant. In a study of the influence of discounts in the mature market of American restaurants, Moschis *et al.* (2003) found that discounts were highly ranked as an attribute in this market, but warned that discounts should not be a goal as companies that engaged in offering discounts to senior customers have not achieved competitive advantage. Rather than competition on price, Moschis *et al.* suggested that efforts should be made to find value added offerings, e.g. personalised greetings. In another study of that market, Knutson *et al.* (2006) found that the most important factor in choosing a restaurant for these customers is perceived value. Knutson *et al.* commented that it was a logical outcome given that value is simply the relationship of total experience to total cost.

The above discussion suggests that the focus should be placed on the concept of perceived value as the central consideration for selecting a restaurant.

2.6.5.4 Service Quality

Service quality is probably one of the areas that have been most researched, particularly in services marketing (Fisk *et al.* 1993); however, there are numerous interpretations of what service quality entails. Stevens *et al.* (1995) attempted to link service quality in restaurants with the dimensions of service quality indicated by Parasuraman *et al.* (1988). These dimensions are reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy and tangibles. Stevens *et al.* developed a questionnaire that adapts Parasuraman *et al.*'s SERVQUAL questionnaire to the restaurant service. They name that instrument the DINESERVE. The dimensions of DINESERVE and their items are shown below.

Reliability is about the ability to deliver the service accurately and dependably. The items evaluated are:

- Serves you in the time promised.
- Quickly corrects anything that is wrong.
- Is dependable and consistent.
- Provides an accurate bill.
- Serves the food exactly as you ordered it.

Assurance refers to the ability of employees to exhibit trust and confidence (through knowledge and courtesy). In the DINESERVE instrument, the assurance items are:

- Employees who can answer questions completely.
- The employees are both able and keen to give information about menu items, the ingredients and methods of preparation.
- Makes you feel comfortable and confident in your dealings with them.
- Has staffs who appear to be well-trained, competent and well-experienced.
- Employees have the support necessary to do their jobs well.

Responsiveness is about willingness to help and provide swift service; its items are:

- When busy the employees shift to help each other to keep speed and quality of service.
- Provides service without delay.
- Acknowledges and handles special orders.

Empathy refers to the notion of making customers feel well cared for, to make them feel like individuals rather than numbers to be processed. This implies that:

- Members of staff are sensitive to individual needs rather than relying on policy and procedure.
- Make customers feel special.
- Anticipate the customer's needs.
- Employees are reassuring if something goes wrong.
- Keep customers' best interests at heart.

Tangibles are those aspects of the service that can be easily noticed: physical facilities, equipment, staff appearance. In the DINESERVE instrument they refer to:

- The restaurant having visually attractive parking areas and exteriors.
- The dining area being appealing to the eye.
- Members of staff being clean, neat and properly dressed for work.
- Decor matching image of the restaurant and prices charged.
- The menu being easy-to-read.
- The menu being visually attractive and matches the image of the restaurant.
- The dining area being comfortable and easy to move about.
- Toilets being thoroughly clean.
- Dining areas being clean.

- Seating being comfortable everywhere.

Noticeably, many items of service quality overlap with attributes mentioned by other authors. For instance cleanliness of dining areas and toilets are enveloped in this concept of service quality. Other authors referred to quality as mainly the intangibles of service. However, Wakefield and Blodgett (1994, 1999) clarified that in certain service settings where customers spend very little time, e.g. fast-food restaurants, quality is perceived primarily on the basis of intangible factors. Wakefield and Blodgett considered two aspects: time spent in the place and purpose of visit (e.g. hedonic v. utilitarian). Restaurants are labelled as 'moderate' in time spent in the facility, and a combination of utilitarian and hedonic as purpose of visit. Regarding adaptation of service quality instruments to the restaurant context, Namkung and Yang (2008) warned that despite the broad applicability across all for SERVQUAL service sectors, attention should be paid to adapting SERVQUAL to a specific setting. That specificity was addressed by Andaleeb and Conway (2006) with what they called a transaction specific model. An interesting finding of their study was that responsiveness was the most important attribute of service quality. Anadaleeb and Conway described service quality as a multi-attribute dimension that encompasses promptness, courtesy, knowledge, neat appearance (arguably a tangible aspect), helpfulness, attentiveness, and understanding of customer needs. Service quality can be deemed as a largely intangible construct in which personal attitudes of staff can play a significant role (Marinkovic *et al.*, 2013). Of these attitudes, Teng (2011) examined friendliness, linked to being welcoming to the customer. These dimensions are not restricted to restaurants. Bogicevic *et al.* (2013) also referred to friendly/welcoming and helpful staff in the context of airports. Also, Marinkovic *et al.* (2014) alluded to 'responsive and attentive staff' (p. 320).

Pedraja and Yague (2001) linked the perception of price with service quality expected in restaurant settings and find a significant relationship, with higher perception of price and higher service quality expected. Indeed, perceived service quality appears to be an important concept in restaurant operations. It is defined as the difference between customers' expectations and their perception of service delivered (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1988). In practical terms as explained by Martin (1986), it means that different restaurant operations should match different customers' expectations as illustrated in figure 8 below:

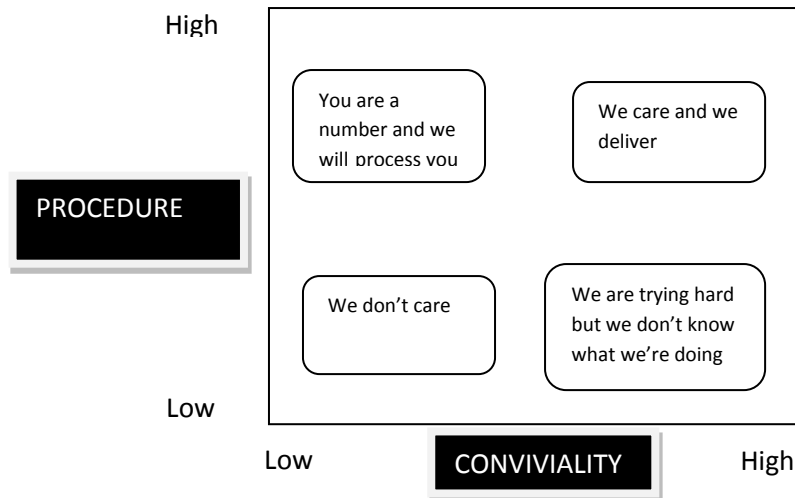


Figure 8: Dimensions of Service in Restaurant Operations - adapted from Martin- (1986)

This seems to imply that fast-food operations are high on procedure and low on conviviality, whereas customers in the context of this research expect high levels of procedure and conviviality. Finkelstein (1989) commented that the regimented nature of the exchange between the customer and serviceperson in McDonald's are structural barriers to civilised society as 'formulaic exchanges prevent any recognition of each other as unique' (p. 11).

2.6.5.5 Cleanliness-Hygiene

Another aspect mentioned by Cousins *et al.* (2002) and one of the original components of the Campbell-Smith (1967) model is Cleanliness-Hygiene. Cousins *et al.* (2002) explained that this concept is related to staff, premises and equipment. There seems to be no consensus about the importance of this factor. Barber and Scarcelli (2009) found that consumers are indeed concerned with cleanliness and food safety. In particular, restrooms are found to be an important factor when assessing the cleanliness and hygiene of a restaurant. Cadotte and Turgeon (1988) ranked it as fourth in a list of restaurant attributes. And in a study of restaurant attributes in Malaysia, Josiam *et al.* (2007) found that cleanliness of toilets and overall cleanliness are the highest ranked factors, almost as important as food Quality. In contraposition to these findings, Titz (2004) found that sanitation was a 'hygiene' factor, which meant that it was important only when not present. Thus, it is something expected by customers, but arguably not a factor for choosing a restaurant. This alertness of consumers

seems to peak during times of bacteria outbreaks. They were particularly acute in August 1995 when in West Palm Beach, Florida (USA) more than a thousand lawsuits were started against two main American restaurant chains (Walczak, 1997). The results from Walczak's study suggest that consumers are concerned with cleanliness and food safety.

The relative importance of cleanliness-hygiene appears to be very high when the market segment is that of parents looking for a place to have a family meal. This is because parents serve as "gatekeepers" who control their child's access to the quality and quantity of foods, and this is particularly true for young children (Elder *et al.*, 1999). The aspect of Cleanliness-Hygiene has been identified as a key attribute related to service quality in fast food (also called quick service) restaurants (Harrington *et al.*, 2011). This consideration of cleanliness as critical to the firm's image rather than a peripheral aspect was confirmed in more recent research. Indeed, Yavetz and Gilboa (2010) found that in full-service restaurants, cleanliness influenced both consumer trust and willingness to patronise the restaurant in the future. Interestingly, Yavetz and Gilboa also found that the perceived cleanliness of the serviceperson's dress also influenced positively the amount of tip received.

2.6.5.6 Location

The importance of location or mention of it as a restaurant has been listed in this literature review. If a restaurant is considered to be a retail outlet, it has been claimed that location is the most important factor (Anderson *et al.*, 1997). It is important to note that it is vital to define precisely what is understood by location. In some cases, location is just mentioned by its name without precise definition of what it means to the consumer. To name just one study; in Kivela *et al.*'s (1997) study, the importance of location is closely related to fast-food restaurants; however what they mean by a good location is not clearly defined. Reference to location varies according to the context of the research which may range from type of restaurant studied, geographical location, tourist destination or cities, etc. Koo *et al.* (1999) conducted a conjoint study with location and three levels: Outlying island, urban or rural. Keyt *et al.* (1994) conducted a study in one restaurant in the USA where consumers rated that restaurant in terms of 'convenience of location' and found that it was an attribute of less importance even than portion sizes. Likewise, in an evaluation of factors affecting customer loyalty, Haghighi *et al.* (2012) found that it did not have an impact on customer satisfaction. In the context of tourists, Yüksel and Yüksel (2003) found that a segment of tourists (atmosphere seekers) was more concerned about a convenient location, which the researchers associated

with restaurant appearance. Indeed, restaurateurs consider alternatives before locating a restaurant. In this respect, Tzeng *et al.* (2002) evaluated the restaurant location process from the perspective of customers and management. With regard to customers, they pointed out that convenience of mass transportation system and parking capacity seem to be more related to the context of the UK. Location is also an objective attribute used in context-aware restaurant recommendation through mobile devices. Park *et al.* (2007) devise a mobile application using an expectation maximisation algorithm for selecting a restaurant based on aspects such as availability of parking area, distance from the consumer together with attributes like type of restaurant, price level, etc. From the examination of the literature, it seems that a clear definition of location and research on how it affects the decision of selecting a restaurant is in need of investigation.

2.6.5.7 Restaurant image

Interest in image as an aspect worthy of consideration has increased because of its potential influence on an individual's subjective perception and consequent behaviour (Castro *et al.*, 2007; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Gallarza *et al.*, 2002; Hartman and Spiro, 2005; Tasci *et al.*, 2007). However, there are conflicting conceptualisations of image. Ryu *et al.* (2008, p. 460) conducted a study of image for quick-casual restaurants and defined image as a bundle of tangible aspects: 'a function of the attributes of quick-casual restaurants that are salient for evaluation'. Ryu *et al.* (2008) examined brand name as a tangible cue for restaurant image together with décor and interior design and price, and this seems to bundle together both tangible and intangible factors. It seems more sensible to concentrate on brand image as affecting that sum of beliefs that consumers may have. Following this order of ideas, Ryu *et al.* (2012) referred to restaurant image as the sum of the emotional perceptions, ideas, or symbolic attitudes that customers associate with restaurants. For other authors, image attributes are made up of aspects of the meal experience which have a considerable impact on customers' loyalty such as service personnel, pricing, ambiance and overall cleanliness (Dhurup *et al.*, 2013). In this line of thought, Yun and Good (2007) defined image as a complex blend of tangible and intangible elements. However, consumers may attach value to brands beyond their tangible benefits (Landon 1974). For that reason, this thesis considers that tangible elements should be considered separately and that restaurant image should be linked to non-product factors that include features such as its associations or the image of spokesperson or celebrity (Musante *et al.*, 2008).

Akin to the concept of brand image is corporate reputation. Devine and Halpern (2001) claimed that corporate reputation is itself a cue that affects customers' perceptions of a company's product/service quality. Chang (2012) found that in the restaurant sector corporate reputation significantly affects customer-perceived trust, customer-perceived value, and customer satisfaction. Chang added that since the restaurant industry offers its customers the experience of a product/service, a restaurant's reputation can be a very important consideration for customers when choosing a restaurant. Rather than focusing on the corporate sector, Lüth and Spiller (2003) referred to brand Image/transfer in the case of gastronomy restaurants.

Concomitant with the aspect of restaurant reputation is the role that celebrity chefs have in becoming brands that not only characterise the restaurant brand but go even beyond, since chefs have transformed their names into brands of their own. Evidence of this transformation is the various branded lines of food and drink, kitchen utensils and household goods endorsed by these celebrity chefs (Henderson, 2011). Supporting the argument of the importance of celebrity chefs, Jones (2009) argued that there is an inherent risk in having such a total perceptual alignment between charismatic founder-entrepreneur and brand, as recently evidenced by the negative publicity that may affect the brand. Nonetheless, Henderson (2011) also clarified that whilst some chefs have become global brands, embraced by social media and continuing appearances in TV programmes, other renowned chefs like Adrian Ferri "limit themselves to a single restaurant and their celebrity is perhaps of a different quality, remaining centred on culinary artistry and the elusiveness of table bookings" (p. 617).

Another association related to brand image is that of restaurant awards. Edelheim *et al.* (2011) defined the awards as benchmarks for excellence. Restaurant awards according to Edelheim *et al.* 'objectify intangible and subjective experiences in restaurants'. De Chernatony and McWilliam, 1989) suggested that in addition, awards such as the Michelin star seem trustworthy in the eyes of consumers (Surlemont and Johnson, 2005; Parkhurst-Ferguson, 2008). Overall, brand image or reputation has clear implications for quality or value assessments and thus restaurants raise their prices above the average (Edelheim *et al.*, 2011).

2.6.5.8 Sustainability issues: the case for a 'green restaurant'

Sloan *et al.* (2009) defined a sustainable hospitality operation as that one with the aim of reducing their impact on the environment and society. Sloan *et al.* put forward a theoretical framework for the factors in a sustainable restaurant operation, with three interconnected dimensions. These are economic (maximise internal and external profit), environmental (minimise environmental impacts) and social (maximise well-being of stakeholders). Another concept linked to green restaurants is Corporate Social Responsibility. For instance, Mohr and Webb (2005) found that when consumers are given information that they trust about a company's level of social responsibility, it affects how they evaluate the company and their purchase intentions. Mohr and Webb also found that there is a segment of consumers with sensitivity to environmental sustainability and this segment will evaluate a company more favourably if it also demonstrates a commitment to environmental sustainability. Scholder-Ellen *et al.* (2006) warned that customers must perceive that the organisation's intentions towards sustainability or other causes must be integrated with business operations rather than a desire to use a cause for selfish purposes.

In the restaurant context, Lorenzini (1994) defined a restaurant organisation that demonstrates concern for the natural environment as a 'green restaurant'. Hu *et al.* (2010) found that consumer willingness to choose a green restaurant depends upon four interconnected factors: the demographic characteristics of the consumer, environmental concerns, ecological behaviours and knowledge of green restaurants. Hu *et al.* found that if consumers know what a green restaurant stands for (one that attempts to pollute less, to recycle and to use energy efficiently), that knowledge may influence their intention to patronize a green restaurant indirectly by the consumers' environmental concerns and their ecological behaviours. Therefore, they suggested, informing customers by enhancing their knowledge of green restaurants through information cards, menu notes, or window displays will influence those consumers who have environmental concerns and/or display behaviours towards protecting the environment already. An important finding was that these consumers were prepared to pay more at green restaurants. The increasing influence of ecological issues in the restaurant industry is the existence of organisations like The Green Restaurant Association in the United States (www.dinegreen.com). This organisation raises awareness of these issues and encourages restaurants to engage in practices that will lead the restaurant to be awarded a certification as a green restaurant. Research on the aspect of sustainable

restaurants is a recent development in need of more research. For instance, Hu *et al.* (2010) acknowledged the need for more thorough follow-up research.

2.6.6. Investigating the choice process in the restaurant context

Establishing the importance of an attribute may not be a good predictor of restaurant choice because there may be several competing restaurants that offer equally attractive “bundles” of attributes that are regarded as equally important (Alpert, 1971). Consequently, Alpert (1980) criticised the usefulness of establishing ranks of importance between attributes. This is because the ascertainment of attributes that are determinant to the decision is a dynamic process. In this respect, Sinclair and Stalling (1990) proposed the application of determinant attribute analysis. This is a technique that allows the isolation of those critical attributes by rating attributes in terms of: 1) how important each is thought to be in determining product choice, and 2) how much difference is perceived among competing products in terms of each attribute (p. 34). On the other hand, Boulding *et al.* (1993) conducted a study of service quality and found that behavioural intentions such as the decision to choose a particular restaurant are part of a dynamic process that involves expectations. Following the studies of Alpert (1971), Boulding *et al.* (1993) and Sinclair and Stalling, (1990); Kivela (1997) concluded that ‘the importance of an attribute coupled with the perceived difference among competing restaurants determines choice criteria and provides the basis for predicting post-dining behaviour intention’ (p. 120). All of the above suggests that there is still ongoing debate on which attributes have a decisive role in the final selection or rejection from the evoked set and how to ascertain attribute importance.

2.7 Customer satisfaction and post-purchase evaluations

Studies on restaurants attributes in this literature are associated mainly with customer satisfaction with these attributes. Customer satisfaction can be used as a proxy to ascertain whether a customer will return to a restaurant; and whilst it is very difficult to guarantee repurchase, it is almost certain that if dissatisfied the customer will not return (Ribeiro-Soriano, 2002). Kivela *et al.* (2000) conducted a study of twenty-eight restaurant attributes and reported a positive correlation between satisfaction of expectations and willingness to return. Likewise, Longart (2010) found that satisfaction with the attributes that the customer ranks higher, leads to positive word of mouth (PWOM). That is, the consumer anticipates satisfaction derived from a restaurant attribute and that anticipation may influence their

choice. The link between pre-purchase considerations and post-evaluation of the meal experience is examined in the model proposed by Oh (2000) in figure 9:

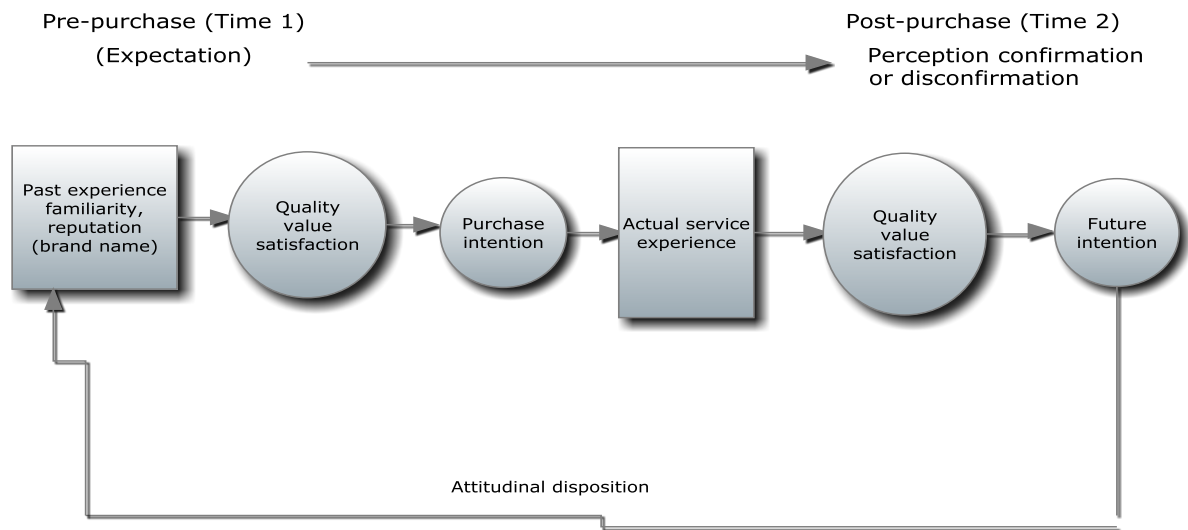


Figure 9: A simplified pre and post dining decision making model (adapted from Oh, 2000)

Another important contribution to the study of restaurant attributes related to customer satisfaction was conducted by Almanza *et al.* (1994). The authors identify attributes that are more conducive to consumer satisfaction in a USA university cafeteria for different meal occasions (breakfast, lunch and dinner). Those attributes are represented in a matrix consisting of zones. An illustration of these attributes for a dinner is shown in figure 10 below:

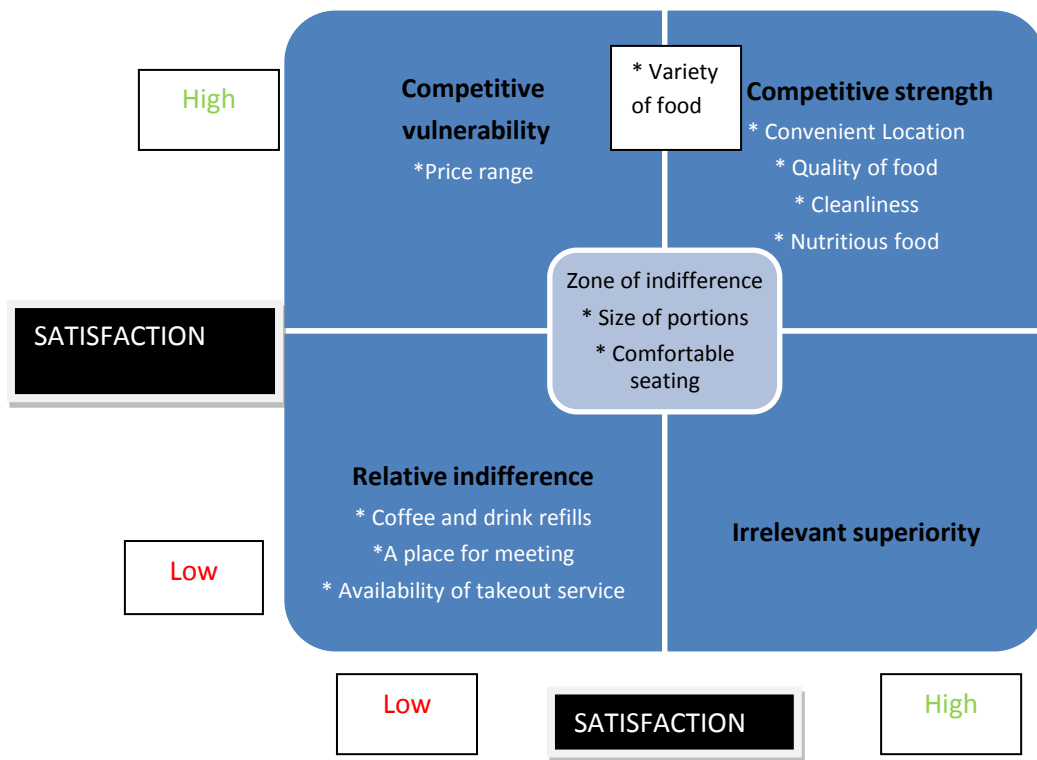


Figure 10: Results of a university food service study for dinner using an attribute matrix (adapted from Almanza *et al.*, 1994)

In a study in Brazil, Cannarozo-Tinoco and Duarte-Ribeiro (2012) compared the most important factors affecting perceived price and perceived quality as key elements for customer satisfaction amongst four different groups of consumers: couples without children, group of friends, family and executives. These factors are: Food attributes, Drink attributes, Confirmation of expectations, Service, Waiting time, Cleanliness, Security, Support facilities, Menu, Accuracy, Décor, Wine list, Image, Advertising, Possibility of booking, Location, After-sales service, Kitchen open to visit, Privacy, Price, Portion sizes, Ambiance, Obligation of tip, Staff appearance, Staffing levels, Previous experience, Competition, Prior expectations. This paper adds a number of restaurant attributes that affect customer satisfaction, and some are worthy of investigation. However, it appears that those factors need more refinement, as some of them cannot be clearly classed as either factors or attributes, for example, competition or confirmation of expectations. On the other hand, as suggested by Oh (2000) in figure 9 above, past experience or familiarity may play an important role on the restaurant decision. Indeed, past experience or familiarity may be influenced by less rational considerations. For example, Mattila (2001) found that customers form an emotional bonding

with the restaurant, which cannot only be explained by cognitive appreciations of attributes. Mattila claims that committed customers 'place a high value on the restaurant's social benefits (e.g., friendship and familiarity perceptions) in addition to good food and a fun atmosphere' (p. 78). In the various sections of this literature review the role and importance of emotions was discussed and it was argued that although emotions may form part of the decision they do not preclude rational consideration of restaurant attributes. Hence, the researcher, although adopting a cognitive approach, is aware of the influence of emotions when selecting restaurants.

2.8 Conclusions

Theories of consumer behaviour influence the tenets for studying consumer decision making. The most salient of these theories, the cognitive paradigm and behavioural perspective model were debated. It was concluded that the cognitive paradigm serves as a more adequate foundation for the objectives of this research, particularly when attempting to predict consumer decisions. This connection between the cognitive paradigm and consumer decision making led to the concept of a rational consumer who attempts to maximise utility when making choices. Starting from the premise of a rational consumer a model of individual choice is proposed: Shocker *et al.*'s (1991) model of individual choice shown in figure 7. After that it was argued that different attributes may be considered differently by various markets. This led to the examination of market segmentation, especially lifestyle segmentation. The latter is particularly relevant for this research since the context within which the decision to select a restaurant is made should be connected with the pursuit of social leisure rather than convenience or for satisfying the basic need of food. Then the specific topic of consumer decision making in restaurant settings was delved into thoroughly. Research on the particular aspect of restaurant attributes from the 1980s until 2011 by different researchers was examined as it is particularly significant when conducting primary research. Although extensive in terms of reach and geographical locations, this research on attributes seems scattered. For this reason, there seems to be a need for a clearer, more unified classification of restaurant attributes in the context of UK restaurants. Finally, the aspect of making choices in the restaurant context was looked into, exploring customer satisfaction and post-purchase evaluations as part of the decision making process.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the underpinning methodology and methods that were used in this research. In order to find suitable methods, an in-depth discussion of research paradigms and approaches was undertaken and, where possible, in the context of consumer research. The main aims of this research are to understand the factors that trigger consumers to select a certain restaurant when eating out and to highlight the main attributes that a restaurant should have in order to be considered and then selected. The research focused on studying restaurants as a social leisure activity. This may take place in a casual dining environment or in a more sophisticated, gastronomically oriented outlet. The context was restaurants that consumers use not for convenience or having a quick lunch but those that have been selected for leisure. This can include a dinner or lunch party, a business dinner or lunch, a romantic dinner or any other occasion which should have required proper consideration before the selection of the restaurant.

3.2 Positivism as a philosophy in social science research

Bryman (2008) asserted that positivism is an epistemological position that entails the following principles:

- Knowledge must be confirmed by the senses (phenomenalism).
- The purpose of theory is to generate hypotheses that can be tested. This is consistent with the principle of deductivism.
- Knowledge is arrived at through the gathering of facts (inductivism).
- Science must be conducted free of presuppositions or values (objectivism)

Reality can then be feasibly fragmented, which means that its parts can be understood and thus the relationships between them (Guba and Lincoln, 1982). According to this view, parts of reality can be separated from their normal context, and consumers are viewed from an external objective (outside-in) perspective (Marsden and Littler, 1996). Positivism then has the main goal of explaining reality and if possible predicting what is likely to occur, which means that the main axiological implication is that consumer behaviour can and should be predicted. Explanation can occur if laws, formulas or detailed models are produced. In this research it is about predicting the decision of selecting a particular restaurant given a particular set of variables. The main ontological assumption of positivism is that there is a reality out there to

be discovered and that reality is independent from the observer. Hudson and Ozanne (1988) contrasted approaches to consumer behaviour and argue that for positivists the world exists independently of individual perceptions about it; that means there is a single, objective, tangible view of the world. Once assumptions of reality are established, the next dilemma is how to study that reality. That is within the realm of epistemology -the study of knowledge and what may be accepted as valid knowledge (Collis and Hussey, 2003). Ontology attempts to answer the question of what exists; epistemology deals with what can be known and how we ascertain that (Cameron and Price, 2009). Epistemology thus attempts to answer the basic question: what distinguishes true (adequate) knowledge from false (inadequate) knowledge? Guba (1990) stated clearly that once a positivist is committed to a realist ontology, s/he is then constrained to an objectivist epistemology.

Positivism usually uses a deductive approach. In a deductive approach, theory is developed, together with hypotheses. These hypotheses are clear statements of the deduction or prediction (Cameron and Price, 2009). A hypothesis could be, for example: increasing advertising of a restaurant will have an impact on the decision to select a particular restaurant. This is then tested empirically, that is by conducting some sort of enquiry or primary research. Cameron and Price (2009) claim that this can be done through the introduction of a null hypothesis, usually called H_0 , which in this case is that advertising has no influence on the decision. Proving the null hypothesis to be wrong will be confirmation of the opposite – advertising does have an impact. If previous theory states that it does affect, and the null hypothesis is confirmed, then the enquiry may indicate the need to modify the theory in the light of the findings (Saunders *et al.*, 2003). In this thesis the relationships to study may involve the perceptions of certain variables that customers consider (cause) with the intention of selecting a particular restaurant (effect); and to use theories to understand how the decision making process for selecting a restaurant takes place. Generalisations refer to the fact that the results of the research may be applied as universally as possible; that could be in all restaurants of the type indicated in the research in a specific country (UK), Europe, the Western world or even globally. It is more feasible that after an exploratory study, hypotheses are tested and then subjected to an attempted falsification which is aligned with the deductive approach.

Positivism is connected with quantitative research. Quantitative research strategies are practical ways to make sense of ontological and epistemological objectivism. Amongst the

strategies of enquiry of this type are surveys and experiments. Theories are tested and relationships between variables are analysed. Quantitative research thus favours a deductive approach whereby theories, such as the theory of planned behaviour in consumer research, are tested. This line of enquiry is appealing as finding out influences for decisions through an analysis of consumers' perceptions using survey methodology seems to be an obvious way to proceed. Quantitative research tends to be influenced by positivism, although 'positivism does not imply quantitative methods' (Hunt, 1991, p. 38).

Examination of the research objectives of this thesis shows that the positivist paradigm is appealing. Positivist research is particularly concerned with measurement, as it is about measuring what the research is intended to measure, for example, likelihood of selecting the restaurant as a numerical figure requires valid instruments. On the other hand, for positivist research, reliability is central to the paradigm, as it is concerned with prediction and whether the results of a study are repeatable, generalisable and consistent (Bryman, 2008). Positivism is defended by positivists as possessing methodological rigour and this is even acknowledged in the interpretivist camp (see, for example, Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

3.2.1 Limitations of positivism

One of the main limitations for using a positivist approach is the paucity of a theoretical base upon which to form hypotheses that can then be tested. As a matter of fact, previous research on restaurant attributes is sketchy and needs further elaboration. On the other hand, using scientific principles for studying complex human reality is a challenging task, as fragmenting the reality of making decisions to select restaurants is almost impossible, given the number of inter-relationships and mutual influences. For example, is it possible to separate the occasion e.g. a romantic dinner, from the decision-maker (a romantic person)? Maybe the occasion is in the eyes of the decision maker, so that it is not a separate reality altogether. Indeed, eating out can have different meanings as the customer can view the experience from their own particular perspective, and it appears that meanings are beyond the scope of positivism (Greene, 1979; Dzurec, 1989). The inherent limitations of positivism make it worth exploring other paradigms that will guide the research design.

3.2.2 Post-Positivism

Undoubtedly, positivism has its roots in science. Nonetheless, even scientists have questioned the absolutist tenets of positivism. For instance, two acclaimed physicists, namely Heisenberg (1901-76) and Bohr (1885-1962) articulated their misgivings about the dogmatism of

positivism (in Crotty, 1998). Heisenberg first questioned the notion that observer and observed are independent. For Heisenberg the issue is epistemological: the scientific method is unable to determine reality (position and momentum of sub-atomic particles) with accuracy, therefore, the problem lies with the method. Bohr, on the other hand, assumes that the issue is ontological; the limitations for knowing are due to the nature of sub-atomic particles, not with the method used. This is thought-provoking as it implies that for certain realities, a new set of concepts for dealing with these realities are necessary, thus any dogmatic perspective should be abandoned. These thoughts appear to be the foundation of post-positivism which was concurrent in the 1920s with another reaction to positivism, logical positivism, also known as neo-positivism (Zammito, 2004). Logical positivism is a narrower version of positivism, which advocates 'the exclusive use of logical analysis to demonstrate positivistic theses' (Weinberg, 1936; p. 1). Logical positivism defends the use of logic and mathematics in not only scientific thought but also as systems of symbolic interpretation. The post-positivist paradigm was the result of the challenge to the dogmas of logical positivism (Zammito, 2004). Whereas positivism (and more particularly logical positivism) rely on logical analysis and objective findings that are validated within the investigation - that is are they measuring what they are supposed to measure (Kerlinger (1973)-, post-positivism goes beyond those narrow confines and gives room for deeper and possibly subjective understanding (Schurr, 2007).

Although not usually mentioned in mainstream consumer research, there are schools of thought that have appeared as revisionist movements to address some of the inadequacies of positivism. Indeed, in the 1980s post-modern (aka interpretivist) research was approached by only 20% of the papers in the most recognised journal in consumer behaviour, *The Journal of Consumer Research*, while the majority of the remaining 80% was devoted to positivist research. Guba and Lincoln (2005) maintained that at an ontological level, for post-positivists true reality can only be imperfectly and probabilistically apprehended. Brown and Turley (1997) rejected the statistical claim and the existence of a single, absolute reality in favour of multiple realities, which are socially constructed; thus moving closer to the tenets of interpretivism. This paucity of recognition of post-positivism in consumer research thinking can be attributed to the common view that there are two distinctive camps in the study of social sciences, positivism and interpretivism. An influential author in social sciences research, Robson (2002), asserted that "there are two main traditions which continue to engage in sporadic warfare. One is variously labelled as positivistic, hypothetico-deductive, quantitative

or even simply 'scientific'; the other is interpretive, ethnographic or qualitative, among other labels" (p. 18). In the field of leisure research, Henderson (2011) revised that dichotomy and argues for discussion and acknowledgement of post-positivism, and this view also seems relevant to the study of consumer decision making in the context of this thesis.

A major distinction between positivism and post-positivism appears to be the distinction between the context for discovery and the context for justification (Zammito, 2004). The context for discovery is the context in which discoveries are first made and the context for justification is the context in which these discoveries are justified and warranted as indeed being valid discoveries (Philips and Burbules, 2000). Whereas discovery in logical positivism is random and serendipitous, with discovery preceding justification, post-positivists reject the divide between discovery and justification with the two being intrinsically intertwined, rarely occurring sequentially (Philips and Burbules, 2000). Zammito (2004) argued that the distinction is empirical in nature with the palpable use of logic (for example, induction) in discovery and with culturally constructed values playing a role in justification.

Another contributor to the post-positivism school appears to be Karl Popper (1902-1994) who advanced the principle of falsification. For a consumer research with a positivist bias (and post-positivist as well), a key objective of the research is to try to find explanations to consumer decision making. This is equivalent to generating hypotheses to be tested. In the traditional view of science, such as the one adopted by John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), observation and experimentation precede formulation of hypotheses (Burton, 2000). In this thesis, the approach would be to observe how consumers make decisions and work out a model. If this model could be verified then all deductions from these decisions would be correct. That would mean that verified hypotheses are established as facts or laws (Lincoln *et al.*, 2011). Popper proposes that science can only make breakthroughs once the researcher advances hypotheses, makes deductions from them and uses observations and experiments to test these deductions until they are falsified. Popper's point is that by engaging in observation and experiments the research is not meant to be attempting to prove a theory but trying to prove it wrong (Crotty, 1998). For this thesis it is appealing to generate or propose a number of selected hypotheses that could then be subject to a process of falsification. Robson (2002) questioned the traditional view of science with a number of orderly, sequential steps and formulations only after a long process of experimentation or other empirical enquiry. Indeed,

complex phenomena such as consumer decision making can hardly follow that orderly, clearly separated linear sequential process. Post-positivists commonly examine a complex phenomenon by utilising qualitative methods that bridge quantitative methods, in which researchers conduct an inductive analysis of textual data, form a typology grounded in the data, as contrasted with a pre-existing, validated typology applied to new data (Altheide and Johnson, 2011).

Indication of the use of post-positivism is evidenced in research on restaurant attributes examined in the literature review. For instance, the use of quantitative methods, like conjoint analysis in the study of attributes in the related field of Tourism and Hospitality, is abundantly evidenced. To name a few: Koo *et al.* (1999), Moskowitz (2001), Tripathi and Siddiqui (2010), Wind *et al.* (1989), Koo and Koo (2010), Koo (2004), Verma *et al.* (2002), Verma and Thompson (1996), Verma and Thompson (1999), Alimova *et al.* (2008), Huyber (2003), Ding *et al.* (2005) and Victorino *et al.* (2005).

3.2.3 Criticisms and limitations of post-positivism

Central to post-positivism is the use of multiple perspectives to define research questions, methods and analyses to interpret results (Cook, 1985). Critical multiplism also suggests that research questions, research designs, data manipulations and substantive interpretations should be openly scrutinized from a wide variety of theoretical perspectives, including overtly antagonistic ones (Houts *et al.*, 1986). Indeed, multiplism acknowledges that there is no single way to fit any piece of research (Shadish, 1993). However, post-positivistic critical multiplism has been criticised for the potential to degenerate into relativism in that all options for the interpretation of research are considered equally valid (Shadish, 1993). Relativism appears to deny objective knowledge of realities independent of the knower (Letorneau and Allen, 1999). Hunt (1984) claimed that this denial is a major pitfall of relativism. According to Anderson (1986) positivism requires scientific methods. These methods underdetermine theory choice and Anderson proposes the development of theory when conducting consumer research as methods do not uniquely pick out particular theories. Anderson gives an example of the complex process by which husbands and wives negotiate their consumption level and state that using a particular theory to study that problem is unsuitable. If applied to this research, that may mean looking at deconstructing consumption in the decision of selecting a restaurant and finding new ways of looking into restaurant attributes. At the same time the research would have to acknowledge that their findings would be subjective with many other possible

interpretations. Contrastingly, an objective of the research is to find explanations about restaurant attributes using theory to guide the thinking process. Critical relativism seems inappropriate mainly because of its rejection of objectivity which is central to the objectives of the research.

Advocates of interpretivism such as Guba (1990) reduced post-positivism to 'a modified version of positivism' (p. 20) that struggles to limit the damage that positivism has incurred. Indeed, there are striking similarities between positivism and post-positivism, for example, the pursuit of objectivity, the use of statistics and techniques to get as close to reality as possible, with the researcher in firm control of the research. However, the critiques of Guba and of Lincoln *et al.* (2011) are based on the central point that research itself will influence the subjects of research; therefore the researcher cannot detach from the subjects. Guba and Lincoln (2005) claimed that in the study of communities and sociological studies, objectivity is affected since the researcher is in fact part of the society and sometimes part of the studied community. In this research, objectivity is sought by a pursuit of detachment so that the researcher would not affect how the subjects of the research make decisions, as then the results would not be representative of consumers making decisions in other situations, which is an objective of the research.

On the other hand, purist positivists perceive post-positivism as 'advocating subjectivism, irresponsible relativism and lack of standards, which work against conducting proper research' (Patomaki and Wight, 2000; p. 213). Despite these criticisms, post-positivism appears to move positivism from a narrow perspective into a more encompassing way to examine real world problems (Henderson, 2011), such as the case of selecting restaurants. Post-positivism is linked with an approximation to tenets of interpretivism.

3.3 Interpretivism

In contrast to the positivist perspective, for the interpretivists, each one of us constructs our own meanings (Solomon, 2007). Therefore, there is not a single reality, independent of the self, but multiple realities or 'truths' (Ford, 1975). For idealists, everything is an abstraction in our mind, even something as tangible as a restaurant. For realists, it will simply be a restaurant, independently of what goes on in the human mind. For interpretivists, reality must be approached holistically and not as discrete, interrelated events. It does not make sense for

interpretivists to fragment or divide reality as meanings change as soon as a system is separated and fragmented. Interpretivism is a school of thought that maintains that social reality is a construct of the human mind, hence the term, social constructionism, has become synonymous with interpretivism. Thomas (1997, p. 58) adopted the post-modernist view and argues that the mainly positivistic consumer research (aka market research) can be challenged because:

- there is no concrete social world out there;
- reality is not a pre-existent idea that has meaning outside language (hermeneutics);
- the cultural construction of respondents' worlds are encoded in their responses;
- each person is made up of a number of different people, all of whom may require a different brand solution, a different product, a different service, in different circumstances.

With regard to the nature of social beings, positivists consider that human behaviour is determined, thus it exists and is there to be observed. However, sometimes it responds to circumstances to which the individual reacts. For example, if operant conditioning behaviours are studied from the perspective of positivism, then the response-reinforcement pattern corresponds to a sort of reactive behaviour to an external stimulus. Interpretivists reject the deterministic view and propose that individuals are active in shaping reality around them and they are proactive towards shaping their environment. The concept of symbolic interactionism put forward the notion of symbols that people create and that there is constant interaction with those symbols, through which people create meaning. Thus, they do not merely react to external influences.

The interpretivist view holds that each person embodies several identities with different needs. This renders consumer research a very challenging, almost impossible task. This is because it cannot represent more than a handful of individuals, with very little value for market research. In consumer research, some researchers have attempted to study social sciences from a hermeneutic perspective which can be seen as an attempt to understand understanding itself with an emphasis on the assumption that all understanding is in nature linguistic (Arnold and Fisher, 1994). Hermeneutics is, then, the field of study that broadly informs the interpretive research perspective (Hackley, 2003).

With regard to validity, interpretivist research depends on the presentation of solid descriptive data, with meaningful sense to the reader, so that this reader is led to an understanding of the meaning of the experience under study (Stake, 1995). However, if the research instrument is constantly adapted to the subject of study, it is difficult to maintain that different questions have been asked to suit the understanding of the subject. It poses considerable challenges in terms of achieving validity. Indeed, interpretivists like Lincoln *et al.* (2011) did not dismiss the importance of validity and show concern for the achievement of validity by asking these questions: 'Are we interpretively rigorous? Can our co-created constructions be trusted to provide some purchase on some important human phenomenon?' (p. 120). For them validity is tantamount to authenticity. Weber (2004) adopted the view that there is no difference in the pursuit of validity, and claims that interpretivist research validity implies that the knowledge derived from it is defensible. However, this defensibility can be subject to interpretation since validation is deemed to be an understanding of the truth (Angen, 2000).

On the other hand, interpretivists, as opposed to positivists do not see any point in attempting to predict behaviour. Their main objective is to understand behaviour. But this understanding is not absolute, as the process of understanding is on-going (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Interpretations of phenomena now are influenced by past interpretations and so forth; for that reason, Denzin (1984) pointed out that there is no such thing as *the understanding* but *an understanding*. That notion of understanding is inextricably linked to the concept of *Verstehen*. *Verstehen* is based on the preconception that physical and social science are a dichotomy (Wax, 1967). Abel (1948) pointed out the particular problems of *Verstehen* as a research tool. Particularly, because of the researcher's need to relate his/her personal experience to the behaviour of the subject of research. That means an understanding based on his/her personal experience. Abel states that the satisfaction of curiosity from the researcher produces subjective increment but adds nothing to the objective validity of a proposition. Bluntly, Abel claimed that all assertions based entirely on the evidence of "understandability" can be viewed as cases of "misplaced familiarity." For this reason, Abel concluded that limitations of *Verstehen* virtually preclude it as a scientific tool of analysis. More particularly in this research an understanding of behaviours which at the date of publishing can be interpreted differently does not fit with its set objectives. Consequently, interpretivism is seen by many authors as unconcerned with reliability and the influential textbook of Qualitative Research of Denzin and Lincoln (2011) does not make a single reference to reliability.

However, Mason (1996) appeared to make some attempts in order to achieve some degree of replication (external reliability) and if research is conducted by more than one researcher (internal reliability).

The term interpretivism has also been equated with post-modernism in consumer research and authors such as Beckmann and Elliott (2000) referred to the post-modernism turn taken up by a considerable number of researchers using qualitative and interpretivist methodologies. In contrast, Cova and Badot (1995) argued that post-modernism goes further than interpretivism by engaging in a completely new assessment of the general tenets of marketing theory. Cova and Elliott (2008) admitted that the post-modernist turn is close to the interpretive approach in its view of the world. For this reason, in the context of decision-making further differentiation is assumed as irrelevant and the term interpretivism is used in preference to post-modernism.

Interpretivism normally uses inductive research. Unlike the deductive approach which starts with a developed theory, inductive research starts with no pre-conceptions; thus it 'builds' theory by starting with observations and deriving theory from them. Following this logic, inductive research always precedes deductive research (Cameron and Price, 2009). Proponents of the inductive approach see the deductive approach as rigid with no room left for alternative explanations of the phenomena studied (Saunders *et al.*, 2003). The focus of the inductive approach is not to find cause-effect relationships but to understand the complexity of a situation. Rather than looking at particular variables causing an effect on the decision made, it attempts to see phenomena holistically. With an inductive approach, variables are not discarded 'a priori' as they may all influence the decision. On the other hand, inductive research tends to be context-bound, thus generalisations are normally not sought. For that reason small samples are required but investigated in-depth. With its emphasis on generalisations, deductive research, in contrast, requires large samples with a more structured approach.

It is important to note that although the category interpretive research is used as a general label in theoretically informed qualitative studies (Szimigin and Carrigan, 2001), qualitative research, is a field of enquiry in its own right, an interconnected family of terms, concepts and assumptions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Creswell (2009) asserted that this form of enquiry

support a way of looking at research that privileges an inductive approach, a focus on individual meaning and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation.

The categories qualitative and quantitative are not mutually exclusive in research (Hackley, 2003). For instance, some qualitative researchers in the post-positivist tradition will use some sorts of statistical measures but seldom report their findings in terms of complex statistical measures. Whether it is acceptable to mix these methods is the subject of continuing debate.

3.3.1 Limitations of interpretivism

Although interpretive research is recognised for its value in providing contextual depth, its findings are frequently criticised in terms of validity, reliability and its inherent inability to make generalisations. Because of this, interpretivists have difficulty to be appreciated as legitimate researchers (Kelliher, 2005). Hunt (1989, p. 196) questioned the appropriateness of interpretivism for sound consumer research, and sees interpretive enquiry as 'much more like a promissory note than a certified cheque'.

On the other hand, the acceptability of findings to others relies on the credibility of the account that a researcher has arrived at (Bryman, 2008). A sceptic positivist may take the view that credibility goes with the researcher, not with the inherent methodology used in the research. Furthermore, Bryman (2008) suggested that the findings should be submitted 'to the members of the social world who were studied for confirmation that the investigator has correctly understood that world' (p. 377). The technique, known as respondent validation may present insurmountable challenges as getting responses back from respondents is very difficult, particularly if a large number of them are subjects of study. Nonetheless, influential interpretivists like Guba and Lincoln (1994) rejected the use of reliability and validity parameters on the basis of multiple accounts of the truth.

3.4. Towards a research paradigm

Burrell and Morgan (1979) maintained that the paradigms are 'mutually exclusive' (p. 25). Jackson and Carter (1991) referred to this as paradigm incommensurability and warned that any attempt towards abandoning this principle amounts to epistemological authoritarianism, and that a loss of paradigmatic differentiation comes together with an unavoidable loss of identity. This was also illustrated by Guba (1990) when discussing the interconnections between ontology and epistemology in positivism.

The epistemological assumptions of these two paradigms are remarkably divergent. Positivism assumes that knowledge is generated nomothetically, that is by generating laws that are as universal as possible. These laws tend to be independent of their context and time. For interpretivists a phenomenon cannot be studied without proper reference to and connection with its time and context, as the phenomenon is bound to these variables. Whilst maintaining that traditional positivist research has a strong connection with the cognitive paradigm adopted in this study, it is also considered that scientific rigour cannot always be achieved when looking into complex decision making situations. For interpretivists, the world keeps changing and entails a great deal of complexity which makes it impossible to distinguish between a cause and an effect, as there is a mutual and simultaneous shaping (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Rubinstein 1981). If the interpretivist view was adopted for this research, it would focus on the dynamic nature of the decision and the interaction of decision makers with other decision makers, media, gatekeepers, rather than look at the decision as an effect that has a cause or a number of causes.

Positivism can be equated to the scientific method and make emphasis in finding a single and objective truth (Salomon, 2010); it focuses on order and rationality. In contrast, interpretivism considers that consumer behaviour to be too complex to fit into the perfectly ordered and rational constraints of positivism. The question then is: can these two seemingly distinct approaches be subject to some sort of rapprochement? Howe (1988) was opposed to the idea of a quantitative-qualitative divide based on what he claims to be a pragmatist view. Howe views this distinction as 'at once most accurately and most deceptively applied at the level of design and analysis'. Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 247) reduced this viewpoint to 'cash register pragmatism'. However, this dismissal of pragmatism and the compatibility of paradigms need to be looked into more insightfully.

3.4.1 Paradigms compatibility and pragmatism

Morgan (2007) rejected the idea that paradigms are epistemological stances but beliefs systems and practices within a field. Morgan complained against setting a narrow set of boundaries around post-positivism and the exclusion of pragmatism as a research paradigm.

Rossmann and Wilson (1985) classified three approaches towards looking at the possibility of reconciling the interpretivist and positivist camps. These approaches are the purists, the

situationalists or the pragmatists. The difference between these three perspectives relates to the extent to which each believes that the contrasting approaches co-exist and can be combined. These three camps can be conceptualized as a continuum with purists and pragmatists on opposite ends, and situationalists lying somewhere in-between. So far, we have focused on the differences (ontological, epistemological) associated with both paradigms. That focus on differences is a feature of the purists' position for who those approaches are incompatible because they are about how the world is viewed and what is important to know. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) claimed that purists tend to focus on the differences between them rather than on the similarities. Situationalists focus on research methods that are more appropriate for certain situations (Rossman and Wilson, 1985). Likewise, Cameron and Price (2009) put pragmatists as an alternative position between interpretivists and positivists.

Morgan (2006) argued against the term pragmatic paradigm and called it a pragmatic approach which concentrates on methodology as an area linking issues 'at the abstract level of epistemology and the mechanical level of methods' (p. 68). Feilzer (2010) saw pragmatism as an alternative paradigm to positivism/post-positivism/interpretivism which accepts the existence of singular and multiple realities. McLafferty and Onwuegbuzie (2006) proposed that qualitative and quantitative research do not entail a dichotomy but different 'dimensions'. Likewise, Kelle (2001) argued that post-positivism and interpretivism converge at several points, thus pointing towards a pragmatic view on paradigmatical divides. In support of this argument, Hanson (2008) stated that the differences between qualitative and quantitative research are more apparent than real. The pragmatists' view is that research methods should serve the purposes of the research, i.e. answer the research questions (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005) as 'epistemological purity doesn't get research done' (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 21). In contrast, for Denzin and Lincoln (2011) pragmatism is not a methodology per se but a doctrine of meaning which simply conveys the idea that the meaning of an event cannot be anticipated before the actual experience. Cherryholmes (1992) explained that for pragmatists, values and visions of human action and interaction precede a search for descriptions, theories, explanations and narratives. Thus, the claims of Creswell that integration of methods is linked to the doctrine of pragmatism are problematic as the focus of pragmatism is on the consequences of action, not on combining methodologies (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In that line of thought, Johns and Lee-Ross (1998) proposed an integrated model of the research and they rejected what they called the scientific method (aka

positivism) as a recommended method for the development of research in any area of social study. Furthermore, Johns and Lee-Ross implied the possibility that positivism would not provide definitive answers and suggested that there was a movement towards phenomenological approaches.

This research attempts to find answers to the particular problem of explaining decisions made by consumers; with further implications for management. That objective is well served by the pragmatists' position that approaches research methods as tools designed to solve real problems and not as an ends in themselves. Hence, the view adopted in this thesis is what Rossman and Wilson (1985) defined as situationalist. Indeed, whilst maintaining that a post-positivist research has a strong connection with the cognitive paradigm adopted, it is also considered that scientific rigor and the pursuit of objectivity cannot always be achieved when looking into complex situations like selecting a restaurant. Although it is recognised that combining methodologies is not the only aim of a pragmatism approach, it is necessary to examine how different research objectives are better served by different methods (situationalists view) and how a pragmatic approach informs the research design.

3.4.2 The research design: an overview

The pragmatic approach proposed by Morgan (2007) moves the discussion 'beyond technical questions about mixing or combining methods and puts us in a position to argue for a properly integrated methodology for the social methods' (p. 73). This implies the possibility of integrating methods. The pragmatic approach appears to focus on the criteria for successful research by asking a simple question: 'Have I found out what I want to know?' (Hanson, 2008; p. 9). Likewise, Miller and Gatta (2006) argued that finding philosophical justifications with vague interpretations of pragmatism was not the challenge but the rationale for proceeding in a particular mixed methods way. With regards to these ways, Creswell (2009) referred to three different types of multi-methods approaches: concurrent, transformative and sequential.

Of these approaches, the sequential mixed methods, there are research stages. These stages can adhere to the canons of either interpretivism or positivism. In the 'sequential mixed method', the researcher seeks to elaborate on or expand on the findings of one method by means of another method. This may involve qualitative data analysis for exploratory purposes following up with a quantitative survey method for a large sample. In a research design using sequential mixed methods, the different methods 'inform and supplement each other' (Feilzer,

2010; p. 9). This pragmatic approach is relevant in this research because the objectives of looking into a framework for examining the consumer decision process and the ascertainment of restaurant attributes require looking into nuances and complexities, for which an interpretive approach is more appropriate (first stage of research, qualitative). In this first stage, the ascertainment of restaurant attributes, on the other hand, informed the stage in which attribute and level importance are analysed. Indeed, for the eliciting of attributes it is critical to conduct exploratory research which is interpretive in nature, concurrent with the tenets of post-positivism, which has been embraced as an appropriate paradigm for studying consumer decision making. In support of this line of thought, Henderson (2011) proposed that post-positivism is akin to allowing mixed methods in the research. Indeed, the second stage attempts to find explanations for decisions made by consumers in certain circumstances. A positivist, explanatory research will be adopted, particularly when attempting to ascertain attribute importance in different contexts. This thesis adopted the viewpoint of Newman *et al.* (2003) which states that the effectiveness of mixed methods should be evaluated upon how the approach enables the researcher to answer the research questions.

In the specific context of consumer behaviour, Demirdjian and Senguder (2004) pointed out that whilst these research perspectives are acknowledged to be different, they are complementary in nature. This adds support to the research design adopted in which research was staggered in two stages. Research in the first stage is mainly interpretive, requiring exploration and understanding through the analysis of qualitative data generated from within the particular context of selecting a restaurant for the purpose of leisure. The second stage is positivistic requiring explanation through the analysis of quantitative data using hypothetico-deductive methods. This research design has already been used to elicit meal attributes, but with a different focus. Indeed, Ding *et al.* (2005) started with a qualitative stage to understand the key attributes of Chinese dinner specials, and interviewed 10 undergraduate students to determine what were key attributes to them and also what they perceived as important to their peers. The purpose of their study was to determine the appropriateness of incentives to respondents in conjoint studies.

3.5 Research data collection and analytical procedures

Bechhoffer and Patterson (2000) argued that choosing a research design in social sciences entails a thorough evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. Some of this evaluation is deemed above to have been conducted by choosing the option of staged research. Now the following dilemma appears to be to accomplish a methodology that:

- a) allows for exploration into relevant attributes for restaurant selection
- b) deals with complex decision making so as to evaluate how consumers make decisions based on these attributes.

3.5.1. First stage of research: Qualitative research design

In semi-structured interviews the interviewee is given a greater degree of flexibility (Bryman, 2008). This open structure ensures that unexpected facts or attitudes can be easily explored (Sampson, 1972). Individual semi-structured interviews have the main disadvantage that potential influencers of the responses, such as other respondents, are not present. It is a fact that consumers firstly do not eat out on their own but in company of one or more people and secondly these companions may normally participate in the decision to eat out. In the wider aspects of consumer decision making, several authors have agreed on the considerable impact of groups on the decision and the aspects surrounding it. Bearden *et al.* (1982) argued that social scientists have recognised group membership as a determinant of group behaviour. Venkatesan (1966) found that in consumer decision making in the absence of any standards, individuals tend to conform to the group. On the other hand, Ward and Reingen (1990) established that choice is related to shared knowledge. Looking into the dilemma of opting by individual rather than focus groups, Fern (1982) found that there was no evidence of the superiority of focus groups over individual interviews. However, Fern's experimental study appears to lack a meaningful context in which the participants were engaged in an 'idea generation' experiment. Although no other studies on the topic have been produced, Bristol and Fern (1996) discovered that there is evidence that participants in groups find the experience more stimulating than participants in either self-administered surveys with open-ended questions or in structured group interviews in which interaction is limited. The latter point moves the balance of the argument towards the appropriateness of group interviews to achieve the research objective. This is because the nature of the decision of eating out involves the encouragement of discussion and active participation.

Group interviews can take the form of focus groups. Focus groups are characterised by Agar and McDonald (1995, p. 80) as 'somewhere between a meeting and a conversation'. The focus group as a research method has its origins in market research, conducted by Paul Lazarsfeld (1901-1976) in the 1940s; who also specialised in consumer decision making research. The basic underpinning of focus groups is that by having a group of individuals together and inducing a topic of discussion towards collective attitudes and beliefs of the participants, a dynamic transmission of ideas will start and will result in yielding untapped responses and meaningful information (Threlfall, 1999). Kidd and Parshall (2000) pointed out that although focus group methods are supported by many enthusiasts, many criticise them for a wide range of deficiencies.

One of these downsides is named the 'group effect' in which certain participants attempt to dominate the discussion (Saunders *et al.*, 2003) to the point that they may restrict or even silence participation of other members, or else, respondents may not concentrate as well when other people are present (Arksey and Knight, 1999). This effect can be minimised by encouraging participants to voice their ideas and by active moderation of the interviewer. Besides, although the occasional lack of concentration may occur in focus groups, this is deemed to be rare in properly selected, enthusiastic groups with a keen interest in eating out and enjoying restaurants. Another issue mentioned by several authors relates to the skills and role of the moderator (e.g. Merton and Kendall, 1946; Fern, 1982; Gibbs, 1997; Sim, 2011). Gibbs (1997), for example, stressed the role of the moderator and characterised it as both demanding and challenging.

Nonetheless, if decisions, like selecting a restaurant, are of a consensual nature then group dynamics may inform knowledge of customer decision making because focus groups are best used instead of individual interviews owing to the interactions among group members (Sofaer, 1999). In addition, respondents in focus groups have the opportunity to be involved in decision-making (Race *et al.*, 1994). On the other hand, 'focus group work foregrounds the importance both of content and expression because it capitalises on the richness and complexity of group dynamics' (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2011). Threlfall (1999) asserted that many researchers start with a focus group stage prior to larger research programmes. Furthermore, Calder (1977) argued that focus groups, conducted before quantitative research

serves for stimulating the thinking of the researcher, as they represent an explicit effort to use everyday notions and ideas to generate scientific hypotheses.

There is ample evidence of the use of focus group interviews as a stage preceding quantitative research, particularly the study of attributes with conjoint analysis. Green and Srinivasan (1978) and Louviere (1988) stated that focus group interviews are a valid technique for identifying attributes that are important to consumers as a preliminary data collection effort. These latter arguments supported the staged research design adopted in this thesis whereby the qualitative research stage informs the subsequent quantitative research stage.

3.5.1.1 Sampling in first stage - qualitative research

Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 34) proposed to answer six general questions to check qualitative sampling like the one in this stage of the research. These questions, answered in the context of the research objectives, are:

- Is the sampling relevant to your conceptual frame and research questions? Spicer (2011) found that in the eating out market in the UK, out of 2000 Internet respondents only 6% stated that they do not eat out and 10% have eaten out but not in the last three months. Therefore, it is clear that selecting someone who does not eat out or does it too infrequently is not highly likely. Considerations of market segmentation focus on finding people of different age groups and gender with an interest of eating out. For this purpose a questionnaire will be conducted so as to ascertain whether the respondent fits the criteria. On the other hand, it allowed for conducting a respondent profile (see appendix 1).
- Will the phenomena you are interested in appear? It has been found that people are active when discussing restaurant selection; evidence of this is the massive interest in online customer reviews and reading of restaurant reviews. Therefore, this carefully selected focus group will engage in relevant discussion.
- Does your plan enhance generalisability of your findings, through conceptual power or representativeness? Coyne (1997) asserted that sampling procedures in qualitative studies are not as rigidly set as in quantitative studies, but that flexibility may lead to mistakes. Arguably all qualitative sampling is purposeful (Patton, 2002) because the sample is always intentionally selected according to the needs of the study. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probabilistic sampling; that is one in which not every member of the population in study has a probability of being selected for the study. It

has the goal of sampling those who are relevant to the study. It must be used carefully and not as a 'technical fix' (Barbour, 2001; p. 1116). However, in Patton's (2002) classification, although all sampling is purposeful there are 15 strategies with convenience sampling being one of them. Convenience sampling is a kind of non-probability sampling strategy 'in which members of the target population are selected for the purpose of study if they meet certain practical criteria' (Farrokhi and Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012; p.785). In this study the criteria refers to geographical proximity and easy accessibility as they were in London or High Wycombe areas of easy access to the researcher and willingness to volunteer as some people volunteered to form a focus after an appeal for help in a newsletter. Hence, the sampling strategy for the focus groups is deemed to be a convenience sample. This convenience sample will attempt to encompass people of different ages and gender to make it as representative as practically possible of the population eating out in restaurants, although this thesis does not consider that qualitative data can offer results that can be generalised, even taking into account that the more representative the respondent the better the quality of the data collected, as per Barbour's (2001) advice.

- Is the sampling plan feasible, in terms of time, money, access to people and your own work style? Definitely convenience sampling is much more cost effective and allows for greater access through and suits the style of the researcher who is engaged in social networking.

The next question relates to the number of respondents in the group, their characteristics and the way they will be selected, and the structure of the interview. In terms of size, Veal (1997) suggested that a focus group should be comprised of between 5 and 12 participants. Fern (1982) found that groups of up to eight respondents generate significantly more and better responses, with diminishing returns with groups larger than eight. Since it is thought that average dinner parties are not normally large, groups towards the lower range suggested by Veal are preferable, with the optimum size being between 5 and 7 respondents.

The respondents were selected under the criteria that they have eaten out in restaurants for leisure (as opposed to convenience) at least twice in the last year and that they have been involved in the decision to select the restaurant. Chattopadhyay and Alba (1988, p. 2) argued that 'decision makers simply and efficiently recall a previous judgment of the object rather

than form their judgments anew from whatever facts can be recalled'. This suggests that respondents should be asked to recall how they have made decisions to select restaurants in the past rather than think about how they will make new judgments. Of course, on certain occasions, respondents may not remember the full facts about a decision made a distant time ago and may require retrieval cues or environmental stimuli (Costley and Brucks, 1992). Tulving and Pearlstone (1966) found that there was higher recall when cues were used. This was considered in the research design. The researcher has attempted to select the respondents of the focus group interviews from different groups of respondents, from different ages and backgrounds. Groups had different types: professionals, academics, housewives, etc. of different ages, ranging from the mid-20s to the mid- 60s. In total 32 people took part, 15 male and 18 female, each focus group having between 4 and 6 respondents. (More detail in appendix 2: Focus group interview face-sheet). A total of six interviews were conducted as it was considered that data saturation had been reached and that there was already enough information about restaurant attributes, and focus should have been made on data reduction, given the considerable number of attributes (see chapter 4).

3.5.1.2 The research instrument: interview guide

The research instrument was conducted as a semi-structured interview, which has the advantage of allowing a certain flexibility and greater freedom in the sequencing of questions, the exact wording, and the amount of time devoted to the different topics covered (Robson, 2002). Then an interview guide (appendix 3) the purpose of which is to help the moderator – in this case the researcher – to direct the group discussions and to encourage conversation around the topic of selecting restaurants; and also to ensure that all the key information is collected (Dilorio *et al.*, 1994). In pursuit of increased instrument reliability the interview guide will be tested through a pilot interview, having for guidance the research conducted by Mc.Lafferty (2004). This pilot interview is in appendix 4. The pilot used a convenience sample of the same size and group composition as the research interviews. This also allowed for testing the initial interview guide and for ascertaining the length of time required for the interview.

The interview guide first attempted to ascertain how the respondents arrive at their consideration sets and then focused on the issue of attributes. This is critically important as the second stage is based on the study of attributes. Some of the attributes are elicited from previous research but respondents are also free to mention attributes of their own volition.

Amongst the attributes to be considered, the following will be probed: quality of food, ambiance, sales incentives, cleanliness, service, variety of menu, brand, past experience, reputation of chef, value for money, location, portion sizes and type of cuisine. Given the number of attributes elicited, the dynamics of the group and the time allotted for the interview, not all of them can be probed in a single interview and note was taken of new attributes and the context in which attributes are discussed and which attributes are related. The interview guide also explored the issue of sustainable restaurants, a novel topic and whether that sustainability is an issue which influences consumers. The interview will also look into the aspect of branding, and the role of emotions in making the decision.

The procedure for conducting the interviews is based on Morgan and Spanish's (1982) suggestions. At the start, the researcher introduced himself and the purpose of the research to the participants. The focus group interviews took around 45 minutes on average. The interviews were recorded using an Ipad®, with backup recording using Iphone® technology, as a precautionary measure. The interviews were then transcribed (see transcribed interviews in appendix 5). The data was then organised using qualitative data analysis software (QDAS). One of the many functions of QDAS packages is to provide a centralised place for storing raw data. On the other hand they have the function of helping to analyse the data (more information in the qualitative data analysis section). Johnston (2006) highlighted that a number of features of QDAS programmes, such as the ability to generate coding automatically or to search text for keywords, phrases or patterns of words, can save a considerable amount of time. The software of choice for this purpose was Nvivo because it is increasingly flexible in adapting to the demands of modern research (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). It can be highlighted as testimony of its advantages that for Bucks New University and many other universities, NVivo is the QDAS of choice.

3.5.1.3 Using Nvivo

Bazeley and Jackson (2013) enumerated the many uses of Nvivo. The uses of Nvivo applied to their project are:

- a) Manage data: there is a considerable amount of data related to the project. In this case the internal function of Nvivo organises the face-sheets, interview audios and the transcribed interviews. These are all are saved under the 'internals' tab. Figure 11 shows how Nvivo organises data. In the "navigation view" the "internals" are shown.

The transcribed interviews tab in the “ribbon” was clicked and the list of interviews can be seen in the “List view”.

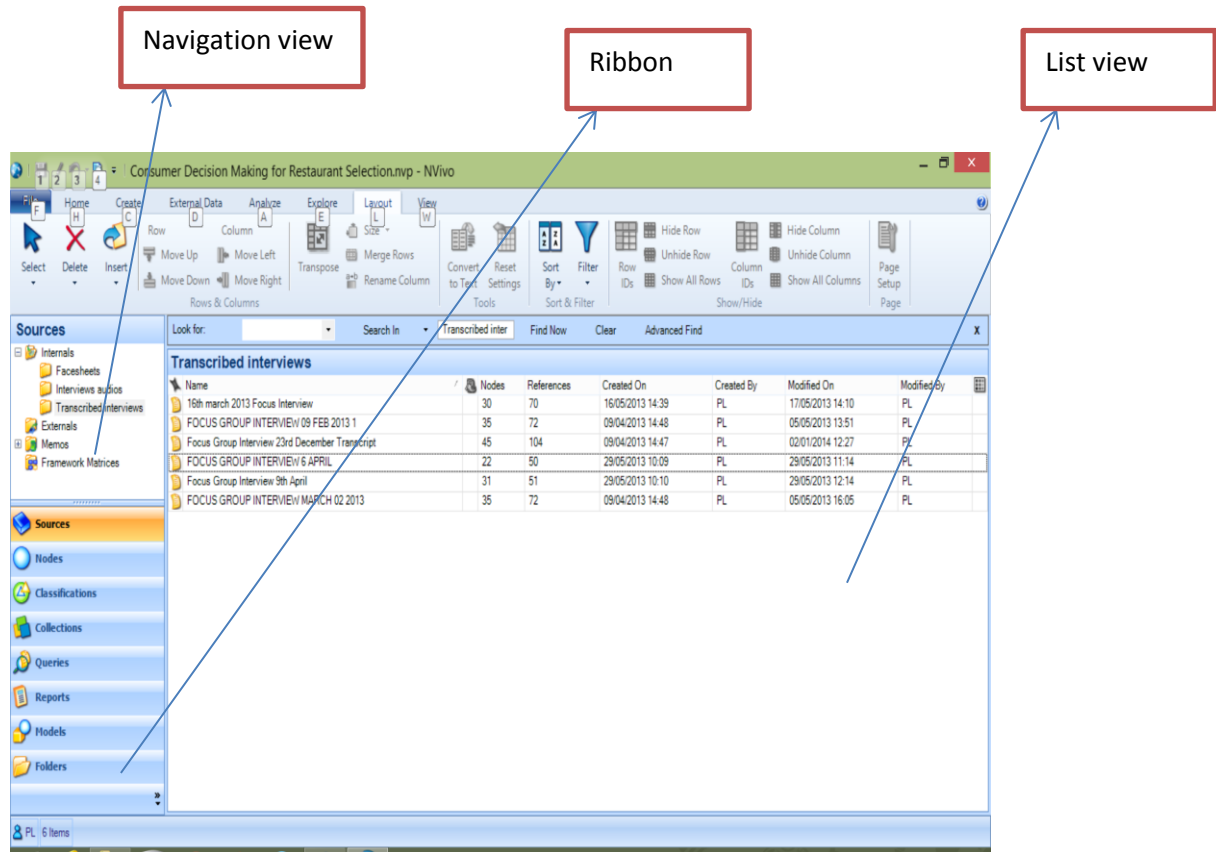


Figure 11: Screen shot of internals showing list of transcribed interviews

- b) **Manage ideas:** It helps organise and provide speedy access to conceptual knowledge, i.e. the themes as well as the data that supports them. This is particularly important in qualitative research and is called the audit trail which has the purpose of establishing the rigour of a study by providing the details of data analysis and some of the decisions that led to the findings (Wolf, 2003). To find an idea or theme within the data, the function “queries” in the ribbon can be used. Figure 12 shows a query for the sub-theme music and dancing (as part of the theme Ambiance) where references to music and dancing can be found. In this case 5 references to music and dancing were made in one interview and 2 in the second interview. The “detail view” shows the excerpt of the interview where the reference can be found.

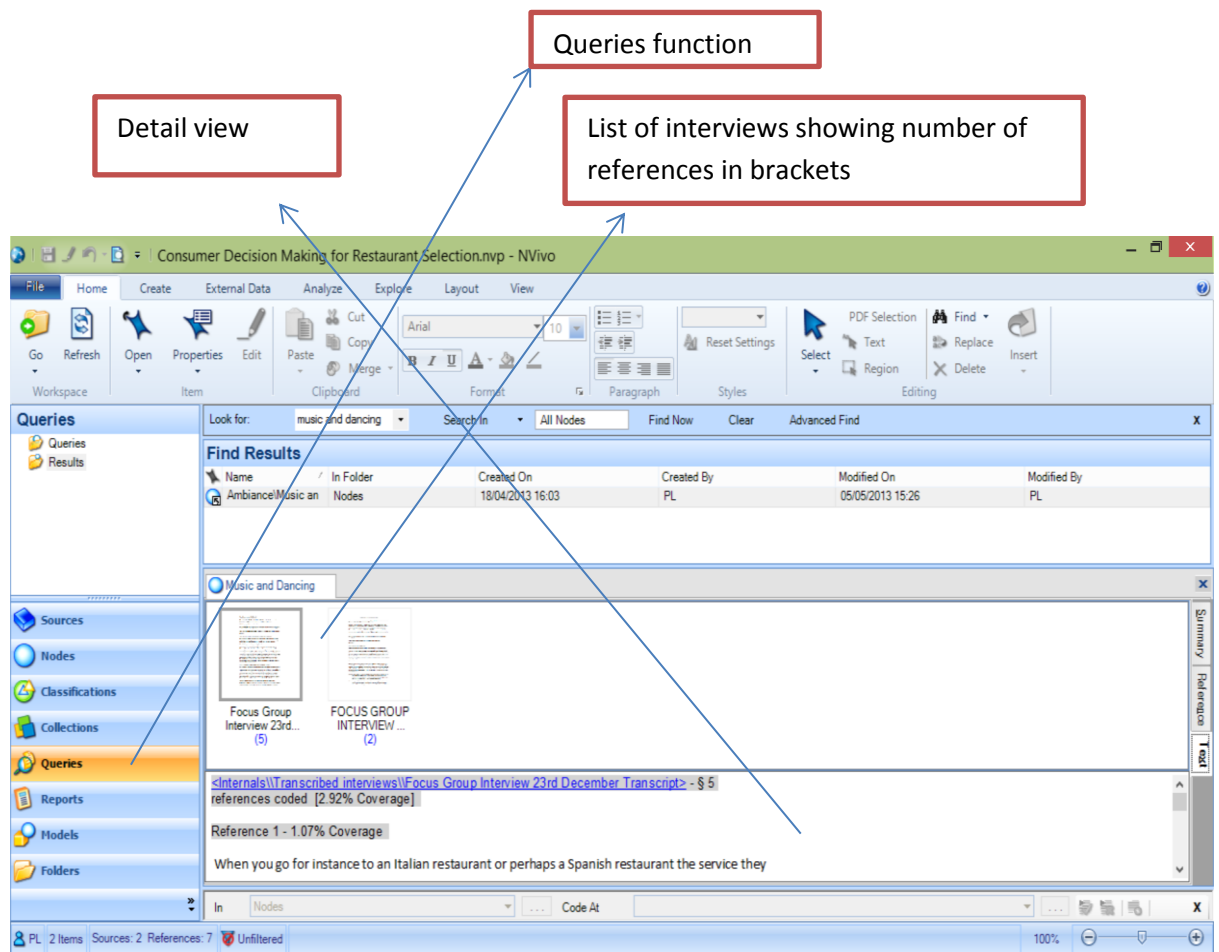


Figure 12: List and excerpt of interviews shown in Detail view in NVivo

- c) Visualise data: It is possible to show the content of themes and sub-themes within the data and how they are visually represented. This allows the themes to be managed and the interviews that gave origin to the themes to be tracked down. Figure 13 shows a screen shot of a number of themes organised in alphabetical order. In NVivo themes are nodes. To the left of the node Ambiance, there is a + sign; by clicking this sign the sub-nodes of any theme appear.

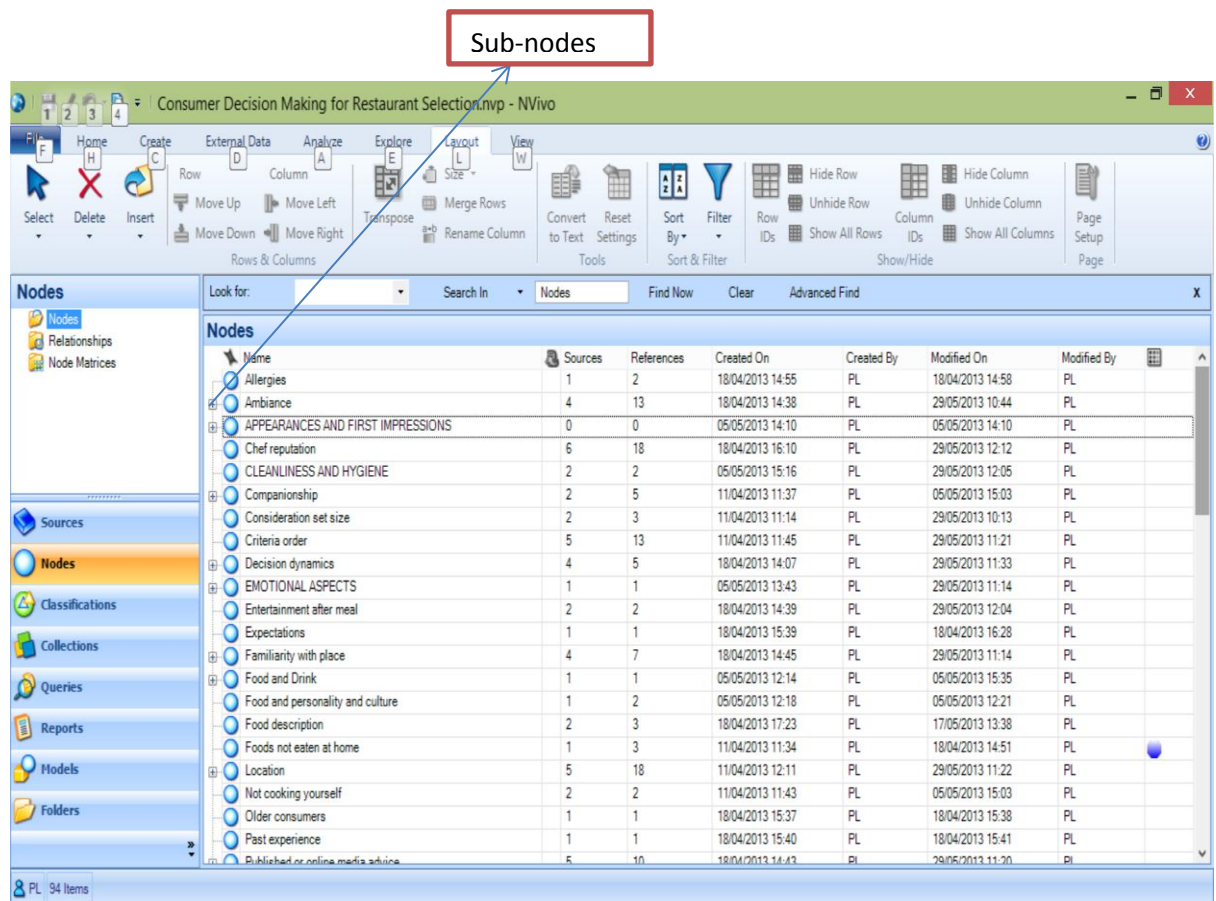


Figure 13: Screen shot of Nvivo: Nodes shown in list view

3.6 Analysing qualitative data using applied thematic analysis

Most of the research conducted into restaurant attributes is quantitative in nature. The study of Cannarozzo-Tinoco and Duarte-Ribeiro (2012) is one of the notable exceptions. The researchers used a focus-group technique but although it is not clear what approach these researchers took to analyse the data collected, it can be assumed to be a theme-based analysis and the themes are the factors elicited by the interviewees. Guest *et al.* (2012) explained that thematic analysis goes beyond the narrow purpose of counting words and phrases; it focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit concepts and themes within the data. This research attempted to arrive at an understanding of the processes surrounding customer decision making in restaurant selection and to add to the body of knowledge with respect to restaurant attributes. The main advantage of applied thematic analysis is that it is a tool that cannot be characterised as a specific method but as a tool to use across different methods (Boyatzis, 1998). Indeed Braun and Clarke (2006) cite a number of advantages, an important one is that besides its flexibility, it allows for social as well as psychological interpretation of the data. These authors view Applied Thematic Analysis as a foundational method for

qualitative analysis. In this research eating out is approached from a social perspective, but also delves into the psychological aspects of decision making. For that reason, applied thematic analysis is the adopted approach.

Qualitative data analysis involves 'making sense of the data collected' (Guest *et al.*, 2012). These authors explain that applied thematic analysis achieves this goal through an iterative process of identifying and defining features. There are two main categories of themes. The first is the one that Guest *et al.* (2012) labelled as the structural approach, which is defined by Di-Cicco, Bloom and Crabtree (2004) as a template approach as it involves applying a template (categories) based on prior research and theoretical perspectives, which are imposed by the research design. This is the case for many of the questions asked in the interviews in this research as prompts to interviewees to raise restaurant attributes that have been discussed in the literature. The second category is that of emergent themes from the discussions by the interviewees. In applied thematic analysis there is definitely a researcher effect on the data (Guest *et al.*, 2012). The researcher has working experience in restaurants and has also conducted previous research in this context. That input is noticeable in the research.

Thematic analysis has two levels in which themes are identified. The first level is at the semantic or explicit level and themes are identified within the explicit or surface meaning and the second level looks for other nuances beyond what a participant has said (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is considered that for exploring restaurant attributes, a semantic analysis will suffice. In the case of antecedents to the decision and other emerging themes, the analytic process will move from the initial description to interpretation, where an attempt is made to delve into broader meanings and interpretations.

One of the limitations of Applied Thematic Analysis is that it may miss some of the more nuanced data (Guest *et al.*, 2012). Certainly, the literature review has shown that the phenomenon of eating out in restaurants is indeed complex as is any topic that looks into the intricacies of consumer behaviour. However, the aim is not to develop a theory but to work towards an understanding of processes prior to making the decision which may be significant for eliciting attributes and as antecedents to the decision.

It is important to note that in this study the qualitative data analysis has two main aspects; the first one deals with the process antecedent to the selection and the second one with restaurant attributes. For both aspects, there is a focused approach to inform specific

domains, and with regard to restaurant attributes its main purpose is to inform the quantitative instrument. In these cases, Guest *et al.* (2012) suggest that a quick and targeted analysis can be conducted. This contrasts the more formal approach proposed by Ritchie *et al.* (2014) in figure 14.

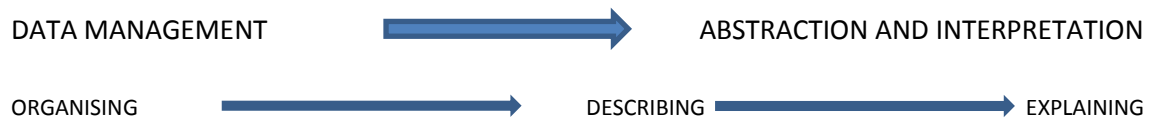


Figure 14: The formal analysis approach, adapted from Ritchie *et al.* (2014, p. 281)

This formal analysis approach forms the basis for the qualitative data analysis. The researcher familiarised himself with the themes, and constructed an initial thematic framework, based on the meal experience models and existing research. The process of sorting codes, which involves reviewing data extracts, summaries and display of data, is detailed in appendix 6: “using Nvivo”.

3.6.1 Constructing categories

The development of categories was conducted following the first three steps of qualitative content analysis suggested by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009). These steps are: data preparation, definition of unit of analysis and developing categories. Thomas (2006) provided a framework for developing categories, as they should have the following features:

- a) Category label: a word or short phrase.
- b) Category description: a description of the meaning of that word.
- c) Text or data associated with the category, which illustrate meaning, associations and perspectives.
- d) Links: Each category may have links or relationships with other categories.
- e) Type of model in which the category is embedded.

There are two objectives of the research which were part of the first stage (qualitative research). The first one refers to the antecedents to the decision using the stylised EKB model for structuring the various themes that arise from the interviews. The second one is the study of restaurant attributes and their interrelationship. The features of those categories will be ascertained using Thomas’s (2006) procedure.

3.6.1.1 Restaurant attributes

It was possible to classify restaurant attributes after an analysis of the qualitative data from the focus groups and existing research on restaurant attributes. The category label for example, food and drink, ambiance, was originally considered from the existing literature previously researched. The analysis attempted to present the meaning through a description of the category. That was compared with the categories elicited from the interviews and a continuous process of comparison with the categories in the literature. That process is called qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is 'a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns' (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1278).

In the first place, the attributes from the literature were analysed and classified into a number of tangible or intangible attributes. Then a process of refinement of data followed. This process of several refinements was described by Dye *et al.* (2000) using the analogy of a kaleidoscope of data. These attributes were compared with the thematic analysis developed from the focus group and a preliminary list of categories was formed. For example, there are raw data bits which are the different attributes like Quality of Food and Drink mentioned in the literature and in the focus groups. A semantic comparison of terms was conducted to establish similarities. Secondly, sets were formed following the preliminary rule of inclusion, based originally on the meal experience models studied. In the process the rules of inclusion were revised as some categories seemed to overlap and some data emerging from the interviews appears to shape an existing list of attributes into a distinctive new category. This study of attributes resulted in categories which fit into existing categories and others that did not (a new category created). After several refinements the final category array was obtained. Then an analysis of links between these categories was conducted as well. A new model of classifying attributes resulted after this process of comparing categories.

Under these categories a large number of attributes resulted, as it is the aggregation of attributes from all research plus the attributes elicited from the interviews. That large number could not be tested in the second stage. Therefore a process of reduction of attributes (data reduction) was conducted. Once the categories were found the attributes were listed under each category. In this case, there are preliminary studies on restaurant attributes. An initial list of attributes is generated from the literature. This initial compendium of attributes can be

modified if some attributes emerge inductively (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This has the advantage of supporting the accumulation and comparison of research findings across several studies (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). This process of data reduction was followed to find the final attribute list. It is important to note that this process does not attempt to be so comprehensive that it overwhelms the reader with details but to grasp the essence of data (Tesch, 1990). This is an interpretive endeavour which may lead to differences in how researchers interpret data, even when confronted with the same task (Sandelowski, 1993).

3.6.1.2 Antecedents to the decision

In this case the main category labels are structured around the stylised EKB model of Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005). The text or associated data comes from the interviews only. Some themes like green consumerism are examined as they were considered in the literature (deductive approach) and their meaning for consumers was evaluated. Also links with other categories in the model are also evaluated.

3.7. SECOND STAGE OF RESEARCH: QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN.

The second stage of the research involved a study of restaurant attributes using conjoint analysis, which is a set of methodologies rather than a single one. Therefore a discussion of this is included here.

3.7.1 Conjoint Analysis

Conjoint Analysis is not a single method but a set of methodologies. Before considering the specific set of methodologies covered by Conjoint Analysis, it is important to explore them in its wider context. Conjoint Analysis is inextricably linked with complex decision making (CDM). Louviere (1988, p. 9) defines CDM as 'the process of assessment, comparison, and/or evaluation in which consumers decide which aspects of products or services are important, compare products or services on each of the important aspects, and decide which one (s), if any, to choose. Green and Srinivasan (1978) proposed the term conjoint analysis for the work that had been conducted in marketing so as to distinguish it from the orientation in mathematical psychology towards testing the adequacy of respondents' data with respect to alternative information processing rules (Wittink *et al.*, 1992).

Conjoint Analysis is deemed to be the most rapidly growing and perhaps the most widely used market research technique at present (Orme, 2010). Vriens (1994) offered a purpose-based classification, which includes:

- Marketing Segmentation.
- Product and pricing decisions.
- Competitive Analyses.
- Promotional decisions.
- Distribution purposes.

Alpert (1971) explained that after consumers acquire information and learn about alternatives, they define a set of determinant attributes to use to compare and evaluate brands. After a comparison of all available brands with each of the attributes, consumers discard some of those alternatives and develop final 'choice sets' of brands from which to choose. That process of comparison, setting determinant attributes and forming final choices, entails psychological as well as value judgments about brands. In consumer oriented marketing, buyers may be shown a product concept and a variety of questions can be asked. Alternatively, respondents can be asked to rate brands or products or to check features or brands that they prefer. However, according to Orme (2010) none of these approaches has been consistently successful and cost efficient. Orme (2010) emphasised that Conjoint Analysis uses the best elements of these techniques in a 'cost-effective survey research approach'.

Conjoint Analysis refers to techniques used to estimate attribute utilities based on subjects' responses to combinations of multiple decision attributes (Louviere 1988). Basically conjoint analysis could also be called trade-off analysis because that is basically what the techniques are about. However, as highlighted by Louviere (1988), it must be clearly understood that conjoint analysis is not a single tool but a set of techniques that share some commonalities but also important differences. Orme (2010) distinguished between traditional conjoint analysis, developed in the 1970s and Conjoint Analysis after the development of commercial software in the 1990s. These two categories will be examined below; it will begin with traditional conjoint analysis which encompasses two approaches, full profile method (also known as traditional full profile method) or partial profile method (also known as Adaptive Conjoint Analysis or ACA). The traditional method provides a basic underpinning of conjoint methodology. Then, separately, a different category called Discrete Choice Analysis (also called Choice based Conjoint) will be examined. For a detailed explanation of how Conjoint Analysis operates refer to appendix 7.

3.7.2 Uses and limitations of traditional conjoint analysis

In conjoint analysis respondents choose attributes, for example the number of courses in a meal, and the levels, which could be 1 course, two courses or three courses. If all the attributes with the corresponding levels are presented, that is called full-profile. Green and Srinivasan (1990) noted that if the full-profile approach is used, it is important to limit the number of attributes and levels. Denstadli and Lines (2007) and Orme (2010) also point out that if the full profile is used, respondents tend to use simplification tactics if the information is overwhelming, and several authors have found that respondents may focus on salient attributes to the detriment of the rest. Maybe because of these disadvantages, Sawtooth Software have found that there has been a decline in the use of the full profile in one of their packages (CVA) with 14% of total projects completed in 2003, compared to only 5% in 2008. Because of the shortcomings of traditional conjoint; it was deemed necessary to examine the most popular conjoint analysis methodology, also known as Choice Based Conjoint, which is also known in academic literature as Discrete Choice Analysis, as in the next section.

3.7.3 Discrete Choice Analysis

Authors like Verma (2002) and Louviere *et al.* (2010) argued that Discrete Choice Analysis (DCA) is close but not the same as Conjoint Analysis. Verma and Thompson (1997) established a number of comparisons and based that differentiation on the fact that traditional conjoint analysis data are obtained in the form of ratings or rankings and that, in contrast, DCA places the respondents in simulated choice making situations, in which they select choices they do not rate or rank. That is, Discrete Choice Analysis involves a single decision maker choosing one alternative among a small well-defined set (Ben-Akiva *et al.*, 1997). Louviere *et al.* (2010) focused on the historical foundations of Conjoint Analysis which are indeed different from DCA. However, there are so many similarities that it is possible to see Discrete Choice Analysis as an evolution of Traditional Conjoint Analysis. To start with, influential conjoint research scholars such as Green *et al.* (2001) use the term 'Choice Based Conjoint' for Discrete Choice Analysis. Secondly, Statistical models - also called estimation methods e.g. Multinomial logit (MNL) models, or nested logit models developed from a DCA study relate service attributes to consumer preferences (Victorino *et al.*, 2005). Thirdly, conjoint analysis is deemed to be inspired by scientific experimental design (Mazzocchi, 2008), in which the researchers manipulate the variables, in this case the attributes and their levels. In Discrete Choice Analysis, the research design takes the form of Discrete Choice Experiments (DCEs). For instance, the decision-maker responds to experimentally designed profiles of possible

alternatives, in which each alternative has a different set of attributes (Verma and Thompson, 1996). Finally, the most popular software development organisation for Conjoint Analysis, Sawtooth Software © have developed several conjoint solutions, with the most popular being Choice Based Conjoint (CBC) based on Discrete Choice Analysis theory. It should be noted that one of the main problems with traditional conjoint was with full profiles, as respondents have the task of rating, whereas that problem is minimised with Discrete Choices as respondents just have to choose, a natural human task.

McFadden pioneered the endeavours for the development of the discrete choice modelling theoretical framework with a seminal paper in 1980. This paper was highly praised after its publication and Hauser (1980, p. 34) commented: 'I do not hesitate to recommend (McFadden's work) in marketing to economic scholars. I strongly believe that each discipline can learn from the other. The synergy will extend on theoretical and practical knowledge of the consumer and the market place'. Gaver (1980, p. 35) added: 'In any case, the probabilistic models described by McFadden provide an excellent starting point for the analysis of consumer behaviour'. Proof of the influence of McFadden's work on Discrete Choice Modelling is the fact that his effort earned him the 2000 Nobel Prize in Economics. Orme (2010) highlighted the main advantages of DCA, particularly because of its resemblance to a typical decision. Besides, they can decline a selection. The aspects of choice deferral or 'no-choice' options are particularly relevant in consumer decision making (Dhar, 1997). Because of these advantages DCA is a natural option when attempting to predict product or service choices as they closely mimic the decision process in competitive contexts (Orme, 2005).

DCA has been successfully used for a variety of applications in consumer and leisure research (Verma and Thomson, 1999). Evidence of this is the influential book of Ben-Akiva and Lerman (1985), still a key reference for Discrete Choice Analysis research. Ben-Akiva and Lerman approached individual choice behaviour positivistically, and examine in depth Discrete Choice Analysis.

Obviously, DCA presents a number of methodological challenges. In the first place, careful sampling must be carried out. This is because DCA uses simulated situations which require a representative sample of customers who will make choices. These simulated situations are derived from realistic variations of genuine service offerings (Verma *et al.*, 2008). The aspect of sampling will be considered thoroughly in another section. On the other hand the

experimental design in DCA is relatively complex (Verma and Thompson, 1997). However, the development of sophisticated software and support from providers such as Sawtooth Software®, have made this task less problematic.

3.7.4 Overall limitations of conjoint analysis

First of all, it is important to bear in mind that all models are abstractions of reality, and for conjoint approaches as for any model, applicability 'depends on the assumptions, theoretical foundations, and scientific methods used in modelling, data collection and analysis, as well as one's understanding of customer demands' (Verma *et al.*, 2002; p. 16).

Lambin (2007) argued that conjoint analysis presents serious issues if attributes are new to the respondents or if cognitive capacities are weak. In the context of this research, restaurant attributes are known to respondents and evidence of this is the number of studies on restaurant attributes conducted. With regard to cognitive capacities, the selection of restaurants will not entail knowledge about a complex product but it is a quotidian task.

Mahajan and Wind (1991) highlighted the inability of the method to 'capture the complexity of the market'. Of course, the same can be said of any technique and methodology; that just serves as a reminder that regardless of the sophistication of a methodological tool, its predictability power must be considered with caution. Another limitation is the risk of fatigue due to information overload when the number of attributes to be ranked or rated is large, even if the fractional factorial design (fraction of the full-profile) is used – a problem which may be avoided by using the paired comparison method (Lambin, 2007). Regarding the cost of research, Vriens (1994) also mentioned that for low-budget research, conjoint analysis is definitely not an option. Nonetheless, the researcher attempted to overcome these issues by contacting Software developers, particularly Sawtooth Software® for free access to the most up-to-date technology for conjoint researchers.

Orme (2010, p. 29) summed up the inherent limitations of conjoint analysis: 'Human decision making and the formation of preferences is complex, capricious and ephemeral. Traditional conjoint analysis makes some heroic assumptions... and that complex decision making can be explained using a limited number of dimensions. Despite the leaps of faith, conjoint analysis tends to work well in practice, and gives managers, engineers and marketers the insight they need to reduce uncertainty when facing important decisions. Conjoint Analysis is not perfect, but we do not need it to be'. Therefore, conjoint analysis allows for an approximation to

reality, acknowledging that it is 'imperfectly apprehended' (Lincoln *et al.*, 2011; p. 98). This is consistent with the post-positivist approach assumed in this thesis. Now the dilemma is what type of conjoint methodology to follow. The next section will delve into these quandaries.

3.7.5 Research in hospitality and tourism using Conjoint Analysis

Conjoint Analysis is a widely used methodology in the service industry, including hospitality and tourism. An excerpt of research papers using conjoint analysis is included in appendix 8. In that table, it can be noted that the studies of Koo *et al.* (1999) and Verma and Thompson (1996) are the ones which bear more similarities with this research. However, there are important differences. The first study focused on preferences of different segments but with a small sample size and a narrow number of attributes; its prediction power is very limited indeed. On the other hand, it used traditional conjoint analysis, which appears as less natural to respondents than Discrete Choice Analysis. The second study, although it used Discrete Choice Analysis, was restricted to pizza restaurants, with fewer attributes in a limited sample of restaurants and a restricted sample size. This research aims to be applied to much more than a particular type of restaurant.

On the other hand, it can also be noticed that although many recent studies have used Discrete Choice Analysis, a few still use traditional conjoint techniques with older studies such as the one of Wind *et al.* (1989) being very influential for further use of conjoint analysis in commercial and academic research. Research for academic papers like the ones in appendix 8 appears to have limited resources because of the reliance on small sample sizes and use of respondents who may be unrepresentative of populations in study, such as the choice of university students of Koo and Koo (2010). Furthermore, it is also limited in the number of attributes that it can handle; this may be because of restrictions of the software selected (or the apparent lack of one). Remarkably, none of the papers related to the use of conjoint analysis in the context of hospitality and tourism used the software most popularly used in conjoint analysis research, Sawtooth Software ©. Nonetheless, Sawtooth is used in other academic contexts. Some academics even did not disclose the software used. For instance, in the study of pizza restaurants, Verma (2002) does not discuss the software used, but in two previous studies (1996 and 1999) he uses NTElogit. The researcher has found that the development of Conjoint Analysis can be largely attributed to the work of Sawtooth Software © researchers who have published working papers of outstanding quality and are supported by the main authors in the area of conjoint analysis (some are mentioned in the list of

references). For that reason, the author of the research applied for a research grant to this company and obtained it in May 2013. The version used in this research is Sawtooth 8.3.2.

3.7.6 Choosing the conjoint methodology for this research

Discrete choice experiments are invariably more difficult to design and analyse than traditional conjoint analysis. In addition, for small sample sizes traditional conjoint may work better than DCA, unless the attribute list is concise and respondents are able to answer a larger number of questions, which does not seem to be the case for this research, since the attribute list is of considerable size.

Despite its disadvantages, there are also issues with traditional conjoint analysis. Firstly, as pointed out by Louviere *et al.* (2010), traditional conjoint analysis relies on Conjoint Measurement (CM), which is not associated with choice behaviour theory. On the contrary, CM theory originally was not a theory about the behaviour of preferences or choices, but instead a theory about the behaviour of sets of numbers in response to factorial manipulations of factor levels, therefore its origin is pre-eminently from the mathematics field. That does not demerit its value as a valid predictive tool, but points out the paucity of consumer behaviour theoretical underpinning. In contrast, Discrete Choice Experiments are based on a long-standing, well-tested theory of choice behaviour that can take inter-linked behaviours into account. Indeed, the theoretical framework that underpins DCEs started with Thurstone's (1927) study of application in the measurement of psychological values. Thurstone's paper introduced the idea of random utility, with choice being determined by the choice with the maximum utility at the particular moment when the decision is made (Mc Fadden, 1986). This theory is known now as random utility theory (RUT). Louviere *et al.* (2010) asserted that the latest works in DCE theory and methods are based on McFadden's DCA theory, as McFadden extended Thurstone's original theory of paired comparisons to multiple comparisons. More importantly, Louviere *et al.* (2010) categorically stated that 'unlike Conjoint Measurement, random utility theory provides an explanation of the choice behaviour of humans, not numbers' (p. 62).

Also as mentioned above it seems more natural for consumers to make choices, not to rate or rank them. Furthermore as stated above the use of technology has made that task more achievable. For instance DCA software can be administered in a variety of ways such as computer-assisted personal interviewing, telephone interviewing, Internet Surveys and even via paper-and-pencil questionnaires (Orme *et al.*, 2010). These advantages probably explain

why DCA has become the natural choice for decision-making researchers using conjoint analysis methods. Therefore, it is considered that DCA will be the conjoint technique to use. The next dilemma entails deciding whether to use full profiles or partial profiles and what type of DCA specific technique is needed.

Sawtooth software has developed Choice-Based-Conjoint software (CBC). The problem with CBC is to present respondents with a number of attributes that they can manage. If the qualitative research stage concludes in a number of attributes larger than six (6), then the use of partial profiles seems to be the way forward as suggested by Green and Srinivasan (1978). Indeed, partial profile CBC is being increasingly supported by scholars like Chrzan and Elrod (1999) and Chrzan (1999). Nonetheless, CBC requires larger sample sizes. Another issue with partial profiles is the fact that the partial-profile choice shares an important weakness with traditional conjoint techniques: the understatement of the importance of price as an attribute (Johnson *et al.*, 2004). For that reason, presenting a partial number of attributes with a price and another set of attributes with a different price, may lead to a partial perception of value, when what is required is that respondents evaluate a restaurant concept with a particular price. Therefore, full profile is preferred to partial profile. In terms of limitations and problems applying CBC, Johnson and Orme (2007) indicated that:

- In CBC respondents (especially in the internet version) complete choice tasks so quickly that it puts into doubt the normal application of compensatory rules. For example, it is difficult to accept that respondents might be able to evaluate four alternatives each specified on nine attributes in a very short time. For this reason, it is most likely that the ways in which they make choices in the exercise are not typical of a normal product/service selection.
- In order to produce relevant part-worths (utilities) a number of choice tasks must be presented to the respondent. To ensure accuracy is maintained across each aspect of the research, the number of tasks required turns the exercise into a repetitive and boring experience, with the end result being the respondent's disengagement.
- If the respondent finds critical attributes there is often only one such product to select in a choice task. The respondent is then left with the unrealistic scenario of having to select a product he may not have intended to select in the first place;

otherwise he/she may select none. Furthermore, the option of none may be under-selected because of what is known as 'helping behaviour'.

However, progress has been made in developing a method that combines the best aspects of traditional conjoint with the realism of CBC. This method is called Adaptive Choice Based Conjoint (ACBC). Adaptive Choice Based Conjoint is consistent with the theory that complex choices made by consumers entail the formation of a consideration set and then choosing a product within that consideration set (Orme, 2010). Johnson and Orme (2007) stressed a number of advantages of ACBC compared to CBC:

- Respondents find that experience with ACBC is more stimulating than CBC and therefore engagement is much higher.
- The selection is closer to an actual shopping experience, in which non-compensatory as well as compensatory rules are used.
- There are more choices for the respondents, although the focus is on a smaller subset.
- Individual part-worths are easier to calculate than with conventional CBC.

A word of caution must be made about the apparent appeal of ACBC over proved CBC. As pointed out by Orme (2010) ACBC is a new technique which may need a few more years' experience to learn its value and application for choice analysis. And whilst conventional CBC performs well with fewer attributes, it may seem that for a considerable number, as in this research, ACBC seems much more promising. It is considered that the tasks in ACBC are more stimulating and enhance engagement, considering the number of attributes that may be elicited from the focus group interviews. On the other hand, in the decision to select restaurants it has been found (from previous research and in the focus group interviews) that consumers use both compensatory and non-compensatory rules. It is deemed that the selection made through ACBC is closer to the actual decision to select restaurants. Additionally, it has been found (again from previous research and in focus group interviews) that there may be a large number of attributes. In cases with a large number of attributes, ACBC has been found to work better. Deciding on where to eat out in the context of leisure appears to be a high involvement decision. Orme (2010, p. 126) suggested that 'for studies involving five attributes or more (especially in high involvement contexts) an adaptive

procedure offers compelling benefits'. For all these reasons ACBC was the conjoint method chosen to analyse restaurant attributes.

For studies with a large number of attributes, ACBC is preferred, with a number of attribute that should comprise 12 or less attributes with no more than seven levels. If a study involves more than 12 attributes, the software platform of Sawtooth software allows for the reduction of attributes prior to conducting the ACBC experiment.

3.7.7 Sampling strategy

Green and Tull (1978, p. 111) argued that 'in any sampling situation the usual result is that the sample selected is not completely representative with respect to the characteristics of the population from which it is drawn'. Assuming that this is the case; then the next question was to assess the likelihood of finding unrepresentative respondents. If it is important to make statistical considerations of that uncertainty, also called sampling error, the sampling strategy should be probabilistic; otherwise, it is possible to work with a non-probabilistic sample. These two strategies are considered here.

First of all, it is important to ascertain whether it was possible to accede to the immense population referred to above. There was the added difficulty of obtaining a list with all the elements of the population through, for example, electoral registers. This would be a long and cumbersome process. Otherwise, the only option left was to try to find a list, either compiled by the researcher or by some organisation. This would have entailed finding what is known as the sampling frame, which is 'a complete listing of all the units from which the sample will be selected' (Bryman, 2008). Some private organisations offer consumer lists of a large part of the UK population, essential for probability samples. In probability samples a population has a known chance of being included in the sample (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005).

Firstly, it was important to consider whether the cost of a mailing list would actually provide an adequate sampling frame, as obviously the selection of respondents on the list is beyond the control of the researcher. Secondly, it was important to remember that a majority of the adult UK population eat out in restaurants for leisure, thus the possibility of sampling error is greatly minimised. Thirdly, it is an objective of the research to present a model that can be tested with large samples. Finally, this research adopted the post-positivist view of approximation to reality, and for that approximation, non-probability samples - although not statistically

speaking as accurate as probability samples - can be a valuable tool. Indeed, although non-probability samples have weaknesses, these can be mitigated through the use of 'knowledge, expertise and care in selecting samples' (Chein, 1959).

Non-probability sampling is an umbrella term, for all sampling strategies that do not conform to probabilistic principles (Bryman, 2008). Patton (2002) classified non-probability sample types as: Convenience, purposive, self-selection and quota. Saunders *et al.* (2003) asserted that the first two methods are appropriate for very small samples, but not for the type of sample required for ACBC. Therefore quota sampling is examined as a possible sampling strategy.

Quota sampling is a type of stratified sampling, with the word quota corresponding to non-probabilistic samples to the word strata used in probabilistic samples (Bechhofer and Paterson, 2000). In CBC it is necessary to get a large sample. If the sample size required is say 1,000 respondents, we may say respondents of different age groups so as to make the sample as representative of the population as possible. This can be viewed as an attempt to overcome the issue of unrepresentative samples (Veal, 1997). If five (5) age groups are considered, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59 and 59 or above, then for each group the quota of respondents would be 200. This sampling method is exposed to selection biases as extraction for each quota is still based on haphazard methods (Mazzochi, 2008). This is because although the quota can be representative in terms of one characteristic, for example age, as in the case explained above, it may be quite unrepresentative with respect to other characteristics (Bechhofer and Paterson, 2000). Nonetheless, as argued many times over in this section, even if haphazard, the likelihood of non-representative respondents is limited. Although quota sampling is not as broadly used in academic social research (Bryman, 2008), it is a cost effective sampling method used in consumer research even for national studies. To name a few, Shimp and Sharma's (1987) research on American consumers' opinions about foreign products, or the national study of consumer perceptions of Verbeke *et al.* (2005). Also in metropolitan areas (Cronin *et al.*, 2000) –a study of customer behaviour related to quality satisfaction related to quality and value in service environments-. It has also been used to establish styles of consumer decision-making for different genders (Mitchell and Walsh, 2004). One of the criticisms is that it under-represents people at the extremes of income and over-represents people with larger households (Bryman, 2008). However, in the first place people of very low income may tend to

eat less (or not all) in restaurants. People with large incomes – the very rich - would be less accessible to get responses from regardless of the method used.

Another non-probability sampling technique is snowball sampling. The term snowball sampling was first introduced by Coleman (1958), who praised its virtues for social research because it allows for the sampling of units that interrelate with each other. Snowball sampling can be defined as a 'procedure in which initial respondents are selected randomly but where additional respondents are then obtained from referrals or by other information provided by the initial respondents' (Green and Tull, 1978; p. 210-211). Therefore unlike traditional probabilistic sampling in which it all starts with a sampling frame, snowball sampling results in creating a sampling frame after sampling is complete (Wejnert and Heckathorn, 2008). Lately, the term of Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS) is used, as a variation of the chain-referral sampling methods (Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004). RDS starts with a moderate number of initial respondents, also called seeds, and their referrals are called waves (Wejnert and Heckathorn, 2008) – more details are included in the snowball sampling appendix 9. Hence, RDS begins with a convenience sample of respondents, with the key innovation that through many waves of sampling, that dependence on that initial convenience sample is reduced (Gile and Hancock, 2010). The possibility of accessing large segments of respondents is a known fact as in populations as large as the USA, every person is indirectly associated with every other person through six waves (Killworth and Bernard, 1978). In support of the appropriateness of RDS, Wejnert and Heckathorn (2008) found that RDS referral chains progress twenty times faster than with traditional methods and also incentives will be lower. Because of its appeal for accessing a considerable sample cost-effectively and relatively quickly the use of RDS sampling is attractive. On the other hand, Biernicki and Waldorf (1981, p. 157) argue that if a study has the purpose of generating theory, the analytic endeavour should consider a substantive analysis of the respondents so as to 'assure that the sample characteristics will at least broadly correspond with those that are thought to exist in the actual population'. This seems akin with the concept of quota population (Smith, 1975). Therefore, it all points at combining Respondent-Driven Sampling with Quota Sampling. This non-probabilistic sampling strategy is deemed to be feasible and efficient as suggested by Teddlie and Yu (2007) because as they asserted sampling considerations are practical by nature (Kemper *et al.*, 2003).

3.7.8 Sample size

In the context of choice analysis: Hensher *et al.* (2005) argued that sampling remains one of the least understood areas of choice analysis. Some authors like Mazocchi (2008), excluded non-probability sampling as a sampling strategy that allows the calculation of a sample size reliably. However, in the context of choice analysis, Hensher *et al.* (2005) contended that “non-random samples are also possible; however, the results of the analysis may not be readily transferrable to the larger population of interest” (p. 184-185). This caveat may apply to heterogeneous populations in which the possibility exists of including a member of the population who can deviate greatly from the general population; in this case, for instance, somebody whose preferred restaurant attributes are completely uncommon and have not been mentioned in previous studies. It is considered that this likelihood is almost negligible considering the great deal of studies with restaurant consumers considered. To prove this point, discrete choice experiments like that of Laba *et al.* (2012) used panels of respondents that were sourced non-probabilistically by an online panel provider. Furthermore, that study used a final sampling based on census data in terms of age and gender.

On the other hand, although the sampling strategy is considered to be non-probabilistic, it can be argued that due to the effect discussed by the six-degrees of separation theory (Milgram, 1964), magnified in the digital age (Kleinfeld, 2002), almost every respondent of the sampling frame can be randomly contacted through referent sampling. Formulas to establish optimum sample size require random samples, thus in order to estimate a sample size for this research, the sample will be assumed to be obtained at random, as for the considerations about the characteristics of the population above mentioned. For all these reasons, it is considered that the estimation formula that Louviere *et al.* (2000) provided for calculating optimum sample size for random samples is appropriate in this research:

$$N > \frac{qz^2}{rpa^2}$$

In Louviere *et al.*'s formula, N represents the minimum number of participants; "r" is the total number of choice scenarios or replications, "p" is the choice share of a restaurant concept, $q=1-p$, "z" is the confidence level under normal distribution, and "a" is the allowable margin of error. In the choice tournaments respondents will be shown 3 restaurant concepts with ten attributes showing a particular level, in this case there are (3X10) 30 choice scenarios, $z=1.96$

for a confidence level of 95%. If there are three choices, the probability of choices one is $1/3 = 0.33$ which is p . Then $q = 1 - 0.33 = 0.67$. If the margin of error is set at 5% then:

$$N > \frac{0.67 * (1.96)^2}{30 * 0.33 * 0.05^2} = 104$$

Therefore, according to this formula the minimum sample size is 104 respondents for the ACBC sample. However, it is to be noted that this formula was derived for a simple selection and, in this case, there are several screens showing several combinations of 30 choice scenarios. This added complexity for an accurate calculation of the sample size and the application of the formula.

And in the case of large populations like the one in this research, Orme (2014) discussed that sample sizes for conjoint studies range from about 150 to 1,200 respondents. However, for ACBC it has been found that in smaller sample sizes, ACBC would yield similar group-level errors, with 38% fewer participants than in a traditional discrete choice experiment, such as the ones in CBC (Chapman *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, Jervis *et al.* (2012) conducted a conjoint study comparing the results of a sample of 777 respondents using CBC with a sample of 250 respondents for the same ACBC equivalent study and found similar overall utility scores for all attributes with similar respondent clusters and concluded that ACBC surveys can be used with smaller sample sizes as an alternative to larger CBC surveys. It also appears that smaller sample sizes compensate for the additional time required to complete ACBC surveys (Cunningham *et al.*, 2010). This is one more of the reasons why ACBC was the preferred conjoint method. As a minimum of 150 respondents is indicated as a rule of thumb and Louviere *et al.*'s formula points to a minimum of 104, the research attempted to get as many respondents as possible but not fewer than 150.

On the other hand, the first part of the research dealt with establishing which attributes are more important for certain segments, that is, which attributes are more relevant for this particular occasion or for a particular age group, etc. In this case Salant and Dillman (1994) produced a table that is based on:

- a) Sampling error tolerated (in this case that will be 5%)

- b) Population size in the table values for 1,000,000 and 100,000,000 give the same results. It is estimated that the population of people who eat out for leisure in the UK is greater than 1,000,000.
- c) How varied the population is in relation to the characteristics of interest. In this case, we may consider the population to be very varied about a particular issue, for example, how many considered a particular attribute and how many would not? The maximum split, to be conservative, is a 50/50 split and has a sample size of 384; for a less varied population 80/20 the minimum number is 246.

In this case a minimum of 246 participants is required but aiming at a figure as close as possible to 384 participants for cross-tabulations. That will mean that at least 246 participants should complete the first part of the questionnaire. This is an important distinction as for the length of the questionnaire (about 20 minutes to complete), many respondents did manage to complete all the ACBC tasks while others completed at least the first part of the questionnaire. These are usable answers for the cross-tabulations.

3.7.9 Recruitment of participants, pilot study and final sample

After the researcher obtained the licence to use the software in May 2013, it was necessary to learn the software basics and programme the research design for the survey. An initial version of the survey was completed in August 2013. That version was piloted with lecturers at the London School of Hospitality and Tourism of the University of West London, with members of staff at Buckinghamshire New University and consultation with the research supervisors, Dr. Eugenia Wickens and Dr. Ali Bakir. These pilot surveys provided valuable insight in terms of the language, order of options, options presented, and length of the questionnaire. Several changes were made to the initial version which was then tested with ten colleagues at University of West London and further feedback was received. Minor changes were introduced but they were not deemed significant enough to discard the initial ten questionnaires. The survey was then fielded fully in September 2013.

The first respondents were recruited through the professional network LinkedIn. These were professionals known to the researcher personally or through the network by cold contacting or by references from other members of the network. Also personal contact with known colleagues and neighbours was made so as to widen the sample with their acquaintances. Another way was through the newsletter of Buckinghamshire New University, entitled 'Digest'.

However, recruitment through the newsletter proved difficult. On 10 January 2014, a total of 170 participants had been recruited this way and research ethics approval was requested for contacting participants directly through e-mail circulars and offering incentives. Although incentives were approved, approval for circulars either at University of West London (where the researcher works) or Buckinghamshire New University was not granted, making it difficult to recruit more participants. Hence, this research faced severe limitations in obtaining a large number of respondents, the newsletters proved to be ineffective since not many recipients of these newsletters seemed to read them. The researcher opted to find respondents through networking using his LinkedIn and Twitter accounts and opened a dedicated Facebook page for the research so as to attract more respondents (see appendix 10).

The licence for Sawtooth Software was obtained to run until 31 March 2014 but since the quota was not obtained, further extension was requested and Sawtooth Software kindly extended the licence until 31 May 2014. This allowed recruitment of the quota required. In total for the first part of the questionnaire 376 respondents took part in the research. The criteria for respondents were:

- a) The respondent should eat out at restaurants. If the respondent answers Never to the question about Frequency of eating out, they did not progress into the second part. In total 6 out of 376 answered never (1.6%).
- b) The respondent should be involved in making the decision. If the respondent answers Never to the question about Involvement in the decision, they did not progress into the second part. In total 7 out of 376 answered never (1.9%).
- c) To be of 19 years of age or above. If the respondent is under 19 years of age, he/she did not progress. In total 6 out of 376 did not qualify (1.6%).

An examination of the demographics of the respondents can be found in appendix 11. The final number is well above the minimum requirement of 246 respondents and closer to the upper requirement level of 384 participants mentioned above. The Adaptive Choice Based Conjoint section is divided into:

- Build Your Own
- Screening Section
- Choice task tournament

These sub-sections are examined in more detail below. For 'Build your Own' (BYO) and the Screening section a total of 295 respondents took part. That is significant for the counts of 'non-acceptables' in order to look for non-compensatory behaviour. Now the calculation of sample size for discrete choice analysis referred to the Choice task, in which a preferred concept is ascertained and for which the calculations of Louviere *et al.*'s formula apply. In the choice tasks tournament and calibration concept a total of 243 respondents completed, well above the minimum of 150 set above.

3.7.10 Using Sawtooth software: the basics

This section only deals with how the software was used in order to design the questionnaire to be applied. The software is composed of two main parts. The first part is common to all conjoint methodologies and is called SSI software, an ordinary questionnaire software platform. The second part is the ACBC module that is the methodology. The first part of the questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 12.

3.7.10.1 SSI software

All the questions in the questionnaire were based on SSI software (see figure 15). Questions 1 to 5 are mostly demographic questions in order to cross-tabulate responses with different groups of respondents so as to analyse possible differences in how the different segments chose restaurants and what attributes are more important for the various segments.

As mentioned in the previous section, the first question is a filter question. It is about the frequency of eating out. The second question is another filter question, and relates to involvement in the decision. Since the purpose is to find out whether respondents are engaged, if they select that they are never involved in making the decision, that does not make them qualified to answer questions about restaurant selection and thus they will not progress to the second stage of the questionnaire. Question 3 is about gender. Question 4 is another filter question about age groups and question 5 is about Life Cycle. If respondents qualify for the second stage of the questionnaire, they are asked about Occasion for eating Out (Question 6). The qualitative stage found that a key antecedent for the decision is the occasion for eating out. Respondents were asked to select an option amongst day or night out with friends or family, romantic dinner, a birthday party, special celebration or other. That option was kept in mind by respondents as the choices referred to selecting a restaurant for that particular occasion.

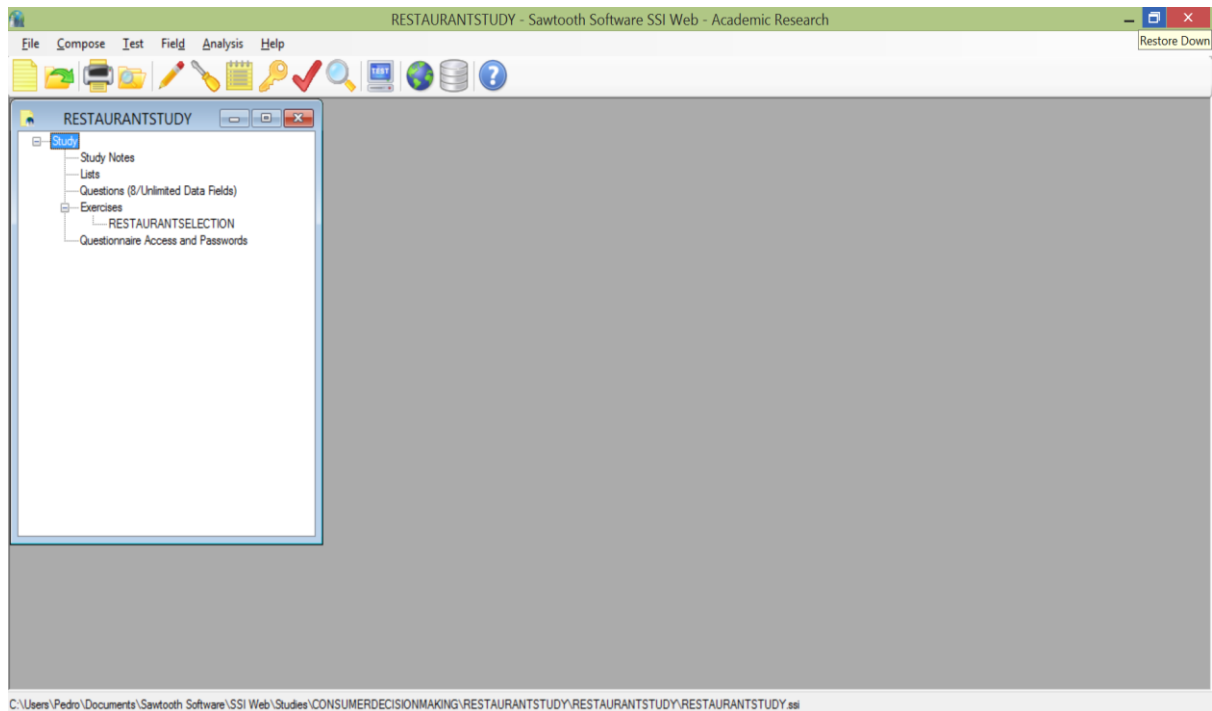


Figure 15: Initial screen of SSI software

In SSI software it is possible to add a conjoint exercise to the questionnaire. In figure 16, to the right it is possible to see the option that can be added. In this case, the option of ACBC was added after Q6. To the left there is the option of adding a question, showing the format of the question that can be asked. Figure 16 shows that all questions from 1 to 7 have the format “select”.

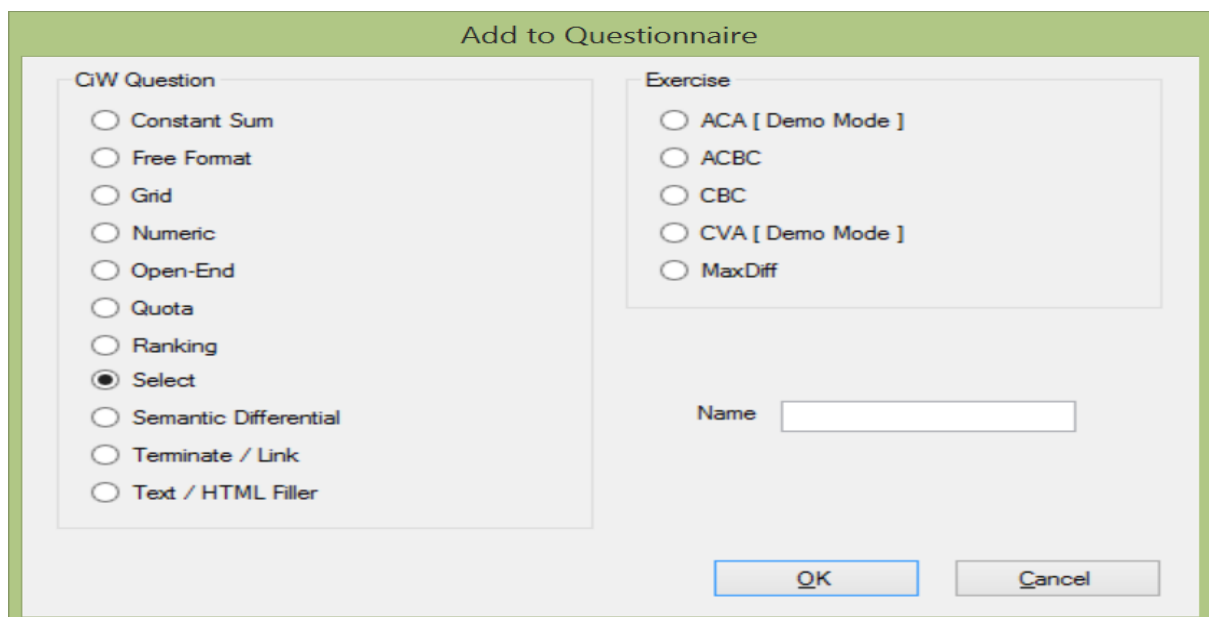


Figure 16: Adding a conjoint exercise to the questionnaire

Figure 17 shows all of the questions from 1 to 7 and the ACBC exercise. Figure 17 shows 8 questions. The first six are demographic (Frequency, involvement, gender, Age-group, Life Cycle), Question 6 refers to the respondent selecting an occasion for eating out and all the choice thereafter will relate to that occasion. In Question 7, respondents can select attributes that are considered most important. The menu shows 'Write Questionnaire', if the "Add" tab is selected, the menu in figure 17 will appear. For question 1 to 7 the question is of the type select. For question 8, the right column for exercise was clicked on ACBC. That will be question 8, which is the ACBC exercise.

Question Name	Question Type
Start	Questionnaire Access and Passwords
<Page>	
Frequency	Select
Involvement	Select
Gender	Select
Agegroup	Select
Lifecycle	Select
<Page>	
OCCASION	Select
<Page>	
Q7	Select
<Page>	
RESTAURANTSELECTION_B...	ACBC Build-Your-Own
<Page>	
RESTAURANTSELECTION_S...	ACBC Screening Task
<Page>	
RESTAURANTSELECTION_S...	ACBC Screening Task
<Page>	
RESTAURANTSELECTION_S...	ACBC Screening Task
<Page>	
RESTAURANTSELECTION_U...	ACBC Unacceptable
<Page>	
RESTAURANTSELECTION_S...	ACBC Screening Task
<Page>	
RESTAURANTSELECTION_U...	ACBC Unacceptable

Page: 5/39
Data Fields: 8/Unlimited

Figure 17: List of questions in Write Questionnaire Menu in SSI software

3.7.10.2 Forming lists

The software allows the formation of lists. These lists refer to options that can be made by the respondent at any stage of the questionnaire. For example the age groups (Q4), is a list with a number of age brackets, involvement refers to how often the respondent is involved with making the decision to eat out, and lifecycle is about where the respondent is in his stage of life (married with or without children for example). Figure 18 shows a number of lists. Figure 19 shows the predefined list for food quality with four levels, choices that a respondent has, of which he/she can only select one.

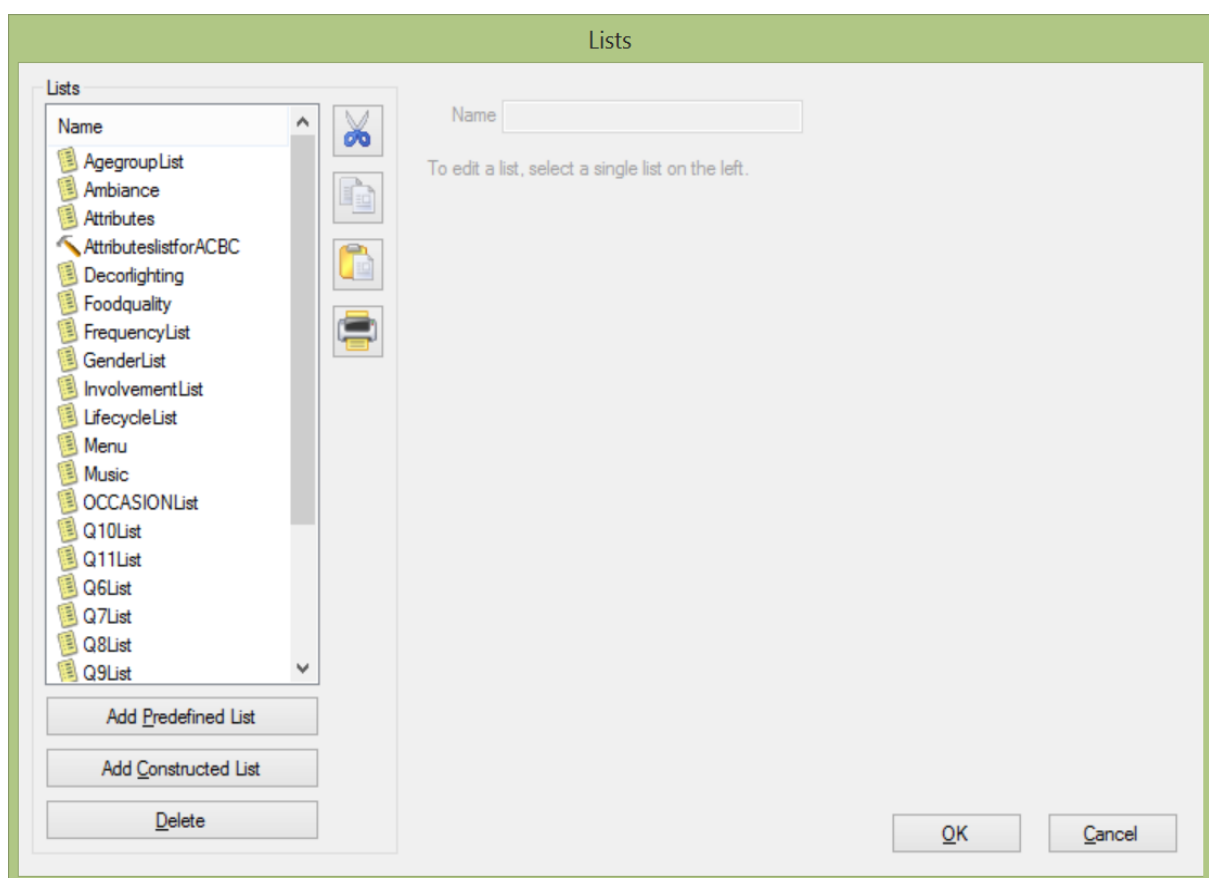


Figure 18: Lists in Sawtooth Software

Constructed lists are based on parent lists. For instance, figure 20 shows how the final attributes list for ACBC was formed. It shows that that list is made up of a number of fixed attributes that will be made part of that list plus the list called selected attributes that has also as parent the list attributes. In figure 21 it is possible to see how the selected attributes list is

formed (see discussion after figure 21). The rationale for selecting attributes is examined after the qualitative data analysis section as this rationale is informed by the qualitative stage of the research.

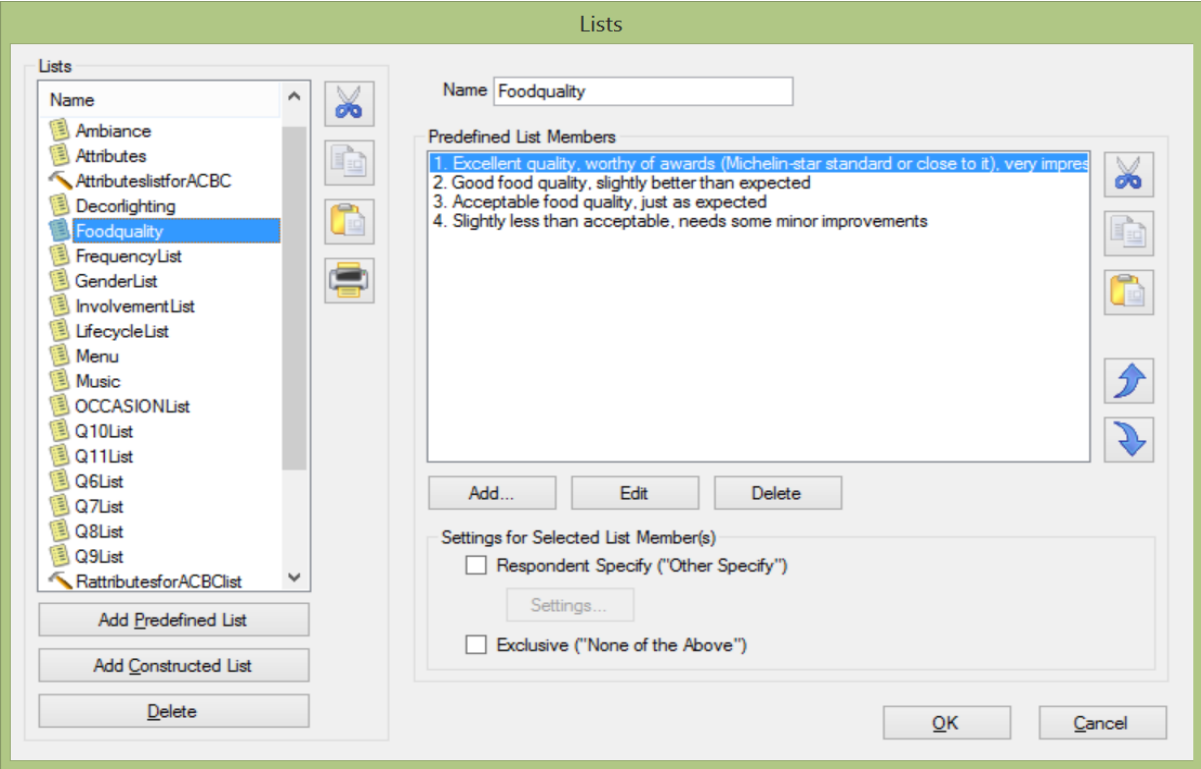


Figure 19: Pre-defined list showing the different levels

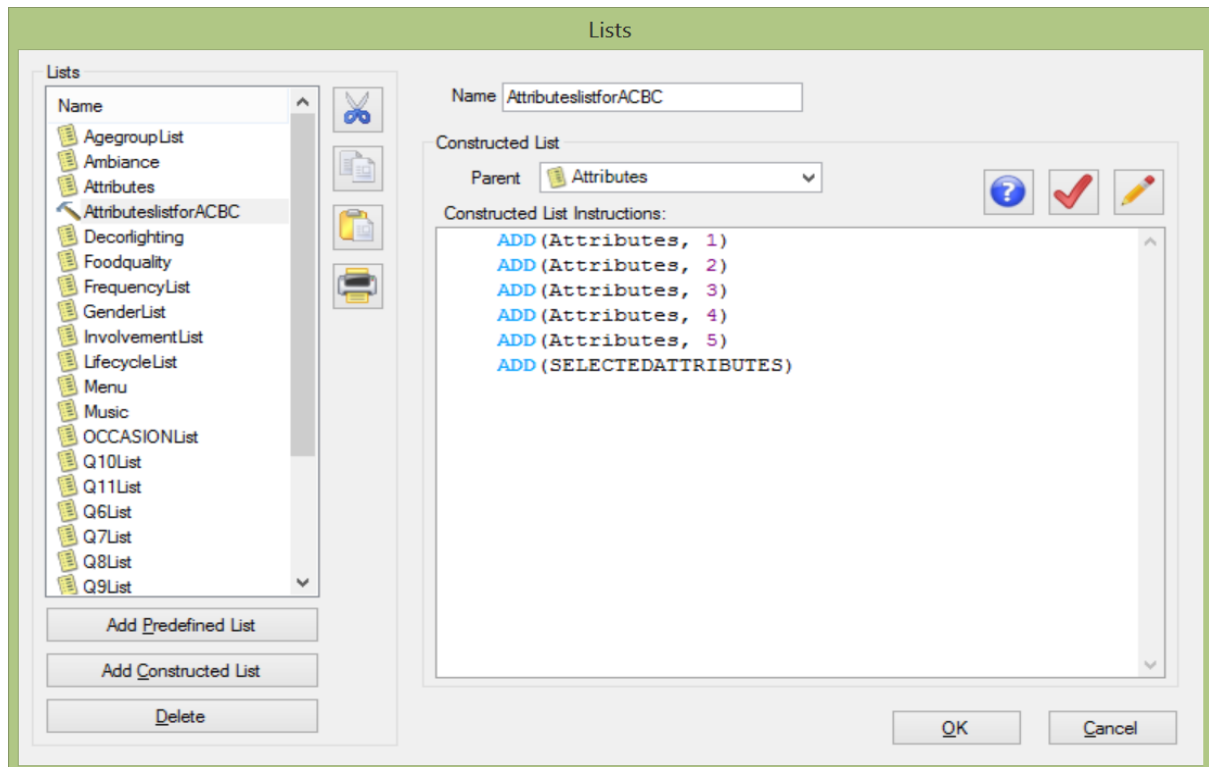


Figure 20: Forming the final ACBC list

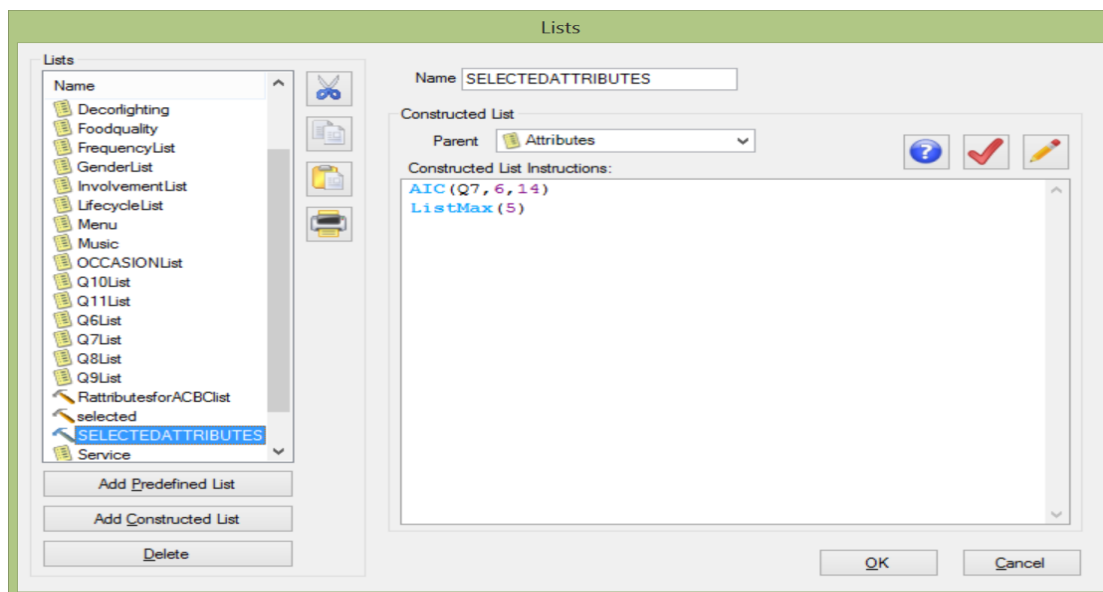


Figure 21: Formation of list of respondents' selected attributes

Although the ACBC module can work with up to 100 attributes, it is virtually impossible for respondents to choose efficiently with such a long list of attributes. Typical studies in practice cover about 5 to 12 attributes (Sawtooth Manual, 2013). This is the list that respondents saw

in question 7. Respondents had to choose from the total list of fourteen (14) attributes –of which 5 are fixed-, there were 9 options, counting from attribute listed as number 6 to attribute number 14, with the maximum number that can be selected being 5. Therefore, 10 is the final number of attributes that a respondent saw at a particular time. The approach to pricing is summed pricing in which price is treated as a continuous variable. Using the “summed” pricing approach leads to restaurant concepts that show realistic prices. Restaurant with high-end features carry higher prices, and restaurants with low-end features carry lower prices. Under summed pricing, thousands of potential unique prices could be shown to respondents. The BYO section details more how this works. The rationale for obtaining that final number of attributes (14) to be tested was discussed in the qualitative data analysis section.

3.7.11 The research instrument: Adaptive Choice Based Conjoint (ACBC)

This section looks at all the relevant aspects of the questionnaire once the relevant attributes have been selected by the respondent. There are four main parts in the ACBC questionnaire, namely, Build Your Own, Screening section, Choice Tournament and Calibration Concept. The ACBC tasks will be discussed below.

3.7.11.1 Build Your Own (BYO)

Figure 22 shows the BYO task, noting that that there are 9 attributes, and that the higher the level, the greater the cost incurred. Adding all the individual costs per feature resulted in a total for the meal cost for one person. For example, respondents have three levels for the fixed attribute of menu options, with higher cost for the option with the greater variety. These individual costs are added up. They can see the total underneath per head and can adjust the levels accordingly. It is important to note that a prohibition between levels of attributes was necessary. In this case it does not make sense that respondents select in ambiance the level that reads “quiet, customers can engage in private conversations” with the attribute of music and the level “Audible Background music, compatible with busy atmosphere”.

Choose a type of restaurant that you would go to for the occasion selected in the previous question. Bear in mind the better option indicates a higher price per head.

Please also consider a price for your preferred type of restaurant. Cost per feature contribute to the total price per head you are prepared to pay for that type of restaurant. The cost include drinks to go with meals, like 1-2 glasses of wine and water.

Feature	Select Feature	Cost for Feature
Menu options	Select Feature	£ 0
Quality of food	Select Feature	£ 0
Ambiance	Select Feature	£ 0
Timing	Select Feature	£ 0
Decor and lighting	Select Feature	£ 0
Presentation of food	Select Feature	£ 0
Range of beverages	Select Feature	£ 0
Music	Select Feature	£ 0
Service	Select Feature	£ 0
Total		£ 0

YOUR PREFERRED CHOICE OF RESTAURANT

Figure 22: Features and cost per feature

3.7.11.2 Screening section

In this section four restaurant concepts are shown, for example a restaurant that provides a particular level of service, with a level of variety, etc. and that concept also has a price tag. Obviously, some options like a greater level of service are more expensive. They are shown in figure 23 in sequence order and preference order. Some options like ambiance have no preference order, meaning that whether they want a quiet or busy environment there is no record of the price paid.

ACBC Build-Your-Own - RESTAURANTSELECTION

Question Text Question Settings Exercise Settings Skip Logic

Attributes Pricing Alternative-Specific Prohibitions Design Shared Question Settings Conditional Display Merged Rows

List of Attributes RattributesforACBClist

	Attribute	List of Levels	Sequence Order	Preference Order	Include In BYO	Include In Must-Haves and Unacceptables
1	Menu options	Menu	Low to High	Worst to Best	Yes	Yes
2	Quality of food	Foodquality	High to Low	Best to Worst	Yes	Yes
3	Ambiance	Ambiance	None	None	Yes	Yes
4	Service	Service	High to Low	Best to Worst	Yes	Yes
5	Price	<Summed Pricing Attribute>	None	None	Yes	No
6	Decor and lighting	Decorlighting	None	None	Yes	Yes
7	Music	Music	None	None	Yes	Yes
8	Timing	Timing	High to Low	Best to Worst	Yes	Yes
9	Range of beverages	Q6List	High to Low	Best to Worst	Yes	Yes
10	Presentation of food	Q7List	Low to High	Worst to Best	Yes	Yes
11	Portion sizes	Q8List	None	None	Yes	Yes
12	Restaurant appearance and cleanli...	Q9List	None	None	Yes	Yes
13	Location	Q10List	Low to High	Worst to Best	Yes	Yes
14	Offers	Q11List	None	None	Yes	Yes

Rename Advanced... Preview OK Cancel

Figure 23: Total list of attributes with sequence and preference orders

Figure 24 is a screen shot (full questionnaire in appendix 12) so it only looks at part of the page (only 5 attributes are shown) that contains 10 attributes with a particular level (below):

http://127.0.0.1:1501/RESTAURANTSTUDY/cgi-bin/cwweb.exe?hid_s=DwAAAAAIAAAJAAALWNLRSVXTM08cbvQ5YqjdKctLraqlMye40JL7d51aV

127.0.0.1:1501/RESTAURANTSTUDY/cgi-bin/cwweb.exe?hid_s=DwAAAAAIAAAJAAALWNLRSVXTM08cbvQ5YqjdKctLraqlMye40JL7d51aV

Here are a few restaurants you might like. For each one, indicate whether it is a possibility or not. Remember that the choices you will make refer to the occasion that you chose before. You also have to consider a price for restaurants that, in your opinion, represent value for money when compared to other restaurants.

(1 of 8)

	£64	£39	£76	£60
Price	Excellent overall food presentation	Excellent overall food presentation	Acceptable presentation, almost as expected	Excellent overall food presentation
Presentation of food	Excellent overall food presentation	Excellent overall food presentation	Acceptable presentation, almost as expected	Excellent overall food presentation
Ambiance	Quiet, customers can engage in private conversations	Quiet, customers can engage in private conversations	Quiet, customers can engage in private conversations	Busy, great atmosphere even if slightly noisy
Quality of food	Good food quality, slightly better than expected	Acceptable food quality, just as expected	Good food quality, slightly better than expected	Good food quality, slightly better than expected
Timing	Have to wait slightly more than expected either to be seated or for the courses	Have to wait slightly more than expected either to be seated or for the courses	Perfect timing to be seated and for the courses to get to the table	Perfect timing to be seated and for the courses to get to the table
Range of beverages	Some variety of wines and spirits and non-alcoholic drinks better than	Basic list of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages	Some variety of wines and spirits and non-alcoholic drinks better than	Some variety of wines and spirits and non-alcoholic drinks better than

Figure 24: Screening section

It can be noted that the option of £76 has higher level options. At the end of every column showing one of the four restaurant concepts, respondents will have two choices, either “A possibility” or “Won’t work for me”. This allows the screening of options that may be unacceptable or must-haves. After a few screens, it is possible to evaluate if the respondent is using non-compensatory rules; that is if the respondent seemed to be avoiding an attribute with a particular level. That could be a lower level of service (a cut-off point), even though that would obviously be cheaper. That means that a lower price does not compensate for that low level. Then another screen is presented (see figure 25):

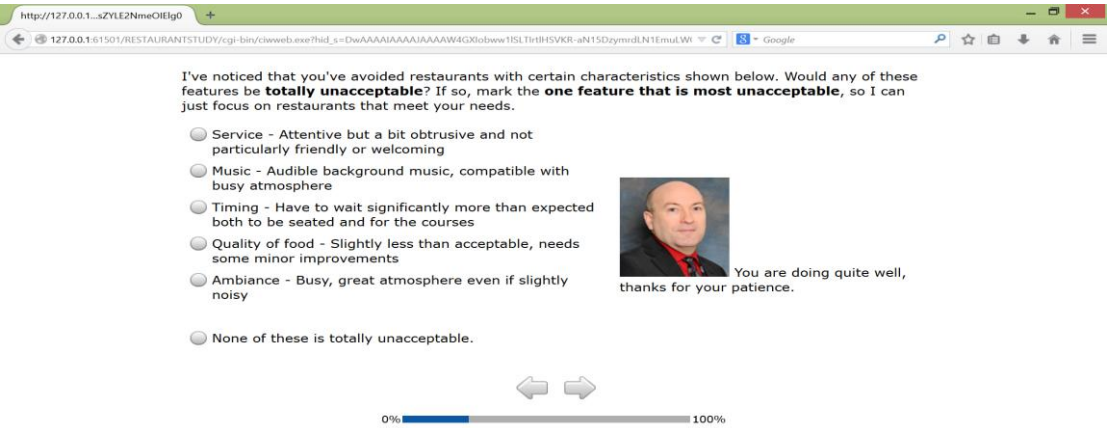


Figure 25: Evaluation of unacceptable choices

The process of marking “unacceptables” is repeated so as to find 5 unacceptables, following the software provider recommendations (which are summarised in appendix 13), an example of another unacceptable screen is in figure 26

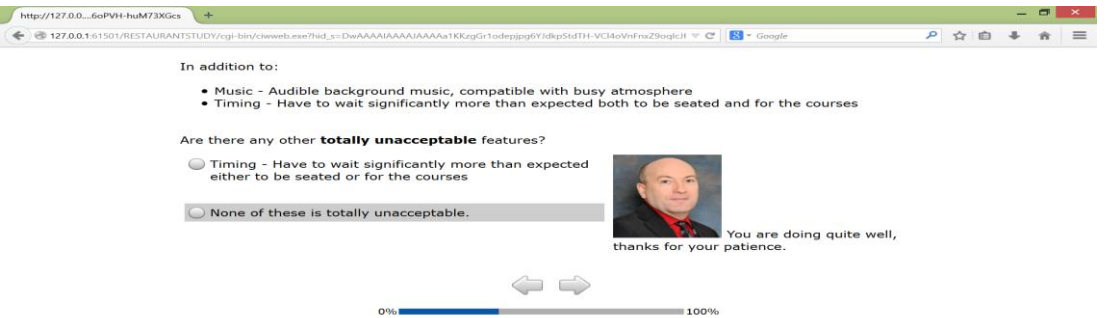


Figure 26: Additional unacceptable screen

In addition to unacceptables, a respondent may have also chosen restaurant concepts that contain certain attribute levels by choosing several times “A possibility”. Those levels may be considered to be a must-have. Figure 27 shows an example of a screen shot:

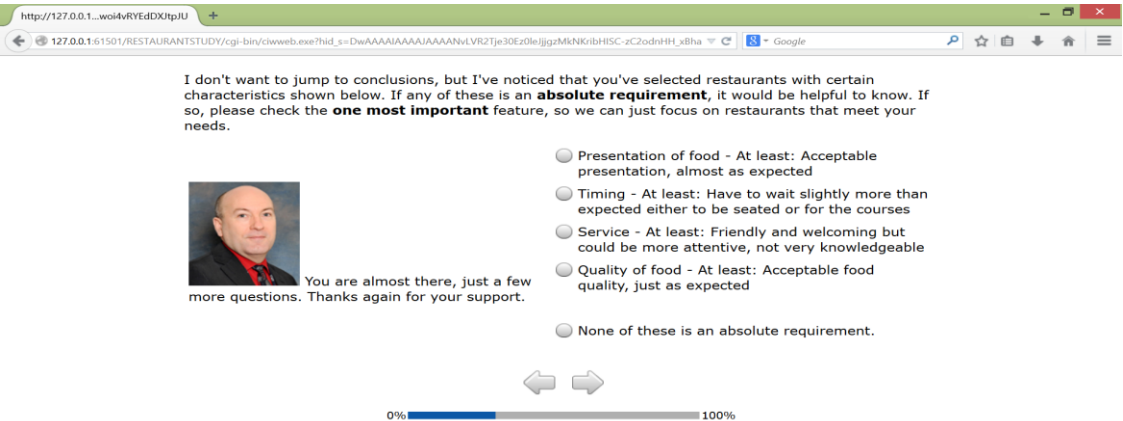


Figure 27: Must-have screen question

The process of looking for must-haves and unacceptables together with showing screening questions (8 in total), allows focus on a smaller number of restaurant concepts to test in the next section, called the Choice Tournament.

3.7.11.3 Choice Tournament

In this section the respondent was shown three restaurant concepts in each screen that survived the previous section. Eight choice tasks are shown, and respondents can choose only one of the concepts in each screen. An example can be seen in figure 28:

The screenshot shows a web browser window with a URL starting with 'http://127.0.0.1...'. The page content includes a message: 'Among these three, which is the best option? (I've grayed out any features that are the same, so you can just focus on the differences.) (1 of 8)'. Below this is a table with three columns representing different restaurant concepts (E68, E39, E54) and rows for various attributes. The attributes are: Price, Presentation of food, Ambiance, Quality of food, Timing, Range of beverages, Portion sizes, Service, and Music. The table compares these attributes across the three concepts, with some features grayed out to highlight differences.

	E68	E39	E54
Price	£68	£39	£54
Presentation of food	Excellent overall food presentation	Excellent overall food presentation	Excellent overall food presentation
Ambiance	Quiet, customers can engage in private conversations	Quiet, customers can engage in private conversations	Quiet, customers can engage in private conversations
Quality of food	Good food quality, slightly better than expected	Acceptable food quality, just as expected	Acceptable food quality, just as expected
Timing	Perfect timing to be seated and for the courses to get to the table	Perfect timing to be seated and for the courses to get to the table	Perfect timing to be seated and for the courses to get to the table
Range of beverages	Some variety of wines and spirits and non-alcoholic drinks, better than the standard	Ample list of wines and spirits and non-alcoholic drinks	Ample list of wines and spirits and non-alcoholic drinks
Portion sizes	Smaller portions so as not to waste food	Smaller portions so as not to waste food	Smaller portions so as not to waste food
Service	Knowledgeable and extremely attentive and very friendly	Friendly and welcoming but could be more attentive, not very knowledgeable	It could be more knowledgeable, but attentive, friendly, welcoming and relaxed
Music	Low background music	Low background music	No music

Figure 28: Example of Choice task

The greyed-out rows show attributes that are tied across restaurant concepts so that respondents focus only on the remaining differences. Tied attributes are the most key factors (based on the cut-off-rules seen in the screening section) and thus the respondent is encouraged to look further at features of secondary importance as well. Each choice results in a winning concept that will then compete in subsequent rounds until the preferred concept is identified. That allows for understanding what attributes are the most important as they are trading them off with price. For example in the case in figure 28, respondents have to pay significantly more for highest levels of Food quality and service; that will be a trade-off so they may prefer to trade off a lower level for a lower price.

3.7.12 Analysing data from the questionnaire

This section is divided mainly into counts and cross tabulations and also at utility scores per level of attributes with HB analysis.

3.7.12.1 Counts and Cross-Tabulations first part of the questionnaire

The first part of the questionnaire revealed important information about preferences for particular attributes by certain segments. In this case, it was possible to conduct simple counts of the most preferred attributes and levels that could be selected by groups but also to establish if there are significant differences between segments of consumers. A Pearson's chi-square test was used to compare frequencies observed in the following categories:

- Frequency of eating out.
- Age groups.
- Gender
- Family Lifecycle
- Occasion

Comparisons are made when frequencies are higher than 5, using Howell's (2006) suggestions.

3.7.12.2 Counting Analysis for ACBC

The second part of the questionnaire (ACBC exercise) also provided useful insights. ACBC software allows the count of:

- **BYO:** How often levels were included
- **Unacceptables:** How often levels were unacceptable
- **Must-Haves:** How often levels were must-haves
- **Screeners:** How many products were screened into the consideration set
- **Choice Tournament:** How often levels were included in the "winning" concept

Relevant cross-tabulations were made between some of these counts and certain segments, for example occasion, gender or age group. The output of counts is particularly useful for understanding how the preference for a particular restaurant concept varies in function of price. Since higher level attributes have a higher price and vice-versa, then if a few respondents select a low level of an attribute, which attracts a much lower price; that means that regardless of the reduction in price that level is not attractive, showing non-compensatory behaviour. A higher percentage for an intermediate level will mean that customers are not prepared to pay a premium price for a higher level of an attribute.

Counts can then be a good starting point for the analysis. However, if there is disagreement about which levels are preferred; then summaries of importance from aggregate counts can artificially bias estimates of attributes' importance. Therefore a more accurate analysis of attribute importances can be determined using the utility values generated by HB analysis (Sawtooth Software, 2013).

3.7.12.3 Hierarchical Bayes (HB) Analysis: Calculation of utilities and importances

A utility is a number that represents the attractiveness of a feature, for example great variety of dishes including vegetarian options and specials, which is one of the three levels for the attribute menu options. A basic problem has been to create individual-level utilities for each respondent (Howell, 2009). It should be noted that individual utilities offer more valuable information than looking into the average of a sample. For example, if there are two options with respect to portion sizes and half of the respondents go for larger portions and the other half for smaller portions, the averaged result would conclude that consumers are ambivalent with regards to portion sizes and that can be the worst conclusion. With individual level utilities it is possible to distinguish market segments that go for larger portions and target them separately. In the ACBC exercise the respondents have a screening section of 10 choice tasks. If respondents select the attributes with the larger number of attributes, the maximum number of combinations is $(5 \times 4 \times 2 \times 4 \times 4 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 5 = 192,000 \text{ combinations})$. It may seem a daunting task to estimate the preferences for that colossal number of combinations from the relatively small amount of information collected. The BYO and screening sections allow for a reduction in that number and then the choice tasks present (3 restaurant concepts within the 10 attributes; that is 30 combinations at a time). Anyway estimating preferences accurately is a challenging task that can be done using HB analysis in the ACBC Sawtooth Software platform.

The use of HB estimation has greatly enhanced usability and predictive validity of discrete choice analysis data (Sawtooth Software, 2013).

Bayesian methods have been used successfully for the estimation of individual conjoint part-worths (Allenby *et al.*, 1995; Allenby and Ginter, 1995; Lenk *et al.*, 1996). Without delving into detail on the many advantages that it has over other methods, it is now possible to estimate random-effect choice models with 50 or more dimensions (Allenby *et al.*, 2005). In the presence of high consumer heterogeneity for problems that involve a high number of attributes, Yu *et al.* (2011) demonstrated the improvements that an adaptive choice-based design has, coupled with HB estimation. In this case with 9 attributes (excluding pricing as it is a function of the other attributes) with levels ranging from 2 to 5 levels, the number of maximum dimensions is around 50. For that reason, estimation of part-worth utilities using HB is conducted in the ACBC platform of Sawtooth Software almost by default. Practical use of HB has been possible due to the development of fast computers, which was just a distant goal in the 1990s, but a reality now. The ACBC HB analysis with 20,000 iterations took about 30 minutes with the researcher's Acer Aspire S7 Laptop that has the following features:

- Operating System: Windows 8.1
- Processor: Intel® Core TM [i5-3337U@1.80](#) GHz
- System type: 64-bit Operating System, X64-based processor
- Installed memory (RAM): 4.00 GB (3.82 GB usable)

As explained by Jervis *et al.* (2012) the HB algorithm estimates the average utility score for the entire sample size studied and then uses respondents' individual data to compare that respondent's data with the total sample average. It is called hierarchical because it has two levels. At the higher level, utility part-worths of individuals are described by a multivariate distribution (a vector of means and a matrix of covariances); whereas at the lower level the probabilities of choosing particular alternatives are calculated using a Multinomial Logit Model. Variability in the overall utility estimation from individual respondent choices is then reduced. Lenk *et al.* (1996) found that HB models can capture heterogeneity even when there are not sufficient observations to obtain for individual level estimates. From those findings, the assumption is that respondents were drawn from a single population of normally distributed part-worths, thus as pointed out by Orme and Howell (2009, p. 2): 'the bottom-line on extensive simulation studies and experience is that HB estimation is fairly robust to the normal assumption of part-worth heterogeneity'. Orme and Howell explained that the single-normal

population assumption is only an influencing factor on the final-part worth estimates, and does not constrain the final part-worths to reflect normality. This analysis will be conducted for the overall sample of respondents. This analysis is termed as undifferentiated HB analysis (Sawtooth software calls it generic HB). It is also interesting to define the population distribution based on respondent characteristics or control variables. These variables are called covariates. The covariate to be tested will be occasion, in order to see if there are differences in preferences due to occasion. This is called HB with covariates and how the covariate was selected is shown in figure 29 below

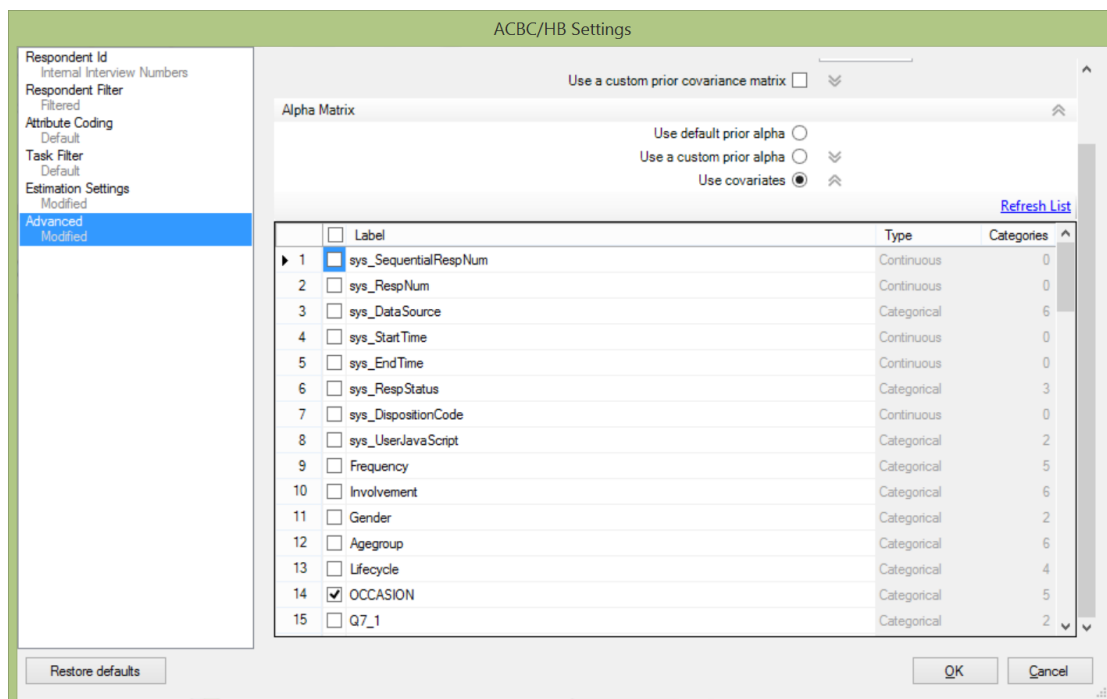


Figure 29: Selecting the covariate occasion for HB analysis

The difference with generic HB is that respondents are compared to their predicted mean based on the characteristics of a parameter that looks into the particular characteristics of an occasion segment rather than comparing it with the mean of the total population.

With regard to how well the solution (average utility part-worth of every respondent) fits the data, the value called Root Likelihood (RLH) offered an estimate. The best possible value is 1.00 and the worst possible is the inverse of the number of choices available in the average task, in this case there are three choices, thus that value is ($1/3 = 0.33$). In some spread-sheets the system multiplies RLH by 1000 so the worst possible value is 333 and perfect fit is 1000.

The value of RLH obtained was 0.67 (670). It can be interpreted as just better than twice the chance level.

In conjoint studies, attribute importance can be derived from utility scores. Sawtooth Software determines importance scores by calculating the utility score range multiplied by 100%. The analysis looked into the difference in utility part-worths between levels of an attribute and the relative importance that each attribute will have for certain occasions. It is important to note that part-worth utilities are scaled to sum zero within each attribute, therefore some part-worth could be negative numbers but what matters is the difference between levels of an attribute. A word of caution is necessary here, attribute importances are directly affected by the range of levels chosen. For example, if there are four levels for food quality and five levels for service, it may affect the difference between the importances of the two levels, whereby all previous research has demonstrated that food quality is by far the most important attribute. That is why although importances can give an indication of preference, particularly if there are significant differences in importances, it is also essential to look at differences between levels of a particular attribute to ascertain critical differences in the preference for those levels. Therefore, the HB analysis also looked into these differences after the analysis of importances.

3.7.12.4 HB with covariates

Orwell and Howell (2009) explained that when segmentation studies are conducted, distances between utility means of segments are diminished. This is because HB shrinks the individual estimates of the part-worths towards the population mean. It is obviously better to ascertain whether there are significant differences between segments if that is possible. That can be done if HB with covariates is used rather than generic HB. It is important for this research to find out whether average importances differ according to the occasion of eating out and whether differences between levels of attributes are significantly different. If statistical tests such as Anova had been conducted, the means would have been affected as they are compared with the total sample rather than with their particular segment. Orwell and Howell (2009) compare average importances for three segments with a generic HB run and with a covariates HB run and find that there was almost 50% more spread in the latter for a particular attribute. This enhanced spread was not obtained by chance but because it offers a truer representation of their segment means because of a more accurate representation of population means in the HB upper model. This means that there is a more meaningful, robust

and accurate analysis between segments. For that reason, HB with covariates will be conducted for looking at possible differences between occasions for eating out. The HB analysis was conducted for 80,000 iterations (figure 30).

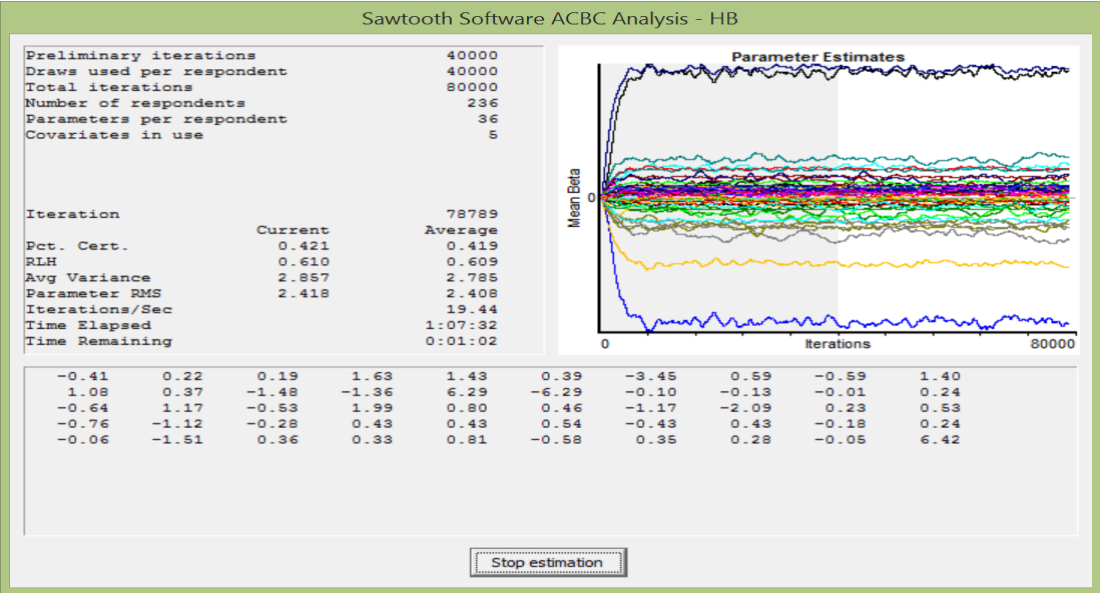


Figure 30: HB analysis with covariates

3.7.13 Credibility of research

This research entailed both qualitative and quantitative stages and demonstrating credibility entails different approaches. Indeed, it is acknowledged that the nature of quantitative research can be threatened by an overemphasis on a scientific method as opposed to the art and creativity of interpretation (Whittemore *et al.*, 2001). Nonetheless, qualitative researchers query the need to demonstrate that their studies are credible (Creswell and Miller, 2000). In this line of thought, validity – or its equivalent - and qualitative research should not be seen as oxymorons (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007).

In this section these issues are addressed, looking into the two stages of the research in separate sections. The limitations of the interpretive approach have been discussed in the light of credibility of research, and the rejection of parameters that are used to assess credibility of research in quantitative research for qualitative research. Indeed, Whittemore (2001) stated that the underlying assumptions and tenets of qualitative research appear to be incompatible, and for this reason, terms must be aligned with the interpretive approach. In qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that the terms credibility, transferability,

dependability and confirmability are more appropriate for assessing the rigour of a qualitative study than the terms validity and reliability, whereas validity and reliability will be used for quantitative research.

3.7.13.1 Validity

Bryman (2008) summarised validity as the issue of whether an indicator (or set of indicators) that is designed to determine a concept really measures that concept. In our case, that will mean: Do consumers really make decisions to select restaurants based on a number of attributes evaluated? Robson (2002) explained that if a piece of research can plausibly be explained through causal relationships, then this investigation is referred to as having Internal Validity. In this research, that will mean that if restaurants that have certain attributes are more likely to be selected, therefore a causal relationship between the degree of having the attribute and the likelihood to be selected could be established. Four basic approaches to appraise validity are face validity, content validity, criterion validity and construct validity (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010).

Bruce *et al.* (2008) defined face validity as the degree to which questions appear to be relevant, reasonable, unambiguous and clear. This refers to the particular questions in the survey. After consultation with peers at the University of West London, with or without experience in restaurants, important feedback was incorporated, for example the term restaurant gear, mentioned by a respondent in the focus groups was changed to tableware as it was more representative of the meaning conveyed. Content Validity entails evaluating the content of a survey (Kerlinger, 1973) and it is more systematic, logical and comprehensive than face validity (Bruce *et al.*, 2010). In this case this referred to the whole content of the survey which was discussed with the supervisors of this thesis and was piloted for enhancing content validity.

Angoff (1988, p. 26) looked into the concept of construct validity (also called measurement validity) and argues that 'theoretical conception of the data dictates the nature of the data to be collected'. This theoretical conception originates from the study of restaurant attributes sufficiently examined in the literature review. Constructs are concepts that are measured with multiple variables. Construct validity answers the question: "Is the concept accurately defined and does the instrument or tool actually measure the concept that it is supposed to measure" (Higgins and Straub, 2006). In the questionnaire attributes can be perceived as constructs and

the various variables are the levels for that attribute. Boesch *et al.* (2013) explained that in conjoint analysis attributes and levels are obtained by qualitative methods. Paul (1981) studied how construct validation could be achieved through quantitative methods such as factor analysis and correlation, which prompts the question of whether construct validity is an adequate way to approach credibility of a conjoint study. Therefore, instead of following a post-positivist stance, it is possible to examine this aspect from the constructivist lens, in which confirmability replaces construct validity, whose goal is to assess the extent to which the conclusions are the most reasonable ones obtainable from the data. This can be appraised by describing the procedures in detail as has been done in this thesis and by integrating several views (Boesch *et al.*, 2013). An example can be provided with the aspect of ambiance or atmospherics. Due to the fact that ambiance is a multiple construct; it encompassed several factors when analysing the literature review and the focus group interviews. In the focus groups, aspects related to ambiance were elicited such as appearance (how the restaurant looks) and décor, lighting. Coolican (2004) suggested creating meaningful links for a superior interpretation of what is being asked. Kim and Moon (2009) reviewed a number of researches about servicescape and a number of dimensions such as ambiance, design, cleanliness are linked differently by different authors. For instance, the aspect of appearance can be linked to how clean a room appears; then it gives the notion of overall appearance, including a clean environment, whereas décor is related to how the place is lit as linked by Lucas (2003). In this case, this implied an analysis of the interviews, an interpretation of the literature review and observation through the experience of the author of this thesis in the restaurant business. This was reinforced with what Boesch *et al.* (2013) termed 'feedback-driven exploration' which in this case entailed feedback loops in the piloting stage but it is suggested that this could be broadened to other researchers and industry experts in the future.

3.7.13.2 Reliability

Kerlinger (1973) defined reliability as tantamount to dependability, stability, consistency, accuracy and predictability and adds that if a research is unreliable it is not possible to depend on it. Reliability is connected to measurement validity: 'if a measure of a concept is unstable in that it fluctuates and is unreliable, it simply cannot be providing a valid measure of the concept in question' (Bryman, 2008; p. 32). Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2002) explained the concept of reliability by placing these questions:

- Will the research instrument produce the same results on other occasions?
- Will observations that can be deemed as similar be observed by other researchers?

- Is there a transparent way to interpret the raw data?

One of the advantages of discrete choice tasks is that they do not depend on a scale that could be subject to different interpretations. Therefore, the research design could answer those questions with a resounding yes. Reliability can be replaced by dependability and this is appraised by examining the research questions and the features of the study and evaluating whether the two are congruent. Indeed, the research questions looked into evaluating attribute importance in various contexts and the research design addresses that. It also asks the question of whether reasonable care has been taken. It can be asserted that by piloting and by carefully checking attribute levels several times, this was achieved. With regard to accuracy, efforts have been made to ensure that the design of the survey is accurate, by measuring, for example its RLH.

3.7.13.3 Generalisability

This concept refers to the ability of a piece of research to be generalised beyond the boundaries of the particular context in which the research was conducted (Bryman, 2008). This is also referred to as external validity. In order to achieve generalisability it is necessary to use samples that are representative of the population in study, and this can be achieved by paying careful attention to sampling, i.e. random sampling (Veal, 1997).

The objective of this research is to offer explanations about restaurant selection, and should not be bound to the particular restaurants that the respondents will recall, or only be applicable to the way in which these respondents make selections, thus being able to make general inferences is of key importance for this research and this aspect was evaluated very carefully when designing the sampling strategy. The aspects of sampling were carefully considered and most particularly achieving a sample size so as to make the results representative of the entire population of restaurant goers.

3.7.13.4. Validity of Qualitative research

Validity was checked by reading the text several times and checking whether it is either repeated across several interviews or highlighted by participants as important. Validity is linked to the development of the codebooks (Appendix 14). Codebooks are essential as they provide 'a central reference for all the codes in the study' (Hennick *et al.*, 2011, p. 225). Two codebooks resulted, one for the consumer decision process, and another one for restaurant

attributes as they are connected with how choices are made. It is important to note that whilst developing the codebook it was thought that in order to cut down the never-ending list of restaurant attributes, some attributes were given a generic name and then by exploring subtleties within the node, several other sub-nodes were identified. This is the case for example of service, which was named 'cues for good service' in Nvivo.

3.7.13.5 Authenticity

Miles *et al.* (2014) termed this also as credibility and claimed that in authentic research, descriptions are context-rich, meaningful and "thick" (Geertz, 1973). Ponterotto (2006, p. 543) defines "thick description" as a central feature to interpreting social actions and entails assigning motivations and intentions for the said social actions. Ponterotto used the metaphor of a tree to explain the interconnection of three concepts, thick description, thick meaning and thick interpretation. The "thick description" constitutes the roots of the tree that nourish and feed "thick interpretation," represented by the solid trunk of the tree, which in turn feeds the branches and leaves of the tree, which represent the "thick meaning." It is the branches and leaves that most capture the viewers' attention, as is the case with "thick meaning," which grasps the attention of the reader of the study. An example of thick description is the in-depth detail of what is meant by food quality and rich descriptions of aspects such as freshness of ingredients. Thick interpretation was achieved by contrasting views and linking concepts with previous research. Aspects of the data that represented food quality for respondents is what is meant by thick meaning and are these branches and leaves that are the headings of the different aspects of the decision-making process. Cho and Trent (2006) approached thick description as a purpose of validity which is approached as a process that is holistic and requires prolonged engagement. In this case, the researcher conducted a reflective process of familiarisation with the literature, looking at literature, qualitative data and, when necessary, results of the online survey. Likewise, the focus group interviews were conducted over a number of months so as to engage more with the data and the themes elicited by it. Fossey *et al.* (2002) suggested that a number of considerations should be made to ensure authenticity. In the first place participants' views are presented in their own voices. In this case verbatim quotes are presented. Secondly a range of voices (including dissenting views) is shown. This is consistently achieved when different aspects are discussed and contrasted in the interviews. Finally, the descriptions and interpretations of data are recognisable to those having the experiences/in the situations described.

3.7.13.6 Transferability

Transferability refers to 'the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other settings or groups' (Hungler and Polit, 1999; p. 717). Shenton (2004) asserted that the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a reduced number of environments and individuals and for that reason demonstrating that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations is impossible. Having said that, although a positivistic demonstration may not be feasible, since generalizability in qualitative research is elusive (Whittemore *et al.*, 2001), it is deemed necessary that study findings fit into contexts outside the research situation (Sandelowski, 1986). Indeed although each unit of research (focus group) may be unique, it is also an example within a broader group and consequently the notion of transferability should not be instantaneously rejected (Denscombe, 1998).

Boesch *et al.* (2013) suggested that the findings should include thick descriptions for readers to assess the potential transferability appropriateness for their own settings. It is acknowledged that the results of a qualitative study must be understood within the particular characteristics of the geographical area in which the field work took place (Shenton, 2004). This is particularly true in the case of London where aspects like the congestion charge were brought to the fore. However, the aspect of restrictions to accessibility to the restaurant was the key issue here and that was discussed regardless of geographical boundaries. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended improving transferability by increasing the number of participants, stratifying the sample and looking purposively for contrasting participants. The number of focus group interviews had a sufficient number of participants so as to encourage debate and have different, contrasting views. And although a systematic stratification of the sample was not conducted, it was purposely composed of different age groups, professions, household income. For instance a group was made of people with links or working in the City of London, whereas other groups were a mixed bunch of different professions and ethnicities. That obviously contributes to increasing transferability of results to a broader population.

3.7.13.7 Dependability

Dependability replaces reliability in qualitative research (Seale, 1999). Shenton (2004) claimed that in order to address the dependability issue more directly, the processes within the study should be detailed profusely, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily get the same results. Following Shenton's recommendations this was achieved by:

- a) Describing what was planned and executed. In this case, the interview guide with clear guidance to what is looked for when asking the questions was presented.
- b) Detailing the operational detail of data gathering, with clear detail of the audit trail
- c) Producing an evaluation of the effectiveness of the process of enquiry (next section on reflections and limitations of research)

3.7.13.8 Confirmability

The concept of confirmability is tantamount to objectivity in qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). Appleton (1995) referred to this as neutrality, which is “freedom from bias in the research process” (Sandelowski, 1986). Patton (2002) recognised the difficulty of ensuring real objectivity because intrusion of the researcher’s biases is inevitable. Nonetheless, steps must be taken to guarantee as far as possible that the findings relate to the experiences and ideas of the participants rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). Boesch *et al.* (2013) suggested explicitly describing the methods, in order to compile an adequate integration of views and to retain the study data for reanalysis. That in practical terms is achieved by having a clear audit trail, which is critical for the reader to determine how far the data and constructs are emerging from it (Shenton, 2004). Bias can be reduced by using unobtrusive measures (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007). Indeed, the researcher working as interviewer tried intervening as little as possible and let conversation move freely when interesting views and discussion were emerging.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The paradigmatic position of post-positivism held in this thesis in relation with the ethics of research holds the view that research should not influence others (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). These authors, advocates of interpretivism and of the intrinsic nature of the researcher in the research process even proposed that both positivism and post-positivism tilt towards deception in relation to ethics. On the other hand, they acknowledged that research following these paradigms should be driven to pursue accuracy. Notwithstanding, the purpose of this research is to understand consumer processes, not to try to understand if and how the researcher may influence their attitudes.

Holbrook (1994) developed a general conceptualization and typology of ethical issues in consumer research. Following this classification, this thesis deals with ethical issues related to ethics in marketing research. Jacoby *et al.* (1998) raised concern about the uprightness of

consumer research as no compromise had been reached at an academic level, by a scholar association towards the development and adoption of a code of researcher ethics. However, this may not be a necessity considering that there has been an evolution in commercial consumer research practice with several consumer research associations developing and adopting stringent codes of practice. For instance the Market Research Society (MRS), the largest of its type, with members in 60 countries developed its first code of practice in 1954, with the latest edition in April 2010, reset in June 2012. These codes will be the basis for handling this research ethically. On the other hand, The Social Research society also developed its own set of ethical guidelines. Ethical considerations for consumer research can be seen as being within the realm of Social Research. This is because social research can be defined as multi-sectoral: (governmental, academic, commercial, voluntary and non-profit) and interdisciplinary (sociology, psychology, economics, politics, marketing, social work etc.). Furthermore, 'it is international and multi-problem based' (Social Research Society, 2003; p. 5). One of the main areas of concern highlighted by consumer researchers is informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality (Kozinets, 1998). With regard to these issues MRS code of April 2010 is very specific:

- 'The anonymity of Respondents must be preserved unless they have given their informed consent for their details to be revealed or for attributable comments to be passed on' (p. 13).
- 'If Respondents have given consent for data to be passed on in a form which allows them to be personally identified, Members must: demonstrate that they have taken all reasonable steps to ensure that the data will only be used for the purpose for which the data were collected; and fully inform respondents as to what will be revealed, to whom and for what purpose' (p. 13).
- 'If there is to be any recording, monitoring or observation during an interview, Respondents must be informed about this both at recruitment and at the beginning of the Interview' (p. 14)

The Ethical guidelines published by the Social Research Society in December 2003 are deemed as a very relevant guide to follow in this research. It is not considered necessary to revisit these guidelines again, but it is important to highlight that they are very detailed in terms of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. On the other hand, these guidelines also

refer to standard protocols for checking ethical considerations. This thesis will keep the advice of the Social Research Society in terms of routinely checking the project to ensure that the research is meeting ethical requirements.

3.9. Reflections and conclusions

This chapter started by considering the research objectives and research scope which influenced the research methodology to be used. Then, an examination of philosophy of research was conducted, discussing the main tenets that appear to have influenced consumer research and the adoption of a post-positivist perspective was made taking into account these research objectives and the deliberations made in the literature review section. The cognitive paradigm of consumer research influences the adoption of the research design which tends to be positivist. However, some of the research objectives, such as an understanding of the antecedents to the decision and the elicitation of restaurant attributes required an interpretivist approach. A post-positivist approach allows for complementarity of methods. However, the researcher adopted the viewpoint that paradigms are incommensurate. For this reason, whilst acknowledging the need for an integrative approach, it was considered that staged research seemed more appropriate as each stage is shaped by its own research paradigm. The first stage was the qualitative stage following an inductive-interpretivist approach using applied thematic analysis to make sense of the data collected. This stage looked into the main aspects surrounding the decision-making process in restaurant selection and shed more light on the aspect of restaurant attributes. The second stage pursued generalisability in order to attempt to predict the restaurant attributes that mostly affect the selection. Previous research has shown that this can be appropriately achieved with the use of Conjoint Analysis. Then the technique of Conjoint Analysis was discussed, including Discrete Choice Analysis. The latter seems to be the most adequate conjoint technique, which is supported by current and powerful technology in the investigation of product/service attributes. As for the particular choice of DCA, Adaptive Choice Based conjoint, a relatively new technique was selected. Some detail in how Sawtooth Software is used was also included in this chapter. The research design seemed to have achieved the desired results. However, the amount of data generated through qualitative research was underestimated. In hindsight, it seemed that there was enough material there to focus on understanding the antecedents to the decision, a full study of restaurant attributes and the relationship between restaurant attributes. Nonetheless, the second stage attempted to shed more light on the importance of

attributes and enabled the researcher to master the research technique of conjoint analysis which appears to be one of the most popular methods to study attributes at present, with potential for future development.

CHAPTER 4: QUALITATIVE DATA: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Qualitative data analysis

This chapter is divided into two separate parts; one will be devoted to how themes and categories were identified and developed. This part will discuss how the data was analysed using Nvivo. The second part refers to the analysis and discussion of data. This analysis is subdivided into two distinctive parts. The first of these parts will deal with the antecedents to the decision and choice considerations, structuring the main categories around the stylised EKB model of Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005). The second part looks into the restaurant attributes, their interrelationships and a data reduction of attributes to be tested in the second stage.

4.1.1 Conceptualising antecedents to the decision and choice considerations

The research followed Ritchie *et al.*'s (2014) framework for analysing data that started with familiarisation with the data. This process of data management began in the literature review and continued looking at the interview transcripts. Then an initial thematic framework, the stylised EKB model (Tuan-Pham and Higgins, 2005) was used. The model refers to problem recognition, information search, consideration set formation, evaluation of alternatives and choice. As the first three are considered to happen previous to the evaluation of alternatives will be titled "antecedents to the decision" (see figure 31). The other two will be titled "choice considerations (figure 32). The elicitation of other themes followed the structural approach (Di-Cicco *et al.*, 2004) in which the EKB model serves as a template and emerging themes are then allocated within the structure.

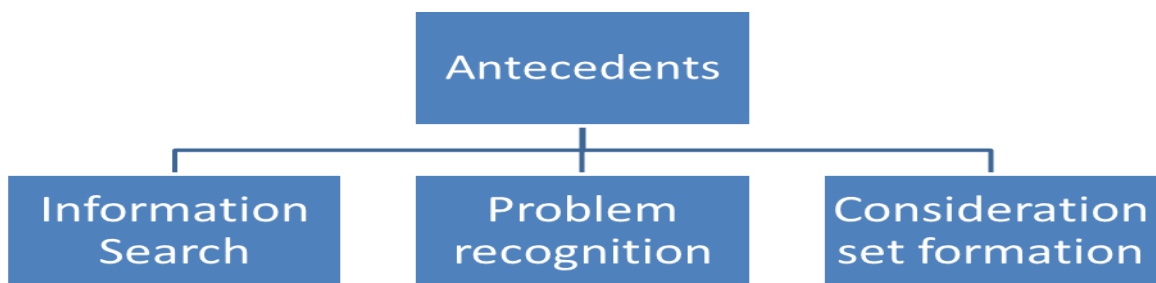


Figure 31: Stages of the consumer Decision Process: antecedents

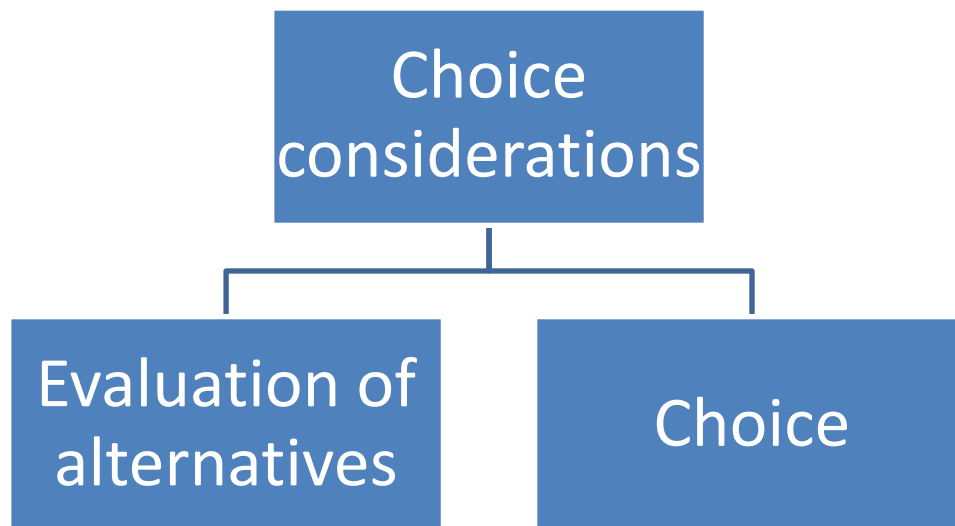


Figure 32: Stages of the consumer Decision Process: choice consideration

4.1.2 Developing themes

The codes that were derived deductively come from the initial thematic framework, the stylised EKB model and some sub-themes were also derived from the literature. For example, information search is one of the stages in the EKB model, whereas word of mouth is a sub-theme of information search. Some codes were derived inductively. For instance, when respondents were prompted about recalling the last time they chose a restaurant, the direction of the conversation touched various aspects of the decision. The interviews were read and codes were assigned. For example, respondents spoke about considering who they were with when they made the decision. That emerging theme was titled “companionship”. Companionship appears to be part of problem recognition, which is the origin of the decision for eating out. For example, on the spur of the moment a group of people may decide to go out and eat. Afterwards, the theme budgets and money available appeared. Another aspect brought forward by the respondents was that after work, they may agree to have a drink and then they may decide to either have a meal there or move to another place. That was titled “Drink before restaurant”. That was then put under the theme “companionship” (a sub-theme). The revision of the literature looked at the influence of groups on the decision, which elicited the topic of group dynamics. A combination of the different aspects brought to the fore by respondents was considered under the theme “Decision Dynamics” of which companionship and the context for being together (for example, meeting for a drink after work which leads to a meal afterwards) and budgetary considerations emerged as sub-themes. This

process was repeated for all the other stages in the EKB process. The final node structure can be found in appendix 15.

4.1.3 Conceptualising and classifying restaurant attributes

The qualitative data analysis had three main purposes. Although there was some overlapping when conducting the analysis, they were treated separately in this section. These purposes are:

- Classifying attributes
- Defining attributes
- Reduction of attributes for testing in the second stage (quantitative research)

4.1.3.1 Classifying attributes

The process started with a familiarisation of attributes in the literature review. It was possible to classify restaurant attributes after a constant comparative analysis. This method was compared by Dye *et al.* (2000) to a kaleidoscope of data. This data is subjected to processes such as categorisation, comparison, inductive analysis and refinement. This analysis entailed comparisons between the qualitative data from the focus groups and existing research on restaurant attributes and within literature on restaurant attributes as well. There are authors who have attempted to classify restaurant attributes and other authors who have simply listed attributes without classifying them. The attributes classification (or models) were:

- Campbell-Smith (1967): food and drink, service, ambiance and atmosphere, value for money and cleanliness-hygiene.
- Anderson and Mossberg (2003) model: food, service, fine cuisine, restaurant interior, good company and other customers
- Gustaffson *et al.* (2006) –FAMM model: room, meeting, products, management control system.
- Hansen *et al.* (2005): Core product, restaurant interior, personal social meeting, company and restaurant atmosphere.

In the first place, the attributes from the literature were analysed and they were classified into a number of tangible or intangible attributes. The attributes mentioned by several authors plus the ones elicited by respondents were put under a heading, and brackets were used to clarify whether they referred to a tangible or intangible element. The analysis attempts to

demonstrate the meaning through a description of the category. This was compared with the categories elicited from the interviews and a continuous process of comparison with the categories in the literature. A semantic comparison of terms was conducted to establish similarities. Secondly, batches were formed following the preliminary rule of inclusion, based originally on the meal experience model but checking whether other models could provide a useful category as well. In the process the rules of inclusion were revised as some categories may seem to overlap and some data emerging from the interviews appears to shape an existing list of attributes into a distinctive new category. An example of overlap occurred in the case of cleanliness and hygiene, which was deemed to be an aspect of a category rather than a category itself; the headings were then re-organised. Initially, cleanliness and hygiene was a category but when analysing the lists, it was considered that it was more appropriate to put it under a new category (Facilities). New categories were created when none of the existing categories in the models of the literature seemed to be appropriate. For example, references to branding, awards and chef reputation were not deemed to fit into any of the categories discussed, so a new category called image was created.

Another issue considered was the relationship between categories. In the meal experience model Campbell-Smith (1967) value for money is considered to be another attribute. Another more recent research also followed a marketing mix approach to attributes and price/value is one of the attributes to be considered by consumers. Other models like Anderson and Mossberg (2004) and Gustaffson *et al.* (2006) established a relationship between price and expectations of service. Jensen and Hansen (2007) discussed the concept of consumer value, which they linked to pre-dispositions. That means that consumer expectations on attributes are based on value considerations. Ha and Jang (2012) conducted research on attributes and their research is underpinned by attribute value-theory (Reynolds and Gutman, 1988; Gardial *et al.*, 1994; Woodruff, 1997). This research delved into respondents' perceptions on the considerations of value for money and attempt to establish whether considerations of several attributes are underpinned by expectations based on how much they are willing to spend. Therefore, attribute-value theory was applied for analysing how the categories of attributes are interrelated.

Summing up, this study of attributes resulted in categories which fit into existing categories and another that did not (a new category created). After several refinements the final category

array was obtained. Then an analysis of links between these categories was also conducted. Another aspect considered was the relationship between variables, more particularly whether consumer value and price considerations underpin customer expectations and thus evaluation of restaurant attributes are dependent on value appraisals. A new model of classifying attributes resulted after this process of comparing categories and the analysis of attributes interrelationships.

4.1.3.2 Defining attributes

In the literature authors explored the attribute “food quality” (June and Smith, 1987; Lewis, 1980, 1981; Auty, 1992; Law, 2008). The research attempted to provide a better definition of what quality meant and also which attributes are part of the classification under a category. This aspect was probed in the interviews in order to elicit what quality of food meant for the respondents. Quality in turn, appears to be a sub-attribute under Food and Drink related attributes and aspects of quality are sub-attributes. The whole list of attributes under food and drink after a study of the literature and the focus group resulted in the following list:

Table 7: Attributes and sub-attributes for food–related attributes

Attributes	Sub-attributes
Variety of food	Specials, vegetarian options.
Food presentation	-----
Portion sizes	-----
Quality	Savouriness, Freshness, Combination of flavours
Alcohol availability	-----
Nutritional aspects	-----
Authenticity/Type of cuisine	-----
Unusual food	-----

The interviewees talked about various aspects of the attributes and then codes were developed inductively. For instance the code “Freshness” was developed when respondents referred to freshness as a proxy for quality. Another respondent elaborated on the aspect of combination of flavours. An audit trail shows the code and the text where the code was mentioned and the context where it was mentioned. For example the aspect of noise is

connected to the context of ambiance and/or atmosphere. For that reason noise was considered to be a sub-code of the attribute “Ambiance” which is an abbreviation for ambiance and atmosphere. In some cases, the definition of attributes informed the quantitative stage of the research. For example, an attribute like variety of food has different levels. It means that it can range from less varied to more varied, but what is understood for variety and more varied needs refinement. As it can be seen in the table above, variety refers to having options like specials and vegetarian options, not only mentioning less varied and more varied which lacks meaning for the respondent. The levels of attributes are chosen by the researcher based mainly on the researcher experience, analysis from the interviews and feedback obtained from colleagues and the thesis supervisors.

4.1.3.3 Reduction of attributes

Under the various categories of restaurant attributes a large number of attributes and sub-attributes resulted. This was found as the aggregation of attributes from all research plus the attributes that were elicited from the interviews. This large number could not be tested in the second stage. Therefore a process of reduction of attributes (data reduction) was conducted. Once the categories were found, the attributes were listed under each category. In this case, there are preliminary studies on restaurant attributes. An initial list of attributes is generated from literature. This initial compendium of attributes can be modified if some attributes emerge inductively (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This had the advantage of supporting the accumulation and comparison of research findings across several studies, as pointed out by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009). This process of data reduction was followed to find the final attribute list. It is important to note that this process does not attempt to be so comprehensive that it overwhelms the reader with details but is intended to grab the essence of data (Tesch, 1990). This was an interpretive endeavour which means differences in how researchers interpret data, even when confronted with the same task (Sandelowski, 1993). This continuous process of comparison took four iterations. The total number of attributes considered at first was 39. The second iteration reduced it to 24. The category of image-related attributes was not included for the following iterations as it is considered that the aspect of image requires more of an interpretive approach and defining attributes and levels is not appropriate since defining image is too subjective. The third iteration reduced it to 18 and the final iteration to 14. The data reduction process is examined in more detail in chapter 5 and in appendix 16.

4.2 Summing up

This section has looked at how data was analysed for the purposes of classifying attributes, defining attributes and reducing attributes.

The comparison of restaurant attributes from the literature together with an analysis of the interviews resulted in a new way of putting attributes in categories. This resulted in a new model different from the existing models of the meal experience classification (Campbell-Smith, 1967), Hansen *et al.* (2005), the FAMM model (Gustaffson *et al.*, 2006) and Anderson and Mossberg (2004). Then the relationship between these categories was established, applying attribute-value theory. Analysis of the interviews ascertained the appropriateness of the application of attribute-value theory. This analysis then allowed the development of a model that looks into the relationships between attributes.

The analysis of the interview also delved into the definition of attributes and sub-attributes. This helps to clarify, for example, what is meant by aspects like quality of food and drink referred to in the literature. The interviews attempted to define more clearly what these attributes are for the respondents.

Finally, this stage (qualitative) looked into the restaurant attributes and the levels to be tested in the quantitative stage. A process of data reduction was followed that reduced the number of attributes from 39 to 14. Some levels of attributes, for example variety of food, were ascertained from an analysis of the interviews.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS: QUALITATIVE STAGE

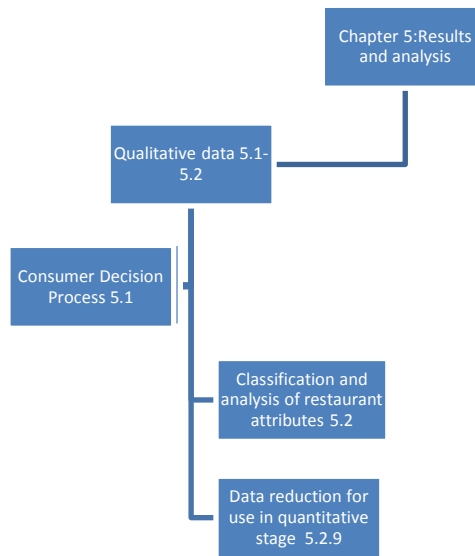


Figure 33: Scheme of chapter 5

This section first discusses the antecedents to the decision following the structured approach of the stylised EKB model (Tuan–Pham and Higgins, 2005). It discusses the antecedents of the decision from the data that emerged from the interviews. This is followed by a distinctive subsection devoted to restaurant attributes. In the first place, there is a discussion on previous classification of attributes and the discussion of the data that emerged from the interviews so as to develop a new grouping of attributes into categories. Secondly, there is a discussion on the definition of attributes and sub-attributes. This helps to clarify what attributes like quality of food and drink entail. This arises from the analysis of the interviews. Thirdly, there is a short discussion as to how the original compilation of attributes (39) was reduced to 14 attributes to be tested in the quantitative stage of the research (Chapter 6).

5.1 Considerations on the consumer decision process (CDP)

This section focuses on the first stage of the CDP (antecedents) see figure below. There are some references to the second stage but the second stage is mostly covered in the separate section for the second stage (quantitative research).

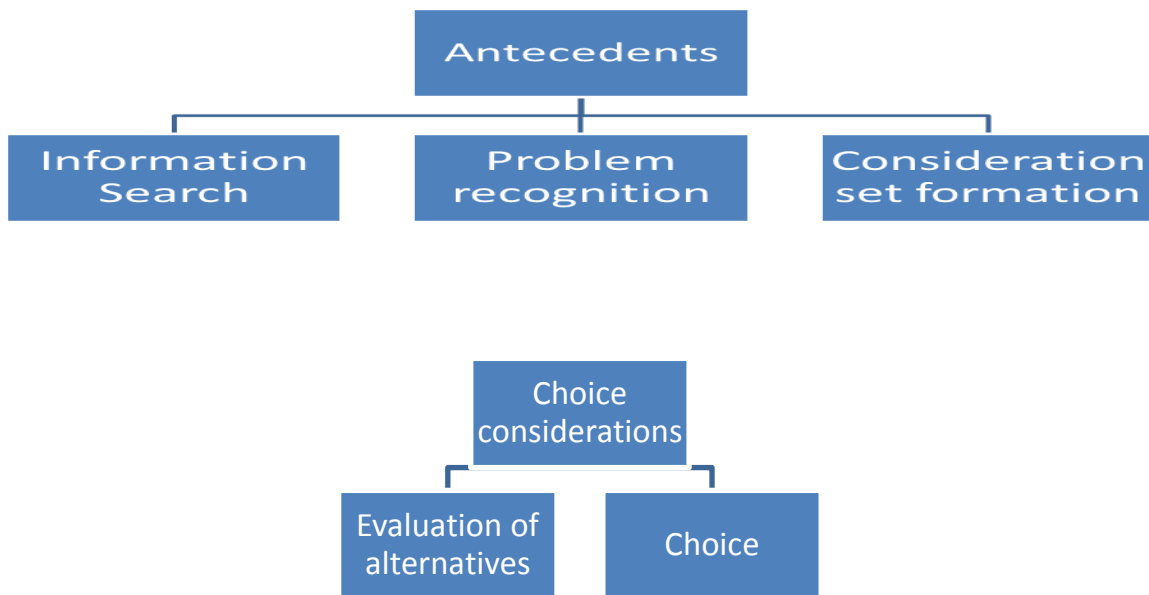


Figure 34: Stages of the CDP process

5.1.1 Problem recognition

As discussed in the literature review, problem recognition is a crucial stage with a clear differentiation between an actual state (looking for a restaurant for leisure) and desired state (finding a restaurant that satisfied the need of the restaurant goers) with aspects affecting either the desired and/or the actual state. In this case, the aspects considered as relevant to how the consumers state their problem are the occasion for eating out, how the problem emerges, which could be through endogenous activation, and whether companionship affects how the problem of selecting a restaurant is framed in the first place.

5.1.1.1 Problem recognition: the role of occasion for eating out

The theme of occasion for eating out was repeatedly mentioned across all the interviews by several respondents. For instance:

... it depends on what the occasion is. So it if was a really special occasion I want to spend lots and lots of money and some of them are extremely expensive and you look at the menus and they are quite prohibitive; I think that there's not much on them and the wine lists are extremely expensive....

it also depends on the situation..., like this person's 60th birthday....it sort of frames the kind of restaurant you want to go to.

For a 60th birthday party you are not going to a modern fusion restaurant but you would rather go to a more classic restaurant... but it really depends on the reason why are you going to the restaurant. Are you going to have fun, are you going to get drunk? Are you just going to celebrate? I think the reason to go to a restaurant is very important.

It can be inferred from the data that any decision for selecting a restaurant is most normally preceded by a consideration of the occasion for eating out, therefore in the EKB model, occasion seems to be a factor affecting either the desired state or actual state, which Bruner and Pomazal (1988) called current situation. The criticality of occasion was discussed by Mehta and Maniam (2002) and Kivela (1997). This centrality of occasion underpinned the study of restaurant attributes by June and Smith (1987), although these researchers did not conduct previous research that justifies the approach of cross-tabulating restaurant attribute importance with the type of occasion.

5.1.1.2 Problem recognition: Endogenous activation

Endogenous activation, as part of the stage of problem recognition (Tuan-Pham and Higgins, 2005) appears to have several facets. A respondent mentioned cravings as a contributor to that activation:

I think sometimes you can almost have sort of a craving, actually often is a craving especially if you have had a drink the night before, but you have an idea in your mind like: "I want to go out and eat Italian or Indian food or whatever it might be".

So sometimes it can actually be informed by how you wake up in the morning and say "This is the type of food I want" ... so that obviously narrows the search.

Bruner and Pomazal (1988) approached the stage of problem recognition as an arousal of needs affecting the actual state. On the other hand, this is also connected with the second stage of the CDP process in figure 34 as the evaluation of alternatives can be alternative based or attribute-based. Cravings prompt for an alternative-based option, which in this case is type of cuisine. This means that cravings may lead to alternative-based considerations, prior to attribute-based considerations.

Endogenous activation appears to be related to consumer moods. This is what Belk (1975) called antecedent states. This mood appears to trigger a particular decision as one respondent put it:

Mood and emotion I mean, the assumption is that the food is going to be good, but the mood and the vibe and whether I know the restaurant manager or whatever fuels it'. This confirms that the decision cannot only be viewed from the cognitive perspective, as attributes may be assumed and emotions can take precedence over rational considerations.

Another aspect brought to the conversation by respondents was memories:

But it's the same with restaurants to a certain extent... that is "this is where we used to go or when we did this we were doing this...." and there is that association about those places...

Well, we used to come here a lot... I remember the first time we went we graduated and we were all working and we thought "we can afford to come here now!"

Me and my friend used to go out in Reading and used to go to this restaurant and we would go there at least once a week ...and we went back there at the age of thirty... and now he would never normally go anywhere near a restaurant like that... But we went back there because that is where we used to go.

Special affections and feelings can be part of that decision making process; for instance a respondent referred to the case of the disabled:

The only case I could bring up for that kind of emotions linked to a restaurant is called Dans Le Noirs which is a restaurant for people who are blind. And blind people are the servers and waiters and I perhaps can find or have an emotional experience and bond with it. But for the rest no, not really. I don't know many people that are restaurant owners... but I find the concept you go there and enjoy the food and you can see what you're eating and you know the people serving you are 100% blind. And you rate the experience greater than the food. Then yes I have an emotional bond.

5.1.1.3 Problem recognition: role of companionship

This theme can be considered from a broader perspective than the minimisation of social risk (Statt, 1997). Indeed, companionship seems to be a critical antecedent to the decision, as eating out in a restaurant is normally a social event. Indeed, respondents saw it as part of the decision dynamics:

The last time I ate out some friends came down and we decided to get into Soho purely to drink but then we decided to eat something quick and light because we did not want to sit down. So the decision was based on that'. Also there are the practical issues of convenience for the social group: 'Another consideration is who you are going to dinner with, because sometimes you have to think about what is convenient for everyone else to meet.

Companionship can also be looked at from a cultural perspective of the group constituents, for instance:

When I go out with the Spaniards and Italians food is important. You don't drink without food. While when I go out with the English, they have a few pints and then they go to a Kebab shop and have food.

This is the social context that Payne *et al.* (1993) referred to as group membership. It is a factor affecting the desired state of the problem recognition stage, referred to by Bruner and Pomazal (1988) as reference groups.

On the other hand, family as a social group has critical connotations as an antecedent:

My sons love the food there the lamb is very nice and they usually prefer to go there, and they tell me they want to go there. Even when I tell them it's busy you have to wait. It's what they like.

5.1.1.4 Problem recognition: characteristics of the decision makers

Oh and Jeong (1996) suggested that knowing what different segments consider when making selection decisions, and what satisfies their expectations, is key to accessing new or growing markets and achieving customer loyalty. On the other hand, Kivela (1997) emphasised the importance of market segmentation when analysing customer preferences for restaurants. It can be inferred then that segmentation considerations are prior to choice considerations as different segments may opt for different ways to consider choices. Respondents mentioned

the aspect of lifestyle market segmentation connected with the issue of geographic demographics, or cultural background:

I have been working with the French and the Germans; I think there is a disparity in terms of how they eat and what they eat. I think the French make time for food while the Germans eat what they can and what they have. So I think there is an inclination towards your cultural backgrounds. I think for the French it is a special time'. Another respondent added: 'But if you look at the Germans they are very efficient and therefore they don't want to spend a lot of time looking for restaurants.

Another aspect mentioned by respondents was that of age segmentation, particularly about older customers:

You see when I was their age I used to enjoy it but as I got older they don't seem to be very many restaurants catering for people of our age, that's the problem. They get fewer and fewer or you have to go into town and travel further and further, and that's the problem.

The latter seems to be an aspect of problem recognition that affects either the desired or actual state (Bruner and Pomazal, 1988).

5.1.2 Information search

Eating out in a restaurant has been considered a high involvement purchase. Blackwell *et al.* (2006) explained that customers' involvement means the actions consumers take towards minimising risks and maximising benefits. The higher the involvement, the more the consumer perceives risks in the pre-purchase context and therefore, the more he/she would engage in an information search about the product/service (Murray, 1991). There are several elements in this stage: extensiveness of the search, direction (internal or external), type of information searched and the structure of the search (alternative-based v attribute based) (Bettman, 1979; Hoyer and MacInnis, 2003). Several of these aspects are covered here under the themes of the role of word of mouth (internal search) and the media (external search).

5.1.2.1 Information search: the role of Word of Mouth (WOM)

The research has found that Positive WOM is particularly important for considering new restaurants in the consideration set:

For me if it is a new restaurant the decision is based on recommendation..., for example, not the industry I work in but the people I work with, they are all about trying the newest thing and they recommend a restaurant.

Positive WOM may not be the only trigger to the decision (see Theory of Reasoned Action) but it is definitely an important contributor to the decision: *'I think normally now the places that you hear through word of mouth are the ones that most influence my decision'*. Another respondent said: *'We did consider another restaurant but the wife made the decision that it probably was not appropriate. So in the end of the day it was word of mouth and also we had been there before'*.

Nonetheless, it was found that WOM has obvious limitations; a respondent acknowledged that the information is basically subjective:

...and everybody's opinion is different. We have been to restaurants based on somebody's recommendation and we really didn't like it.

On the other hand there is the recall limitation as put by a respondent:

I don't think word of mouth really works for me because I don't retain the information. I will forget by tomorrow, probably within two hours' time. I will never remember that. Unless I was really focused and I was looking for something'.

Negative WOM (NWOM) may be even more important: *'If someone said I'm going to whatever and someone said don't go there I wouldn't go'*. This confirms previous studies (Bone, 1995; Herr *et al.*, 1991; Mizerski, 1982; Wangenheim, 2005) that have found that the influence of NWOM is greater than positive word of mouth.

5.1.2.2 Information search: the role of the media

The role of media both printed and online was also a subject of research. It seems that consumers do consider food guides in which restaurants are scrutinised:

.... it used to be the good pub guide and we have kind of moved on to the good food guide. Mainly because I think the good pub guide had changed their bases of how they had entries into it and people now pay to be in it.

It appears that this information consists of both subjective statements such as the quality of food but also objective information such as price:

And you know the level and service of the food should be good. And generally it tells you roughly what you'll spend so you have an idea of what you'll spend.

Guides seem to be particularly important when you travel:

But sometimes when you travel and we kind of travel quite a bit, we go to visit family and friends, we were doing it a lot when we were living north and coming down south we would use the good pub guide rather than, stopping at a service station. Where it's still something on the way but the prices are not much more and actually get really nice food rather than rubbish at a service station.

On the other hand, guides either printed or online seem to be important for planning a night out, for example going out to the theatre when timing and location are vitally important:

...if it's some of my friends and we are going out and going to the theatre we would organize to go to dinner beforehand, see what restaurant is nearby, then we would choose from what is nearby. I might go to Google or Timeout to see what's available and check the reviews or something like that.

5.1.3 Consideration set formation

This aspect may appear concomitant with information search as the extensiveness of search may influence how the consideration set is formed. According to information processing theory 'the consideration set is formed and used by the consumer for subsequent purchase operations' (Roberts and Nedungadi, 1995). Davis and Warshaw (1991) suggested that consumers employ screening procedures using non-compensatory rules to reduce the consideration set to a manageable size. Some of the aspects explored were green consumerism and restaurant etiquette mentioned by respondents. This raises the question: would some consumers discard restaurants that are not "green"? Likewise, is restaurant etiquette a constraint? And if it is a constraint, should the restaurant be eliminated from the consideration set? An attempt to answer those questions is made in this section.

5.1.3.1 Green (ethical/sustainable) consumerism

Respondents were aware of the issues and the different aspects that come under the umbrella of sustainability and green consumerism. In the first place, respondents referred to the aspect of 'food miles' but without it having a major impact on the decision:

For me it (sustainability) wouldn't necessarily come into my decision making but if I was sat there and it became apparent and sourcing things locally and sort of restaurant's will do that and make a point of emphasising that and it reflects more of what they are doing and less trying to ship things around the world and you are feeding off what is local and having a greater produce, it's nice and it tends to be better reflected in better restaurants'. Local produce is linked to the idea of seasonality: 'And they tend to do seasonal things too, but no I don't think it, I think the thing that you feel better about is when they will say it is local and makes me think of one (restaurant) that we went to that one called the Archangel and that again was an all local one and they will say it's a local pig.

Another respondent linked this to organic food: *'the type of ingredients they use, if they are organic...'* Respondents also connect sustainable restaurants to engaging with a wider concept of corporate social responsibility, particularly, charitable giving: *'....And it's giving money back into the local community'*. Or about the environmental impact as well: *'.... how are they getting electricity into the restaurant...'*

The issue of animal welfare is also connected to green restaurants, a respondent said:

But you know it's not ethical in some way but when you do it you think back, like when you eat eggs you want to eat free range eggs to have a sense of empathy with the animal. You want them to be well looked after. But most restaurants you don't know, you just presume that the cows have been looked after and the chickens are roaming free.

In the same vein, another respondent replied:

Yeah exactly and you expect that of the restaurant. Like if you go to I don't know, I tend not to eat at cheaper restaurants because you don't know like Chinese restaurants you probably don't expect them to have the same type of value for the animal... but it does play a value to find my decision; I will put it at the back of my mind. So I know where it's coming from....

Many respondents simply said that they did not consider these issues at all. Others simply linked sustainability to another type of marketing gimmick: *'But when I look at the green factor I'm a bit of a cynic because I think it is a form of marketing'*. Others just see that as a *'nice to*

have thing' or as an issue that becomes important only when they become aware of something wrong or unethical:

It would be nice but it wouldn't impact my decision. It's nice if they do but obviously I wouldn't eat anything that would have been taken from an unsustainable source.

It appears that sustainability and green consumerism still does not play a major role in the decision making process and that even respondents who are aware of the issues do not make too much of this as an issue, as a respondent put it:

That would probably affect my overall opinion of the restaurant and how I feel but probably doesn't really alter my decision.

5.1.3.2 Restaurant etiquette

Restrictions in restaurants may play a role prior to selecting a restaurant. Some respondents are against the restrictions:

That was one thing that I wanted to bring up, also it's about how comfortable you feel. Restaurants sometimes put up barriers or sometimes you have barriers and think "Oh I can't go there unless I'm wearing a collar or a blazer or whatever" and some restaurants actually put these rules in place. Sometimes you might say "Actually, I just want to be very relaxed" and I will go to a little bistro where you don't feel the pressure, and it's about the kind of experience you want to feel. You don't want to feel like having fine dining and feel like you are dressed and feel like you have to act the part. So sometimes a lot of it can be about mood.

Nonetheless, some respondents were appreciative of these rules and again stressed the importance of occasion for having these restrictions in place:

You would probably dress differently, you would be in a different mood; you would want to feel like if it was a special occasion.

This aspect seems to be affecting the evaluation of alternatives (second stage of CDP) as this should have been part of the consideration set prior to considering whether to dress up for this particular occasion and restaurant.

5.1.3.3 Criteria order and consideration set size

It was clear that food was mentioned repeatedly as the most important attribute, normally over aspects like ambiance. This confirms the findings of Pantelidis (2010), Clark and Wood (1998), Mehta and Maniam (2002) and Longart (2010). A respondent commented:

If they said to me it's a great atmosphere... well I don't go to restaurants for atmosphere... If I wanted atmosphere I would pick a bar or a club... where I'm not sitting down and eating... Atmosphere for me it is not important, it would be how they do great tapas or great steaks...so I think the trigger for me would be the food.

Three other respondents said: *'The food is more important for me than the ambiance'; 'The food, I really enjoyed the food, and I'm really interested on how they cooked it'; 'So, yes for me I think the food would be a priority over the environment'.*

Finkelstein (1989) argued that ambiance-atmosphere was as important as food and drink Cousins *et al.* (2002) even ranked it higher than food and drink if the occasion was a night out. In these cases, these arguments appear not be supported by empirical evidence as found in the interviews. As one respondent put it:

I think ambiance is important, most definitely in a restaurant, but I would probably choose the food over the ambiance. If I liked the food there and the environment wasn't that great, I would be a bit forgiving because I liked the food.

Some respondents relate food with type of cuisine:

But our criteria (order) is ... which style of restaurant of what we want to eat, secondly the location and thirdly the price.

Curiously the aspect of service is hardly mentioned in these considerations unless it is mentioned to highlight the point that food is by far the most important attribute to consider a repeat visit:

Is it about the service or the ambiance? Any way it wouldn't be a reason for me to go back to a restaurant. If I had liked it (the food) maybe I would go back.

Other respondents add that location related attributes together with food quality are the most salient attributes:

Think some of the decisions are made on taste as well as convenience. We have an excellent restaurant I live in a village and there's three pubs and one of them has an excellent restaurant and really good chef and we chose to go around there because we don't have to drive.

With regards to consideration sets, the largest set mentioned was four restaurants, with some exceptions for special occasions. Four respondents commented on this: *'Even if we have preferences for a type of restaurant, we may consider a set of 2, or 3 or maybe 4'; 'Three, Nando's, Kebab and another one'; 'I suppose we would consider four restaurants on a weekly basis and on special occasions two or three others; 'And basically and we have narrowed it down to our three favourite restaurants'.*

5.1.3.4 Allergies and health-related issues

The researcher has found that the aspect of health-related issues mentioned by one respondent was particularly important. This aspect seems to affect the consideration set formation as in this case avoiding a certain type of cuisine; this accords with the prevention-focused notion of Tuan-Phan and Higgins (2005) or during the evaluation of alternatives, endogenously activated (Zhou and Phan, 2004). This respondent said:

I don't like Italian food either.... So I'm sort of lactose intolerant and I don't like anything that has cream in it or too many cheeses or anything too heavy like risotto, lasagne or tagliatelle. So for me that is virtually the whole Italian palate, out for me.

....I adore Chinese and Japanese All of those are all characterized by the one thing ... they don't have any milk or cream in them.

This confirms that past experience with a particular type of food also can significantly affect attitudes towards its consumption (Mak *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, Barker (1982) found that an individual's past experience with a food contributes to the development of 'food memories' which are associated with the sensory attributes of the food.

5.1.4 Choice considerations

After a consideration set is in the mind of the consumer the next stage is then about making the choice. That is what was termed "Choice Considerations". There are two stages here. The first stage refers to the evaluation of alternatives which refers to making summary evaluations,

which can just mean discarding an option very quickly. After that, the stage of deciding which option to take is what is called the choice stage.

5.1.4.1 Evaluation of alternatives

In terms of evaluation of alternatives and in particular to sensitivity to evaluative content, the research seems to have confirmed the regulatory focus theory of Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005). This is about consumers regulating themselves using means for that self-regulation. The means can be approach oriented (promotion-focused) or avoidance-oriented (prevention-focused). That is, attribute information has a greater weight on how the alternative is evaluated if the content of the information is compatible with the person's regulatory focus. Jasinka *et al.* (2011) called this self-control, a key aspect of adaptive decision-making that allows the consumer to pursue the deliberate goal to be healthy by overcoming more automatic and immediate-stimulus tendencies such as the cravings for a particular type of food. That is, attribute information has a greater weight on how the alternative is evaluated if the content of the information is compatible with the person's regulatory focus. As for promotion-focused self-regulation, a respondent evaluated very positively a type of cuisine (he claimed to adore it), another evaluated positively references to authenticity and evidence is found with regard to several other attributes. On the other hand, some consumers who have activated prevention, seem to evaluate negatively restaurants that they would try to avoid, for example restaurants with a dress code, or that have spicy foods.

In terms of evaluation strategy, Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005) proposed that promotion focused respondents rely on heuristic modes of evaluation, whereas prevention-focused use more systematic modes of evaluation (or go to familiar places). For instance, a promotion-focused respondent evaluated in terms of taste and convenience; that is about the type of food and whether it is convenient. A respondent who raised the issue of allergies (prevention focused) was very vocal about several aspects like driving distance, where he would park, made reference to style, location and price and seemed to have a very elaborate process for how he evaluated restaurants. Hence, these findings confirmed Tuan-Pham and Higgins's (2005) propositions. On the other hand, it seems obvious that states of promotion and prevention can be endogenously activated. The respondent who raised the issue of allergies was also concerned about noisy restaurants. It was noted that the state of prevention (avoiding those restaurants) was endogenously activated by the alternatives.

The evaluation of alternatives is represented by the different attributes and levels of attributes. The levels of attributes were selected by the researcher, and the choice stage (next section) is about how a particular option is selected once those attributes and levels of attributes have been established.

5.1.4.2 Choice

In the original model there are several aspects of this stage like Status Quo/Default/Deferral, Risk-taking and Context Effects seeking and the extent to which consumers follow a process was beyond the scope of this research. Although there is mention of the aspect of choice, this aspect is covered in more detail in the quantitative stage of the research and refers to considering attribute importance and a trade-off between attributes, levels of attributes and perceived value.

5.2 Towards a new way of classifying restaurant attributes

The attribute classification derived from Campbell-Smith's (1967) meal experience model seemed to have terms that were closer to the ones mentioned by respondents. Law *et al.*'s (2008) classification has some similarities with the following attributes and sub-attributes: food and beverage (portions, variety, quality, presentation); service (operating hours, diversity, speed and server's attitude); value for money; environment (atmosphere, cleanliness, comfort, location and decoration) and they included an additional attribute; attraction (image, novelty, word-of-mouth, advertising). Thus Campbell-Smith (1967) and Law *et al.* (2008) offered a more straightforward classification than Gustaffson *et al.*'s (2006) and Hansen *et al.*'s (2005). Gustaffson *et al.*'s (2006) classification focuses on internal aspects and Hansen *et al.*'s model resembles some of the features of Campbell-Smith's model. Some of the categories mentioned are not possible to elicit from a simple semantic analysis, e.g. management control system (Gustaffson *et al.*, 2006). Others like company (Hansen *et al.*, 2005) appear to be part of other categories such as atmosphere. The cleanliness and hygiene attribute of the meal experience may be included in a new category called facilities. This term is not new as an attribute. It was discussed by Mamalis (2009) but as a restaurant attribute, not as a category of attributes. Other restaurant attributes like driving distance to the place, vicinity to entertainment areas, convenience and availability of public transport can be linked to the location category of Ribeiro-Soriano, 2002; Law, 2008; Auty, 1992; Upadhyay *et al.*, 2007; Harrington *et al.*, 2010; and Lewis, 1980; 1981. References to branding, awards and chef reputation for example were not deemed to fit into any of the categories discussed, so a new category called image was

created. This category is slightly different from Law *et al.*'s (2008) definition of image as a sub-attribute of attraction. Four of the original categories of Campbell-Smith were thus kept and three more were added. The final classification of restaurant attributes has the following categories:

- Food and drink related attributes
- Ambiance and atmosphere related attributes.
- Facilities related attributes.
- Service related attributes
- Location and place related attributes
- Image related attributes
- Price and value related attributes.

5.2.1 Food and drink related attributes

This key aspect of the meal experience as mentioned repeatedly in the literature review is referred to sometimes in very loose terms such as Food (Anderson and Mossberg, 2004). A more precise term, without attempting a classification was provided by Cannarozzo-Tinoco and Duarte-Ribeiro (2012): 'Food and Drink attributes'. Sulek and Hensley (2004) referred to two different aspects of food and drink, food appeal and food safety. References to food have been made in connection with quality (Law 2008; June and Smith, 1987; Lewis, 1980, 1981; Auty, 1992). However quality is considered to be another attribute under the umbrella of food and drink related attributes. It was deemed necessary to conduct an extensive investigation of what these attributes were, given the multiplicity of references and terms used in the literature.

In particular, the attribute of food quality was probed and the researcher delved into what respondents meant by quality. This is because of the imprecision of what is meant by quality found by other researchers. Van Rijswijk and Frewer (2009) found that features of food quality were taste, natural/organic or freshness, but the research encompassed food in general, not only in the context of restaurants. Sulek and Hensley (2004) used the term 'food appeal' and found that features of food appeal were taste, presentation, textures, colours, temperature, size of the portions and entrée complexity. It is found that food appeal has elements of food

quality, as some sub-attributes have been found by other researchers as well. Namkung and Yang (2008) found no consensus on the particular attributes that constitute food quality and conducted a review of the literature and also found freshness and taste to be a feature of quality. Some authors relate food quality to presentation (Namkung and Yang, 2008; Shaharudin *et al.*, 2011). But that makes the researcher wonder whether a well-presented dish with other aspects that are not satisfactory, i.e. vegetables that looked as if they had been micro-waved, may still be considered a quality dish. For that reason, it was necessary to find out what respondents perceived were features of food quality. For instance, the following sub-attributes related to the attribute of food quality were identified: Freshness, colour, combination of flavours, savouriness and texture. In the interviews there were numerous references to taste, so the connection with taste is not be considered a feature of quality as quality food appears to be tantamount to taste. Therefore taste (and thus food quality) is affected by attributes.

Of all the research conducted on restaurant attributes, quality of drink is only mentioned as one aspect by Cousins *et al.* (2002) as 'Quality of Food and Drink'. Also in Cannarozo-Tinoco and Duarte-Ribeiro (2012) who made reference to this as 'Drink attributes', and particularly wine characteristics. Curiously, there is just one mention of quality of drinks in the interviews. A respondent stated: *'Some of the wines are alright but I'm not fussed about them'*. This paucity of mention prompted the researcher to concentrate on quality of food. Nonetheless, the particular aspect of quality of drink may be worthy of further research.

Some authors refer to range of food and drink variety or availability. In the case of food the attribute is termed 'menu variety'. In terms of specificity for this term, Upadhyay *et al.* (2007) included vegetarian food as a feature of variety. The inclusion of specials was mentioned in the interviews, which according to the experience of the researcher in the industry appears to be a feature of some restaurants. With regard to range of drinks, June and Smith (1987) did not specify variety but the mere availability of drinks (liquor availability). This was also pointed out by respondents as 'alcohol availability'. Likewise, Cannarozo-Tinoco and Duarte-Ribeiro (2012) also included a wine list in terms of the mere availability of it. It has been considered that variety of food and range of drinks should be classed as two different attributes.

Therefore, the food and drink-related attributes to be considered in this section and their sub-attributes are:

Table 8: Food and drink related attributes and sub-attributes

Attributes	Sub-attributes
Quality	Freshness, colour, combination of favours, savouriness, texture.
Nutritional aspects	Salt and sugar content, at content, calories content
Type of cuisine	Authenticity
Variety of food	Specials, vegetarian options.
Range of drinks	Alcohol availability
Food presentation	-----
Portion sizes	-----
Unusual food	-----

5.2.1.1 Food quality: Freshness

This aspect of quality of food was mentioned by respondents on several occasions in many ways. Some respondents evoked a type of cuisine, i.e. Italian cuisine with freshness of ingredients:

.....the freshness of the ingredients for me, I had a pizza in the Italian restaurant and the pizza just looked so fresh the parmesan and the bruschetta not the bruschetta the ham on top. It was just great and the quality really good.

Freshness was also related to not cutting corners when preparing food:

I think it is easy to say it shouldn't be bland it shouldn't feel as if it was just frozen food which will be well or microwaved sometimes with some pasta restaurants you get that taste that they have just added water to the sauce which it shouldn't be that.

5.2.1.2 Food quality: Colour

Sulek and Hensley (2004) pointed out that colour contributes to food appeal. Fine (1995) referred to the appropriate combination of colours in a dish.

A respondent put the attribute of colour in the context of quality like this:

...the appearance or the colour of the dish; or in particular the vegetables is very important because it is about the taste and the colour...

The influence of colour appears to be significant, with authors like Piqueras-Fiszman *et al.* (2013) even going as far as assessing the influence of the colour of the plate. However, there does not seem to be an empirical study of the influence of colour of ingredients on the perception of food quality, which seems worthy of further research.

5.2.1.3 Food quality: Combination of flavours and cooking skills

Respondents relate quality of food with fusion or combination of flavours as a sign of fine cooking. However, fusion is not always seen in a good light, as some restaurants may overdo it:

We are talking about food as if you went to this restaurant for this particular type of food and another restaurant for another type of food, but actually, most of the restaurants that we go to, have fused so many flavours together, so it's not possible to say that we are going to have some spicy this, because you can get spicy, you can get 'unsippy', no spice at all; you have all sort of different ranges of food within the same restaurant. It's not as it used to be.

Although the mention of combination of flavours is not new, (for instance a gourmet of the 19th century, Brillat-Savarin (1825) described combination of flavours as agreeable or disagreeable) there did not seem to be a conclusive link to food quality. For this reason, combination of flavours as a feature of food quality appears to be an emerging theme, worthy of further investigation.

The interviewees also discussed cooking skills which may be connected with producing a dish with the right texture or colour or simply that is well prepared:

When it comes to fish and meat I just wanted to see what way it is marinated as sometimes when you cut it you can see that it is not marinated properly.

5.2.1.4 Food quality: Savouriness

The aspect of getting the spiciness/saltiness level correct was probed as it seems that certain consumers (i.e. from South-Asian origin) have a greater fondness for spicy food as found by Josiam and Monteiro (2004):

If it's too spicy you can't enjoy it. I like spicy food but I like to enjoy my food. Like if you are looking at something that says mild and it actually turns out to be burning your mouth, then I would really question it. I'm trying to think recently what I haven't enjoyed because we are really quite picky on where we go to eat.

The aspect of getting the right level of salt is more associated with nutritional aspects, which is discussed later in this section.

5.2.1.5 Food quality: Texture

Quality of food is also referred to as being skilled at aspects of cooking such as texture. A respondent commented:

I think there are times when ... it's just a bit like vegetables and how they have been cooked. I always say you can tell a restaurant by the way they cook their vegetables because they are nice and crisp.

This seems to confirm the findings of the review of the literature conducted by Auvray and Spence (2008) about the effect of touch and visual cues on the perception of taste. Sulek and Hensley (2004) also mentioned texture as a feature of food appeal, a term which also encompasses food quality.

5.1.2.6 Nutritional aspects

This thesis focuses on eating out for leisure purposes because as Macht *et al.* (2005) pointed out, the pleasure of eating goes beyond food and nutrition. However, the aspect of nutrition was considered important by one of the respondents, which rejects the prominence of aspects such as food presentation:

Now I would be far more about what the food is about, food is not about presentation and fancy nonsense, it's about nutrition.

The same respondent elaborated on the aspect of nutrition further and brought up the features of nutrition:

So as far as I am concerned, I'm more concerned about the salt and fat content going into the food and the calories.

This confirms the findings of Narine and Badrine (2007) who found food choices were influenced by health or nutritional benefits by about 60% of the respondents. It all seems that the recent health warnings about an obesity epidemic have had an effect. Although the link does not seem to be clearly linked with quality, it appears that the perception of a healthy meal is positive as one respondent put it:

The express menu you didn't really get to choose it, it was steak a set starter and the children's meal was free which was a really healthy meal as well (tone of voice seemed appreciative of the fact it was healthy).

5.2.1.7 Type of cuisine/authenticity

In some cases it was found in the interviews that respondents chose restaurants because they are looking for a particular type of food. In some cases it seems like the starting point: *'Probably the type of food you feel like then probably take it from there'*. This seems to confirm that restaurants are classified by consumers into several types, the type of cuisine being one of them (Kivela *et al.*, 1999). Being adventurous with regards to unfamiliar cuisine types may be a source of disagreement:

And think about what they have had before and then it is generally an agreement on what they like and what they want and maybe more conservatism over what they don't know about different cuisine and you tend to stick to what you know.

Nonetheless, starting the decision with a preconception of the type of cuisine in mind may actually affect the way respondents define the consideration set. On the other hand, as decisions are consulted, it is likely that more than a type of cuisine is considered:

As I was saying before, forcing yourself into making different choices because you do so easily fall in the same trap... "I want to go out for pizza and this is where I go out for pizza, or I want to go out for tapas and this is where we go for tapas..." So you have to have a word with yourself and be kind of mindful and think about it and choose something different.

In addition, consumers seemed to establish comparisons between restaurants offering a particular type of cuisine, and hesitate when choosing another restaurant of the same type of cuisine to avoid the risk of not meeting the expectations raised by a previous, satisfactory experience. A respondent put it like this:

... also if you like Indian food for example, and someone recommends an Indian restaurant, me personally I enter that restaurant with that pre-conception, is it going to be as good as the one I like? All my judgments are based on things like: that was a good starter but not as good as the restaurant I like.

It also appears that the type of cuisine is a mechanism to reduce the size of the consideration set:

In terms of what cuisine you had and did you enjoy it and maybe you want to enjoy the experience again but generally you put a few options on the table.

The type of cuisine was also mentioned sometimes with the word authentic, for example: 'authentic Thai food'. So it appears that consumers do not only look for a particular type of cuisine but also they look for authenticity in many aspects, not only on the Food and Drink aspect but on the whole feeling of the place:

A few years ago I went to this Moroccan restaurant and the food was very good but the décor was also very authentic and genuine.

This appears to confirm the findings of Liu and Jang (2009) who found that in ethnic restaurants food authenticity affects customer satisfaction, and since customer satisfaction is connected with expectations, it can be inferred that authenticity is a sub-attribute to be considered with type of cuisine.

5.2.1.8 Menu variety

Menu variety has been discussed as an attribute worthy of consideration by several authors, e.g. Lewis (1980, 1981). The researcher wanted to have a greater insight on what menu variety meant and what the right balance for a varied menu was. In this respect, there was no consensus among respondents on what the right variety may be. A respondent put it like this:

Sometimes there's too much to choose from, and you sit there and say I like all of them and you can't decide and sometimes you're better off with a smaller amount. Some places where you go you end up eating off a set menu as it's slightly cheaper. So something that is a little in-between really, so rather than having 20 dishes to choose from but having 5 or 6'.

Some respondents did not see the advantages of larger menus:

For me, the shorter the menu the better. I have the same perception if they specialise in something I tend to go for that and not getting lost in the menu and not knowing what I am going to order.

Another respondent attempted to define what the right variety may be when he discussed the menu of a well-known chain:

... because they have always got a nice menu which changes a lot although it is a chain they always cook fresh and change their menu. That's always nice but there's also not too much to choose from. But always a chicken, beef and a fish and a vegetarian dish to choose from, you know the main sort of dishes the British are used to. But maybe a four of each dish a little bit of variety.

Nonetheless, there is no general agreement on this; for one respondent, variety was not a one-size-fits all issue:

I think it depends again if you are going to chain places. But if you have a large menu you know you're going to find something on there that you want. Whereas typically small independent places will have a smaller menu and do a few things well. Rather than trying to cater for everything. So it depends on the range of places out there you know if you go to a little restaurant that is family run or one off you know then to have small menu is fine. As long as you can look at the menu and see there's something there everyone will like you're ok.

It can be concluded that variety should be investigated contextually and that further investigation in various context is needed.

5.2.1.9 Additional options: Specials, vegetarian as sub-attributes of menu variety

As a part of menu variety, there are options that may be seen as additional to a menu or as part of it, increasing variety. These are vegetarian options and specials. Vegetarian options seem to play an important role in the decision process. As one respondent put it:

.....I also think it is important to think in the way that if I am out with my friends and someone is vegetarian and they can't find a vegetarian dish and if someone just likes fish or chicken it's like in an indirect why there are too many dishes. At least these people get their opportunity to have their one dish they want.

Vegetarian options were already mentioned as part of a well-balanced menu. On the other hand, the addition of specials is connected to the idea of freshness and could be appealing to some consumers:

... the other thing we liked about the Chef and Brewer (restaurant chain) was we'd always know there would be something on the menu we'd like but always did specials. And they changed every day not that we went every day. And we would always try and have something off the specials board. Because you know it's been bought in fresh.

5.2.1.10 Range of beverages

Early research such as that of June and Smith (1987) refer to Liquor Availability which refers to the issue of licensed restaurants (allowed to sell alcohol). Nonetheless, it is still considered as must have for respondents: *'supposed we chose this one because we could walk to it from where we live, so no one has to drive so we could all drink alcohol and get great Thai food'*. As has been pointed out there was just one reference to quality of drinks, but there has been mention of a wine list. Cannarozo-Tinoco and Duarte-Ribeiro (2012) and also one of the respondents referred to wines. The fact that the term list rather than quality was mentioned makes the researcher speculate whether range is tantamount to quality as the greater the range, the more likely it is that quality wines would be part of the list. Nonetheless, for the moment that is just a hypothesis that requires further investigation.

The researcher has considered that the various mentions of drinks, but more in the context of availability, calls for concentrating on a broader aspect of availability, such as range of beverages, for the time being as a sub-attribute of the food and drink category.

5.2.1.11 Food Presentation

The researcher having had the experience of working in a restaurant noticed how much effort chefs take in presenting their dishes. Law *et al.*, (2008) mentioned food presentation as a restaurant attribute. The perception of importance of the attribute is remarkably different. Respondents mentioned presentation of their own volition. A mentioned it as a non-important issue: *'...food is about nutrition it's not about presentation and fancy nonsense it's about nutrition.'* Others, on the contrary, stress the importance of presentation which is connected with freshness:

I suppose before you have eaten it would be the presentation of the meals going past you and so you can sort of gauge it's not an empty plate or full plate of food so that it looks attractive and it looks fresh.

Nonetheless, a respondent seemed to synthesize that presentation is worthy of consideration as an attribute: *'You eat first with your eyes you know, so you need something that looks appealing'*.

5.2.1.12 Portion sizes

There is no consensus in the literature about the importance of this attribute. While Keyt *et al.* (1994) considered portion sizes of little importance, others appear to contradict this position i.e. Cannarozo-Tinoco and Duarte-Ribeiro (2012) and Law *et al.* (2008) mentioned it in other contexts. It seems that there has been a trend towards serving bigger portions (Condrasky *et al.*, 2007). This has been found to be connected with obesity issues (Duerksen *et al.*, 2007). Its currency appears to make it an attribute that is worthy of consideration.

In this respect, once prompted the respondents were very vocal about the importance of portion sizes. One of them attempted to describe the right balance:

I don't like anything too big because there's just too much and I feel like I have to eat it all. And I'm one of those people who if I like it I will eat it all. Even if I'm a bursting I will still be eating it but I also don't want to be paying lots of money for something that is tiny.

Portions are connected to the notion of a whole meal, and the price that is paid for it, as examined by Vermeen *et al.* (2010). A respondent was annoyed by the idea of having accompaniments as different parts of the dish:

We had a bad experience remember when we went to Bank and we were not happy at all you actually ordered your steak and you paid separately for chips or potatoes or vegetables so you had three payments to build your one dish, absolutely a very nice piece of fillet steak but we walked out very disappointed and went to Mac Donald's afterwards. The portion size was so tiny and it tasted wonderful but we felt a little bit cheated by the price again.

Furthermore, the researcher has observed that pub food in the UK has portion sizes that are significantly greater than in other restaurants. It may be interesting to investigate whether exposure to pub environments may affect consumers' expectations about portion sizes and whether this is an attribute to consider. That is left for further research on this topic.

5.2.1.13 Uncommon food (pursuit for variety)

An interesting finding was the mention of unusual/uncommon food, a type of culinary endeavour that the consumer is not used to, as an additional attribute. However, it seems that familiarity with a type of cuisine is more prevalent with researchers like Auty (1992) referring to type of cuisine. Nonetheless, there were some allusions to unusual food. A respondent referred to going to restaurants where they serve food she would not cook at home:

For me there is another thing, I cook a lot, I know a lot of different things to cook and I cook every day. When I want to go to a restaurant I like to go somewhere where I can't cook that type of meal, I cannot make I cannot prepare. That's the reason for me to choose a restaurant.

Going for foods that are not familiar seems to be a reason to select restaurants, particularly in a cosmopolitan city like London, as one respondent put it:

When I was growing up we always had Polish food and nothing beside Polish food and so when I came to London it was nice to try something different. So I don't mind going to eat Indian or Chinese, Iranian because I like to taste how the other food is because my mum always cooks Polish food and there is not habit of going out to eat in Poland'.

Within this category, respondents also seem to look for innovation. In the UK respondents are normally well-travelled and exposure to other environments seems to enhance that pursuit for different ways, different styles:

Even we had tasted different type of food from different types of countries. For instance we went to Spain and ate at a restaurant with Mexican food. Like beef like Kebab but they put it on a vertical bar and they cook it and they put it in front of you. It tastes the same but actually the configuration was different. I really enjoyed that.

This pursuit for variety was examined by Hanefors and Mossberg (2003) as de-routinisation of consumption but it seems that further investigation on this area is required.

5.2.2 Ambiance and atmosphere related attributes

It has been found in the literature review and when ascertaining the consideration set criteria that the importance of the attribute of ambiance and atmosphere varies. Although food and drink were mentioned by all respondents as particularly important, not all agreed on the relevance of ambiance; as one respondent commented:

Well, I don't go to restaurants for atmosphere... If I wanted atmosphere I would pick a bar or a club...where I'm not sitting down and eating. Atmosphere for me it is not important, it would be how they do great tapas or great steaks...so I think the trigger for me would be the food.

Nonetheless, some authors combined ambiance and atmosphere with tangible elements of the place. However, once the attributes were evaluated, it has been found that whilst some element of the place or the facilities may influence the ambiance and atmosphere of the restaurant, ambiance-atmosphere appears to be more of an intangible nature. For that reason, a distinction between ambiance and atmosphere (mostly intangible) and facilities-related attributes is made. In the particular case of ambiance and atmosphere the following sub-attributes have been found:

- Décor and lighting.
- Noise
- Music and dancing
- Ambiance and atmosphere created by other customers

5.2.2.1 Décor and lighting

These two aspects seem to be intertwined. A respondent refers to selecting restaurants by appearances, and décor and lighting was the most salient feature of that appearance:

If we have the time we would have a look at the guide if that's an option. But then if we were down the street looking into all the restaurants it would also be lighting and décor of the restaurant and the price and the menu that we would take into consideration.

Some respondents refer to lighting as particularly important. A respondent talked about excluding restaurants because of lighting and getting the lighting right. Another respondent complained about the fact that many restaurants do not get the lighting aspect right: *'But then the lighting was too bright or too dark'*. Lighting and candle lit places also add a special feeling to the atmosphere of the place, and one respondent stated that this applies to both innovative and traditional types of ambiance:

...like low light like candles, and like you said the nice wine glasses. It doesn't actually have to be we have been to many restaurants that are quirky and traditional but by having low lighting and candles it makes it look a lot cosier and romantic I think.

Indeed this can have a profound impact on couples:

I have quite a good memory from about a month ago especially to do with ambiance and atmosphere it was a little Italian restaurant in Swiss cottage in London. I can't remember the name of it. It was just lovely. I said to my husband that we definitely have to go back there, we were walking down the street again just choosing a restaurant and it was just glowing all the candles by the window ...'

However, candle lights seem appropriate for certain occasions: *'On the day of the week it is, if I'm out Friday or Saturday night and I don't want candle light and crickets in the back ground.'*

Stevens *et al.* (1995) linked décor with perceptions of prices charged but this endeavour of getting the décor that matches customers' expectations appears challenging, particularly, about getting the right balance. It was found that some restaurants seem to overdo it and seem rigid, but that décor seems to be interconnected with the general atmosphere of the place, an entirety concept which Gladwell (2000) termed 'the power of context', as one respondent put it:

As you can image it could be quite pretentious (the décor) but actually it has a relaxed feeling about it because it's very busy and chatty with lots of people and lots of movement.

Another respondent also highlighted that pretentiousness should be avoided: *'the ambiance without it being overwhelming...'* Another respondent also had the same view:

Decoration is important but for me it doesn't have to be pretentious at all... I mean I look for a place that has nice seats and is comfortable enough so that I don't overreact to feel uncomfortable and enjoy the food.

So it seems the place should not appear too formal but welcoming and that there is a relationship between having it right and a relaxed atmosphere. For some respondents the type of cuisine should match the restaurant atmosphere, thus atmosphere and ambiance are part of the same package that goes with a particular type of restaurant:

We usually prefer that when we go to an Iranian restaurant the environment should be arranged based on traditional Iranian culture, when you go to Italian restaurant I expect that the environment looks like the Italian culture, or whatever it is there.

5.2.2.2 Noise

An aspect brought to the fore by respondents was the level of noise in a restaurant. This corresponds to the characterisation of a busy atmosphere (Kotler, 1973). There are numerous references to noise in the interviews. Levels of noise are more objective than most aspects of the meal experience. Respondents have preferences for certain levels of noise for certain situations. In the context of a family outing, a respondent said:

I think also when you go with children, we have eating out a lot just as a couple, and with friends and also with children. When you go with children it's quite nice to go out and it's a bit buzzy and you're not too concerned about her making too much noise. And at least it's not definitely silent in here.

Noisy places seem accepted by respondents who are looking for informal places:

... and in terms of the atmosphere all we were looking for was somewhere that was informal, friendly and we actually didn't mind the noise as we were making noise too.

As restaurants are socialising places where conversation is normally part of the experience, the levels of noise are very relevant, as one respondent commented: *'if it's noisy I think I can tolerate it to some extent. I mean, I wouldn't like it to be very noisy that I can't have a conversation, but I'm sure I probably could have been noisy in my youth as well'*. It also seems that expectations about how noisy the place is depends on the type of restaurant, an interesting exchange amongst three respondents went like this:

R1: Because Spanish restaurants are normally a bit noisy, for my liking.

R2: It's the culture I guess, you have to accept that.

R3: I think I know what to expect from Italian restaurants, they are very noisy and different people will be working there. When I hear people, for example on the tube, speaking Italian, they speak with their hands and they speak out loud and you wonder what? But that's their way.

Others do not accept a noisy place regardless:

It is very important for me that when you go into a restaurant it is not noisy, because you go to a restaurant to have dinner and have chat and to have an enjoyable moment.

Noise or buzz as some respondents put it seems to be part of the atmosphere, an inextricable part of the entirety of that atmosphere that was examined by Gladwell (2000). A respondent actually attempted to provide a view of what the right level of noise was in a greater context, linking it with lighting and occasion:

So I quite like subdued lighting just a nice relaxing environment but a nice sort of buzz as well nice atmosphere of people so I'm kind of in the middle I suppose but sometimes the place can be too quiet and sometimes it nice to have a little bit of a buzz going on without it being so loud that you can't hear yourself think or speak you know I think it depends what restaurant it is as well because if you're going out for say a celebration you know you drink have a few drinks and be merry but then I think it depends on what it is for as well because in that kind of situation you probably wouldn't mind it being lively because you are anyway whereas if you are going out to catch up with a friend for instance to go out and have a good old chat then you wouldn't want it to be so much like that because of the purpose of why you are going out. So I think the occasion does have some (bearing)....

The continuous reference to noise as a prominent feature of atmosphere is taken into account for defining the levels of the attribute ambiance-atmosphere in the quantitative stage of this thesis.

5.2.2.3 Music and dancing

This attribute was probed as authors like Milliman (1986), Jain and Bagdare (2009) and Magnini *et al.* (2008) referred to the influence of music in restaurants. Mattila and Wirtz (2001) even tested the combined effects of scent with music (aural). Thus it appeared an interesting aspect of the meal experience to be probed in the interviews. Respondents have diverse views about having music and dancing as part of the experience. For some respondents music is part of life, and without music life is boring:

For me music is so important. I work in a place and there is no music I think it is boring so I would leave.

Others see music as detrimental to socialising in a restaurant:

I'm not sure I would go back to a restaurant that played music that I didn't know, I need to know the music, it's just because if I wasn't aware of the restaurant playing music when I walked in, I would properly turn around and walk out. Because I'm going out and with somebody and I want to talk to them.

Some respondents accept that for certain types of restaurants music is part of the restaurant atmosphere:

... it depends as well if you go to an Italian restaurant it is nice to have music as the music represents the restaurant.

Another mentioned a trade-off between lower levels of service and having music in the place:

When you go for instance to an Italian restaurant or perhaps a Spanish restaurant the service they give you isn't as well as to the service you would get in an English restaurant, but after that you see that they give you other services that you really love. For example perhaps, music and dancing ... For instance if you go to a Greek restaurant they give you music while you're eating...' Some particularly enjoy it if there is dancing involved: 'And after having the food and the steak, we went to the level below. It was a disco, people dancing and music. Very nice and cheerful place, I really liked it.

Nonetheless, some consumers do not believe that music adds anything special to the meal:

You know they have so much to say but you don't need music it just adds to the general noise of sound.

Others emphasize that other customers should make the ambiance (not the restaurateur) and thus music is not needed:

They (Restaurateurs) have the choice of the music and also the volume of the music and as far as I am concerned you were talking about ambiance and the culture of the restaurant if you like and as far as I am concerned it's the patrons that make the ambiance and the patrons that make the culture of the place and I don't think a great deal can be added with additional music.

5.2.2.4 Ambiance created by other customers

For Anderson and Mossberg (2004), other customers are of such importance that it is one of the categories of the meal experience in their classification of restaurant attributes. However, there is little reference to ambiance, but to restaurant interior. The inclusion of other customers ought not to be omitted since as pointed out by Hansen *et al.* (2005) interactions amongst customers could influence the meal experience if the other customers behaved inappropriately. It is possible to distinguish two different aspects about other customers. In the first place, it is about the number of them. It seems that a restaurant that looks empty is not particularly enticing:

...but if you walk past a restaurant and let's say it's really full and then you walk past a restaurant that has no one in it you're more likely to go into the restaurant that is full which is generally because they have better food. If you go into a restaurant that is empty you think what is wrong with this restaurant.... especially if you don't know the restaurant it's like Brick Lane or something when you go down there you see a restaurant packed you will always go to the one that is packed. Even if the one that is empty can do the most amazing food.

Another respondent referred to the fact that the other members of the customers' group are central to the feeling of the atmosphere of the place:

But when you sit down and eat you feel comfortable if you go with a group of people you make it your own ambiance per se.

Secondly, as seen above consumers see other customers as an integral part of the restaurant atmosphere. Some directly relate ambiance with other customers and the make-up of the clientele, with ambiance sometimes having more relevance than the food:

But sometimes the ambiance can go against the taste. So for example we have recently given up on going to a certain Nando's which is the best griller of chicken in the world and we have decided not to go back there because over the last few months we have noticed that the noise within the restaurant has got higher and higher and it doesn't really matter when you go. You either go earlier when you have young children going crazy or you go later when you have the teenagers and the early twenties. Listen that's great but that's not what I want, so to me it has a positive effect and also a bit

negative effect. As no matter how good the food is you're not going to go there because you don't want to be in such an environment.

5.2.3 Facilities-related attributes

Mamalis (2009) refers to facilities as an attribute but there was not much detail about the elements of those facilities. Other early authors refer to other aspects such as Cleanliness and Hygiene which can be deemed as more tangible aspects than ambiance and atmosphere. Looking at past research and the findings of the interviews, the following facilities-related attributes were identified:

- Restaurant Architecture
- Cleanliness-Hygiene
- Parking Availability
- Restaurant Tableware

5.2.3.1 Restaurant architecture

Stevens *et al.* (1995) include two aspects in the DINESERVE questionnaire. These relate to how comfortable the dining area is, how easy it is possible to move about and whether seating is comfortable in all areas of the restaurant.

As part of the restaurant architecture, a trend toward restaurant designs with open kitchens has appeared. In a study of the influence of open kitchens on consumers, Alonso and O'Neill (2010) looked into aspects like perceptions of physical attractiveness, engagement of employees and the entertainment effect. The study found that the only factor that could be considered as being within an agreement level was the appreciation for the physical attractiveness or appeal of the restaurant by means of its décor and furniture (Mean 4.03 out of 5). The aspects referring to employees and the entertainment factor were less conclusive (mean ranged from 3.08 to 3.33). Despite these findings, two respondents mentioned all these influences willingly:

I like to see the meal cooked for me I like to also see the operation..... when I go to Zizzi's the kitchen is open and I can see being done and put in the oven all in front of me I enjoy that and obviously you are going to see the people serving it and are happy about it.

And they enjoy what they are doing. You can see from their faces they are interested in what that is doing.

This may seem to influence first impressions as well, as put by a respondent:

... if I walk down the street and I see the restaurant, especially the kitchen and you can see that the food is fresh and nicely prepared.

Indeed, architecture, in places that have been adapted to be a restaurant outlet gives the place a special feeling:

Yeah it was really nice but it was quite small but when you in an old London building anyway they put restaurants in the most weird and wonderful places basements and everything else. So it was quite small room that we were in but then you could see out of the window and what was going on outside in the market there wasn't much buzz there so we weren't distracted but it more wasn't so much necessarily a lot of décor in it ...

5.2.3.2 Cleanliness-Hygiene

One of the original aspects of the meal experience (Campbell-Smith, 1967, cleanliness-hygiene has been extensively examined in the literature review. It seems that customers still have their expectations about cleanliness, normally for considering a repeat visit or for excluding restaurants from a consideration set. This is deemed to be a sub-attribute of facilities which was spontaneously brought up by respondents. Some aspects of cleanliness seem to be overlooked by restaurateurs, as one respondent put it: *'Remember we were sitting at this Thai restaurant and there were chewing gums under the tables'*. Another respondent links overall appearance to cleanliness and hygiene:

For me how the restaurant look like is very important because it looks at the cleanliness and maybe a good toilet.

Since the number of restaurant attributes must be reduced for testing in the quantitative stage, the aspect of Cleanliness is put together with appearance, following the connection that respondents made between two items. It is clear that it does not make sense to set several levels for cleanliness as it is anticipated that cleanliness would show non-compensatory behaviour but it seems sensible that respondents should be able to select its importance as a

restaurant attribute together with appearance and decide whether it is an attribute worthy of further consideration.

5.2.3.3 Parking facilities/availability of parking

Ribeiro-Soriano (2002) and Upadhyay *et al.* (2007) mentioned this aspect as an attribute to consider. Although this aspect was not probed, respondents mentioned the aspect of driving to the place and they seem to have taken for granted that parking was available. On the other hand, they referred specifically to the parking policy in certain areas like Central London where restrictive parking policies may be a deterrent to customers. Indeed, a respondent asked about the parking policy for a restaurant in Central London and another respondent replied:

... it's easy because when you are dining it's not usually in (controlled) parking times and the congestion charge doesn't work either.

5.2.3.4 Restaurant tableware

Restaurant tableware has been linked to ethnic restaurants, such as Thai restaurants (Sukalakama and Boyce, 2007) and Chinese restaurants (Liu and Jang, 2009). Hansen *et al.* (2005) listed it as a central object of a restaurant's interior. Interestingly, tableware was mentioned voluntarily as an attribute by some respondents. One of them even mentioned that as the first visible element of a restaurant that she would look at:

I know it sounds silly but, I have chosen restaurants on the shape of the wine glasses. Remember when I wanted to go to this restaurant because of the nice wine glasses sometimes it's, sometimes it's the view you're looking at as you go past. It just looked classy and nice and sometimes you know it's something you're looking in and seeing it looks presentable, neat and tidy.

Another respondent linked tableware with formality:

When I go out for a special occasion I expect to have a table cloth on the table and I expect to have proper glasses on the table and I expect to be treated and pampered that's why we save money for the special occasion we pay lots of money and we want to be served properly and like we did for Peter's birthday we went out it was very nice...

This willingness to discuss tableware prompts the debate for further investigation on its influence on various restaurant settings, not only ethnic restaurants.

5.2.4 Service-related attributes

This is a category of attributes that is mentioned by all previous research on restaurant attributes, and was obviously probed in the interviews. Most authors like Mamalis (2009), Ribeiro-Soriano (2002), June and Smith (1987), Anderson and Mossberg (2004) simply referred to service; other authors are more specific, referring to what may be classified as cues for service. For instance, Law (2008) referred to two dimensions of service, speed and servers' attitude, Harrington *et al.* (2010) also mentioned speed and replaced attitude for the more direct feature of 'friendliness'. Strangely, these authors classified quality of service as another dimension. Service quality has so many facets and for that reason this research aims to shed light on those particular features of the service encounter that appear to be salient features of this group of attributes. A respondent described this difficulty of defining good service, or good quality service in these terms:

Service is another thing and then service and our expectations over the years has gradually gone up, so it's more difficult to impress us with a real good service but it's very easy to compromise what we expect. So the danger in service is that it can only have a negative effect and it is extremely difficult for it to have a positive effect. Do you see what I mean? Really good service, you know when you have had it, it's really difficult to describe...

For some respondents service can have a great impact on the overall evaluation of the meal experience:

I think this can really affect the food could be really good but have poor service. And after experience you're not going to go back there if the service is poor.

The attributes that correspond to service-related attributes examined in this research are:

- Waiting time to be seated.
- Waiting time to be served food
- Welcoming/Friendliness
- Attentiveness/Interaction
- Knowledgeable service

Cannarozo-Tinoco and Duarte-Ribeiro (2012) mentioned waiting time defined as being led to tables, service of meals and drinks and presentation of the bill. There were no mentions of

presentation of the bill in the interviews. The researcher has observed that with the advent of technology this is less of a problem. People who eat out for leisure normally even take some time after the bill has been presented. Furthermore, it is always in the interest of the restaurant to have the bills quickly presented so as to increase revenue by clearing the tables and having them ready for other customers. For this reason waiting time does not refer to bill presentation.

With regard to intangible aspects of the service such as the service provided by staff, Kivela *et al.* (1999) referred to 'staff attitudes'. The interviews revealed the following facets: attentiveness/interaction and knowledgeable service.

5.2.4.1 Waiting time to be seated

A measurable aspect of service is the time that it takes to seat customers once they arrive at a restaurant. This is how a respondent described a bad experience with regard to this aspect:

....but in Park Royal it was horrible and full of people. People were waiting in a queue for ten minutes just to order and there weren't any tables, you had to wait another 20 minutes for a table to be prepared. You had to jump like with a parachute to get a table

This aspect is particularly important and respondents also have an idea of when too much time has been spent waiting for a table:

And this really puts me off when they tell you that you have to wait for about 20 minutes before you can take a table.

Another respondent was even more demanding:

... if I walk in there and I'm expected to be seated and if no one comes up to me and if I'm not given some attention the first minutes I'm walking because if they don't want a customer then.

5.2.4.2 Waiting time to be served food

Another noticeable aspect is the waiting time for courses to arrive. Some consumers understand that freshly prepared food takes time and that the wait may be worthwhile:

My sons love the food there the lamb is very nice and they usually prefer to go there, and they tell me they want to go there. Even when I tell them it's busy you have to wait. It's what they like.

Yeah again the little Italian restaurant I was talking about before has really stuck in my mind it was cooked fresh in front of me and you don't mind waiting that little bit extra time because you know it's been cooked from fresh as well.

It also looks as if for certain type of restaurants long waits are the norm and that regular patrons are prepared to wait, as an exchange between two respondents revealed:

R1: This is service in a Nigerian restaurant. Well they will probably give you water but you will be waiting for your food, if you are going to have a kebab you are going to wait for them to go slaughter the cow, clean the cow and bring it back...how long is it taking.. like come on... so you order rice, they will go harvest the rice, rough the rice, cook the rice... so for me... be prepared to wait.

R2: So it's a very long experience.

R1: Just be prepared to wait.

In another case, a respondent said: *'I've been to a Jamaican restaurant and they cook everything in Jamaican time'.*

Getting the timing right is particularly important when eating in a group as one respondent put it:

Another thing that really annoys me is when you go out with friends and the dishes come out at different times. I find it very unprofessional. And you go somewhere, where you order a starter and a main.

5.2.4.3 Welcoming/Friendliness

Several authors combine these two aspects. For example, Teng (2011; p. 867) referred to 'welcoming and friendly service to ensure customer well-being'. This combination of attitudes seems to be general, not only restricted to restaurants. In the context of airports, Bogicevic *et al.* (2013, p. 14) claimed that passengers tend to appreciate friendly, welcoming and helpful staff. In order to try to reduce the number of attributes, these two aspects will be combined as one attribute.

It seems that a particular feature of good service is welcoming the customer as customers can easily appreciate it if they have been greeted properly:

One of my recent experiences it was meant to be a good restaurant and the food was good. But from the moment of arriving there was no one there to greet us at the door.

Also, another of the ways that good service is referred to is 'friendly service'. Harrington *et al.* (2010) referred to this facet of the service as 'staff friendliness'. Respondents have mentioned friendly service several times without much detail. However, friendliness seems to be linked with 'relaxed' or 'informal' as one respondent put it: '*we were looking for was somewhere that was informal-friendly*'.

5.2.4.4 Attentiveness/interaction

Marinkovic *et al.* (2014) studied the influence of quality of interaction on customer satisfaction. They refer to 'responsive and attentive staff' (p. 320). Since this was a quantitative study respondents were asked about quality of interaction, and the authors imply that the aspects of attentiveness and responsiveness are features of interaction. It is deemed that the word interaction as originally used involves contact with guests, whereas friendliness and welcoming can be perceived from a distance. An aspect of attentiveness discussed was that of being acknowledged and looked after when already seated at the table. A respondent defined a bad experience like this:

And then once we were at the table. It was a while and I actually had to spot the waiter and say can I order my food. And you're not relaxed and you're paying for this, the wine wasn't kept at the table and I had to keep asking the guy for some wine. The food came and he gave it to the wrong people and his attitude wasn't good.

A respondent gave cues about what to expect from an attentive serviceperson:

I used to be a waitress before and I was trained to deliver a really good service to people and people really looked after me to deliver proper service. So when I am on the other side I understand perfectly the waitress and I also expect them to deliver proper service like I used to deliver to my customers. I was always told when the customer comes to the table give them a glass of water to keep them busy even if they have to wait for the menu they have something to keep busy but don't keep them in front of an

empty table, because that is just annoying, give me a glass of water and I am going to shut up, it makes me really upset if I have to wait really long time to see the waiter.

The issue of how obtrusive or unobtrusive the serviceperson, should be is a debatable one. The right balance would mean being attentive but without being too obtrusive, as one respondent described it:

I tend not to like people in your face, when the waiter or waitress is there a little bit to chat over is nice but having a full on conversation I find that too much because you know you end up interrupting the conversation you're already having with the person you're eating with.

Obtrusiveness is also about getting the service wrong or collecting plates at the wrong time:

Yeah it's really annoying when you go to a restaurant and they are in your face and you didn't even finish your food and they are trying to take the plates and you're still eating so....

Having this right is linked to friendliness and attentiveness as one respondent put it:

Like if I am having a conversation before and the waitress just comes over blah not just to take away something but just to have a big conversation and but u usually don't expect to get their life story. I think they need to be attentive and nice and friendly.

An important cue is provided by the frequency of topping up drinks. One respondent defined the right balance:

.... it's non-invasive at all, its quick, friendly service but if you're going to somewhere they are topping up the wine it's the sort of know when or conscious that they are watching. But as soon as your glass does start to get empty they are there then that is perfect.

Another respondent highlighted the difficulty of getting it right:

There's actually quite an art to it. When you actually do want something or you do want another drink you do want someone to be around. You know it can be frustrating if you can never get a hold of the waiter. But equally you don't want someone constantly asking you if you want another drink.

For another respondent the right balance is when the service has been good and that the service people have hardly been noticeable:

... it was the service was just absolutely impeccable you didn't know they were there (the service people) at all but whenever you wanted something you didn't even have to ask it was done.

Overacting during the service encounter may also annoy customers as they may think that it is done for financial reasons, not out of spontaneity:

To me when it happens it feels like they just really trying to get a tip. And you just want to say stop trying so much stop trying so much. It's putting me off.

5.2.4.5 Knowledgeable service

Stevens *et al.* (1995) linked knowledgeable service with trust, as they classed this as a dimension of assurance in the list of dimensions for service quality. In the DINESERVE instrument that Stevens *et al.* developed, they listed:

- Employees who can answer questions completely.
- The employees are both able and keen to give information about menu items, the ingredients and methods of preparation.
- Makes you feel comfortable and confident in your dealings with them.
- Has staff who appear to be well-trained, competent and well-experienced.
- Employees have the support necessary to do their jobs well.

The researcher has been familiar with restaurants and is aware that some service people have difficulty in explaining the dishes properly to customers, something you would expect as part of the service. This is how a respondent put it:

...like it when you can go somewhere the waiter or waitress actually knows what they are talking about you can describe what type of dish you want and they understand.

In some cases, knowledgeable service implies more than describing the dishes but performing some operation by the table. This in the view of one respondent meant care and love for the job as well:

And simply pouring the wine and really played with it and a really beautiful designed bottle you could see the arm movements and really see he was enjoying it you pay twice as much but you enjoy it.

5.2.5 Place-related attributes

Another set of attributes is related to where the restaurant is located. Place also appears to affect the information search stage in the EKB model as it appears to affect the search between global (i.e. London restaurants) versus local (restaurants close to home). Mobile applications appear to be very popular with consumers. Park *et al.* (2007) devised a mobile application for selecting a restaurant based on aspects such as availability of parking area and distance from the consumer. Amongst these attributes the following types were identified:

- Driving Distance
- Convenience for everyone to meet up.
- Vicinity to entertainment area
- Public transport available

5.2.5.1 Driving distance

Close travel distance was listed by Harrington *et al.* (2010) as an important attribute. The topic of an adequate driving distance to the restaurant was discussed by respondents as an important attribute for selecting the place to eat. Some respondents pondered about the occasion but preferred a place that is close by:

It depends on the occasion but for me it's also the proximity because I know I'm the one who is going to end up driving.

For older customers the importance of this attribute is even more prominent as one respondent put it:

Now yet I don't care how good of a restaurant it is, there is no way I'm going to travel a long way to go to it. As I've got older that boundary is moving shorter. There are some wonderful restaurants in the East End I would have gone to but not now. If the travelling is going to be difficult or problematic, speaking as the driver, then I'm not going to do it.

Others, on the contrary, considered that distance is a secondary consideration and that the occasion or the selection is a statement about the host's personality:

My friend went to a restaurant in Oxford with her boyfriend. So they planned everything. They left early on a Saturday and came back on Sunday. They were there one day, had a 7 course meal so it depends on if it's an occasion or not.

I would happily drive somewhere if I was going to get a good experience. Actually for Mathew's last birthday I think it would be nice to go out for a meal and I looked up places where there was good food there.

You see, you are very different from me because if I want to go to a restaurant I don't give a damn if it is one hour I would go to the restaurant because it reflects your personality.

5.2.5.2 Convenient location for everyone to meet up

The importance of location was evidenced by the development of mobile applications like those examined by Park *et al.* (2007) which basically looks at location and thus, the convenience for all the members of the group can be estimated with the aid of technology. Indeed, a restaurant with a central location, equidistant to members of the group who are eating out was also mentioned as an attribute:

Another consideration is who you are going to dinner with, because sometimes you have to think about what is convenient for everyone else to meet up. So If we are going out from work it might be somewhere local from work or if I'm going out with my friends from university there is a crowd of people that I go out with from university and we might decide, ok... or if I have a visitor from somewhere, we might decide to go somewhere with a typical type of food. So it's really about what type of food you want to eat and the location, where is convenient for everybody to meet up.

5.2.5.3 Close to entertainment area

This is another aspect of location linked with convenience, and known to the researcher, having worked in a restaurant in an entertainment area. In places like Central London, and more particularly the West End, an important consideration for finding a restaurant is whether it is close to the entertainment venue, either for pre-theatre or after theatre dinner, as one respondent commented:

So if it's some of my friends and we are going out and going to the theatre we would organize to go to dinner beforehand.

5.2.5.4 Availability of public transport

Considering that there are restrictions on the amount of alcohol that a driver can consume, many consumers may opt to take public transport instead. In these cases, availability of public transport of any sort is also considered as an attribute:

It depends on the transport. If you can get to it by public transport and it's opened until late and you won't have to worry.

I would probably be less likely too because for me I would have to go into Waterloo and then get on the tube where's I don't mind too much getting to Leicester square or Covent Garden as I can easily walk to Waterloo from there .

5.2.6 Image-related attributes

Law *et al.* (2008) listed attraction as an attribute with these sub-attributes: image, novelty, word-of-mouth, and advertising. In this thesis aspects such as word-of-mouth or advertising are not considered to be attributes of the meal experience but part of the antecedents to the decision. Novelty is related to the aspect of unusual food (pursuit for variety), but the term image seems to be worthy of investigation. There was little elaboration in the research paper of Law *et al.* (2008) about what attraction meant, and nothing about what image entailed. This research has found the following image-related attributes: chef reputation, restaurant awards and restaurant branding.

5.2.6.1 Chef reputation

Upadhyay *et al.* (2007) found popularity of chef to be the least important attribute in a list of fifteen (15) attributes for eating out. Chef reputation is linked with the restaurant brand which can be either benefited or damaged by the chef (Jones, 2009; Henderson, 2011). That dichotomy of impressions, positive or negative, was evidenced in the interviews. Respondents were aware of this aspect and celebrity chef endorsement or chef reputation was a debated issue. Some respondents have their favourite chefs. For instance:

...oh we have been to one in Cornwall, Rick Stein, he is a favourite of mine and he has so much more and is quite normal'. Another respondent said: 'I like Jamie Oliver. I have been there twice now but then I want to try something new again.

Other respondents linked that endorsement to food quality:

Generally I wouldn't go because it's a Rick Stein's or Jamie Oliver's (because of their name) you go because you know the food is good.

It also seems that consumers' expectations were higher because of chef reputation:

And it was actually very good. The experience was good, the food was very good. So you go with the idea in mind that you have a preconceived idea that it's going to be good because that Chef is...

However, other respondents seemed to perceive there is too much hype when it is about certain chefs, or have strong opinions about certain chefs:

Having said that, if I go to a restaurant like Marco Pierre White, he pisses me off. The food is so commercial...

If Jamie Oliver was associated to anything it would be a reason for me to avoid it. I can't bear the man, I don't like his style of cooking, and I don't like his recipes.

When it comes to celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, Gordon Ramsay I wouldn't be bothered by it.

Others find that new restaurants sponsored by chefs are worth trying. Then it seems that for new restaurants chefs reputation may be an important attribute for the selection:

I think it would influence me at least to try it. If a celebrity chef opens up a new restaurant I will have to go and try it at some point. But probably I'm not going to do it on the spur of the moment, I will probably do it when I will be with a group of people I know really well and schedule something in a couple of weeks or a couple of months because it would probably be a place where you can't get a reservation straight away.

5.2.6.2 Award-winning restaurants

Ottenbacher and Harrington (2007) claimed that the Michelin guide has a strong influence on consumers' choice of fine dining establishments with enormous changes experienced. They added that the gain or loss of a star often results in enormous changes for the restaurant. In the view of the consumers, awards like the Michelin stars (the only award mentioned by consumers) are even more important than the endorsement of a celebrity chef:

Yes when it comes to celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, Gordon Ramsay I wouldn't be bothered by it. But when it is about Michelin star great then I would go to their restaurants.

Indeed, some respondents linked chef endorsement to brands and that an award of the Michelin star is much more reliable:

I think it is increasingly difficult for people to brand food, and that's essentially what you are trying to do if you are a celebrity cook, and I think this really difficult because you can go to a restaurant, I have been to Michelin Star restaurants, and the food has been what you would expect the food from a Michelin restaurant to be like.

It is also perceived as a certification of quality: *'and if I was looking for a very good restaurant I would look at the Michelin starred restaurants or something like that'*. That (value for money) depends on the type of restaurant you are going to. The influence of Michelin-Stars on the prices that a restaurant can charge was mentioned by a respondent:

For example if you go to a Michelin star restaurant and its very expensive but very good, that could still be value for money because of the experience I have had.

5.2.6.3 Restaurant branding

In the literature review, chained or 'branded' restaurants were distinguished from the traditional independent restaurants. The topic of branding as an attribute was probed in the interviews. Many respondents do not associate branded restaurants as appropriate for a special occasion, but more for convenience like when on a day out shopping:

I think if I was for something generally I like to go to something that isn't a brand especially if it's for a special occasion, and you're doing it as a treat but even then on a general weekly thing if we were going to go out for lunch or dinner I'd say I'd like to go somewhere that wasn't branded. But then there are and I think Westfield, Jamie's Italian and the real Greek they are all actually quite good food, so I think if you are wanting that and you're shopping and going for some lunch then actually those kind of places actually do hit the mark.

Other respondents resort to brands when unfamiliar with a particular area:

We have been to places where you're then actually going to a chained place because you don't know the area and you think 'I know what I'm going to get' or I don't mind, but I think the advantage of a brand I would say is that you know what you're going to expect. So I think it is easier to eat out in a branded restaurant if you go to Bristol you haven't done any research, if you go to Wagamama you know what you're going to get. If you go to this you know what you're going to get.

It also seems that there is a cultural divide and respondents perceive that restaurant branding has still not caught up in the UK and that is more appealing to younger generations or children:

I think it (branding) is a very American sort of concept. Everything is about branding. I think Europeans don't think so much about branding. OK, branding may be important providing that the product and the service you are getting is of a certain level.

Indeed this association with American brands goes as far as comparing branded restaurants to fast food outlets:

I think it depends on what type of restaurant. When you go out for a meal you are looking for something more than a Mc Donald's and as they are not chains (the independents) they are very small and they have some kind of differentiating niche in the market. And it also depends on your age; if you are a kid you then you go for the brand but as you become a bit more adult you are more selective. It's about the atmosphere; it's about the kind of food.

Another highlighted the age issue:

And even in those days between being a kid and being an adult, the brands were getting important ... I think that demographic is mainly 18 to 25.

This seems to correspond to the investigation of the Generation Y (Harrington *et al.*, 2011). This apparent rejection to branding by consumers seems to have influenced restaurateurs to be less open about branding, as one respondent commented:

There's something but I don't know if you've noticed it in the UK but it is quite kind of subtle branding with pubs. I don't know if you have noticed it there's one in Epsom called The Derby Arms which is up on the Epsom racecourse. It's this nice typical gastro British pub and they do change and it's this nice cosy feel and they change their menu

quite frequently and you wouldn't actually know they are a chain. It's not advertised anywhere it's not obvious it's a Young's pub or this is a whatever pub (in reality the Derby Arms is part of a small Surrey-based pub chain). it is what it is, it's under its own name but then there's one in Redditch called the Meadow which is exactly the same menu and you walk in and think hang on am I in the Derby Arms the décor everything is the same. It's really, really successful you wouldn't know but because you have this image you're in this lovely German pub, it's just great food and you don't even know it's a chain.

5.2.7 Price-related attributes and perceived value

In the literature there are numerous references to price and value and in many cases there does not seem to be a distinction between the two. Early researchers like Lewis (1980, 1981) and June and Smith (1987) listed price or value for money as an attribute which could have more or less importance than an attribute like quality of food, for example. There is evidence in this research that perceived consumer value is a construct different from price. Perception of value is a richer construct, even much more comprehensive than service quality (Bolton and Drew's, 1991). This would not only affect the perception of value for the food and drink items as found by Harrington *et al.* (2010), but also the rest of the attributes. Perception of value involves a trade-off between what the customer receives, and what he/she gives up; for example, what he/she pays and the lost opportunity of having spent that time in another place. Teas and Agarwal (2000) examined price as a cue that affects perceived value. Indeed, price and value always seem connected to other restaurant attributes (see Law, 2008; Harrington *et al.*, 2008; Auty, 1992). In the context of restaurants, Parsa *et al.* (2005) claimed that negative consumer perception of value is a mismatch between price and service delivered.

Hence, the process of perceiving value typically involves a trade-off between perceived benefits and sacrifices; that is, between what the customer receives (e.g. quality, benefits, utilities) and what he/she gives up (e.g. price, opportunity cost and maintenance cost) to acquire and use a service (Zeithaml, 1988). Woodruff (1997) made a clear connection when defining customer value. Woodruff defined desired customer value as desired product attributes and attribute performances which if applied to this research means attributes and levels of attributes.

Therefore, all this points towards the necessity of making a distinction between price-related attributes and perceived consumer value. Price-related attributes are those that directly affect the perceived price, for example, sales incentive programmes (Mamalis, 2009). These programmes may include money off coupons or pricing strategy (for example, having set menus or other tactics that influence perceived price). This section then will discuss price-related attributes and then perceived consumer value.

5.2.7.1 Sales incentives and offers

The data suggested that in a competitive industry like restaurants, consumers are trying to maximise their money and restaurant chains have targeted consumers who are increasingly price-sensitive with incentives given to repeat customers. A respondent explained how this works:

.....and costs is another factor especially because a lot of the restaurants now have chain restaurants like Prezzo, Pizza Express all of these chains you can sign up to mailing lists and you get vouchers which means you can get very cheap deals so there happens to be one of those deals on the e-mail the day before and that might be the reason for eating there.

Technological applications for smartphones and tablets seem to be an enabler to these sales incentives, also appreciated by consumers:

So foursquare is an app you have on your phone and when you go to different places you can do things where you can check in to the restaurant or place and sometimes because you've checked in it might entitle you to money off at the restaurant. So once you have checked in and have your bill you can show them a code which gives you discount off your bill.

Also booking websites like Open Table offer these incentives and that may be the trigger to select a particular restaurant as a respondent put it:

....but we have used websites like "book a table" almost to force us to go to a different restaurant and it will be around what deals are going on and if there is a particular.....for example a restaurant that we are going to on Monday.

Nonetheless, not all respondents responded in the same way to promotions and offers. As a matter of fact, other respondents disagreed on the actual value of promotions. This was an exchange amongst respondents in an interview:

R1: *'it actually doesn't attract me for interests to go into a restaurant if they did in fact have promotion'.*

R2: *'I agree'.*

R1: *'because there are less and less people going there for some reason so that's why thus they need to attract people'.*

5.2.7.2 Pricing strategy

This aspect is different from incentives. It is about how restaurateurs present items with prices, put together items in a set menu and so forth.

An aspect that seems to be a negative feature was to charge separately for items when they should be put as part of a course: *'The worst thing is when the vegetables are itemized and priced separately from the meal'.*

On the other hand, consumers appreciate being given a choice when it is about prices:

Really good food really good prices and it was very clever how they did it. They did have a more expensive menu but also they had an express menu for the first time going in there. The express menu you didn't really get to choose it, it was steak a set starter and the children's meal was free which was a really healthy meal as well. It was reasonable and I think then we would go back and buy something off the pricey menu knowing the quality of the food was excellent, so it was good to have that taster and we would go back there for a special occasion; definitely.

5.2.8 Perceived consumer value

This section looks for evidence in the interviews that perceived consumer value as a construct that encompasses influences from all other attributes. One respondent emphasised the importance of value, and mentioned aspects such as décor and lighting and menu, with price being just another consideration:

If we have the time we would have a look at the guide if that's an option. But then if we were down the street looking into all the restaurants it would also be lighting and

décor of the restaurant and the price and the menu that we would take into consideration. It's not like we would go for the cheapest we would go for value. We kind of like that walking up and down and looking at all the menus.

Consumers were consciously looking for the best value for the budget available. A respondent explained that this consideration is made together with other restaurant goers in the group:

I don't know because sometimes it depends on how much money you have and budget. And what you want to spend. I have different kinds of friends, different groups and some people can afford it and some can't. If you want to go to a special restaurant because you like it and the quality of the food and can afford that's ok but when you go out with your friends you need to first of all see what friends they are and it also depends on location. Sometimes your friends are students and cannot afford it. it all depends you need to work-out how much you and your friends want to spend on the restaurant but if you want to spend a lot of money you need to go with friends who can afford it.

The connection between food quality and value was made clear:

Normally I go for quality as well it doesn't mean it's expensive but it has to be quality at the same time but you normally check. Because the quality of the restaurant equals the quality of the food and the money.

Perception of value in the case of drink seems more straightforward. Drink can be a proxy for indicating overall perception of price, thus affecting perceived value. A respondent used the following method:

For me (the decision) sometimes it (depends) will be things like the prices of wine, so you can go to one place and its £18 a bottle but in others its £25 for the same thing.

Aspects of image like chef reputation were highlighted by two respondents:

Because if I'm going to pay a lot of money for dinner I want to make sure that it is going to be good and the reputation of the Chef is going to be massively important.

So if it is a commercial Chef would you pay a lot of money?

The influence of ambiance on perceived value was outlined by a respondent who gave quite a peculiar example of ambiance over the rest of the experience:

There is a really bad restaurant in Brighton that is renowned for being horrible. You only go for the experience because you have the owner who comes out dancing. And you go and pay 30-40 pounds a head just to laugh at him.

Features of the service also affect perceived value. In the case of waiting time, respondents expect that an expensive restaurant should get their timing right:

So we are talking about meals and restaurants. Two weeks ago I had Sunday roast in this poshy restaurant. We waited for one hour and the meal and the gravy was very salty...

A high level of service is also associated with a higher price:

....and simply pouring the wine and really played with it and a really beautiful designed bottle you could see the arm movements and really see he was enjoying it you pay twice as much but you enjoy it.

An association with location was made by two respondents. The first respondent seems to be speaking about a trade-off between a good location and prices that the members of the group can afford:

If you want to go to a special restaurant because you like it and the quality of the food and can afford that's ok but when you go out with your friends you need to first of all see what friends they are and it also depends on location.

Another respondent connected central locations with higher prices:

Oh, I don't mind driving as in Ealing we are not very circulated with restaurants. Having said that, there is a very good fish and chips place that you have been to and Wagamama's that has just opened up which is very good, but really, there is nothing else higher than that in terms of price band. But if you want to eat and make an occasion of it, for example a couple of weeks ago it was my birthday so we went to a deluxe bistro in Baker Street.

In relation to facilities, a respondent linked tableware with formality and higher prices:

Then I go out for a special occasion I expect to have a table cloth on the table and I expect to have proper glasses on the table and I expect to be treated and pampered

that's why we save money for the special occasion we pay lots of money and we want to be served properly and like we did for Peter's birthday we went out it was very nice...

Another respondent highlighted the same issue with the reverse argument:

I don't mind going to some nice place to have a glass of wine in a nice normal glass. When you're paying £15, £20, or £25 for a meal and you know you just want to have a full tummy and that's all but for a special occasion that's what I expect.

The link between price-related attributes like pricing strategy and perceived value is almost obvious. A respondent put it like this:

A grilled sea bass you would expect that to come with something and pay for a side salad...perhaps but if they have itemised everything else because most main courses are about 20£ish a bit less, you would expect that to be included. So the value for money as far as I am concerned would be to have an inclusive menu choice.

It is important to emphasise that respondents willingly referred to these associations between perceived consumer value and attributes. Therefore, more research focused on these associations is needed. Nonetheless, apart from the literature that refers to perceived consumer value as a higher construct, the findings from the interviews point towards an association between the perceived consumer value and the rest of the attributes. Also it seems that price related-attributes may be associated with perceived value: *'it actually doesn't attract me to go into a restaurant if they did in fact have promotion'*. Another stressed that promotion *'cheapens the offer'*, inferring something is wrong with that place if they need to have promotions:

...then they should rely on word of mouth. I would never go to a place for a promotion. It smells cheap. It's too demeaning

On the other hand, while sometimes consumers refer to value and overall perceived value, others refer to price. For instance, the need for promotions (price-related attributes) may be dependent on other attributes. For example, a badly located restaurant could compensate for that with promotions (price-related attributes). A model that makes causal assertions is proposed. These imply that attributes affect perceived consumer value and price-related attributes and that there is also a relationship between price-related values and perceived

consumer values. In order to suggest a model the four criteria established by Hair *et al.* (2010) were used to support the proposed model:

- 1) The interviews appear to establish sufficient relationship between the variables.
- 2) Temporal antecedence of the cause versus the effect. For example the award of the Michelin-star is achieved before the consumer perceives value from it.
- 3) Theoretical basis for the relationship.
- 4) Lack of alternative causal variables. A comprehensive study of attributes in the abundant literature was conducted. Moreover, the interviews tended to highlight attributes that are also within these categories.

Therefore, the outcome of the empirical findings and an application of the concept of perceived consumer value lead to suggesting a model which shows the relationships between attributes and also between attributes and perceived consumer value (Figure 35).

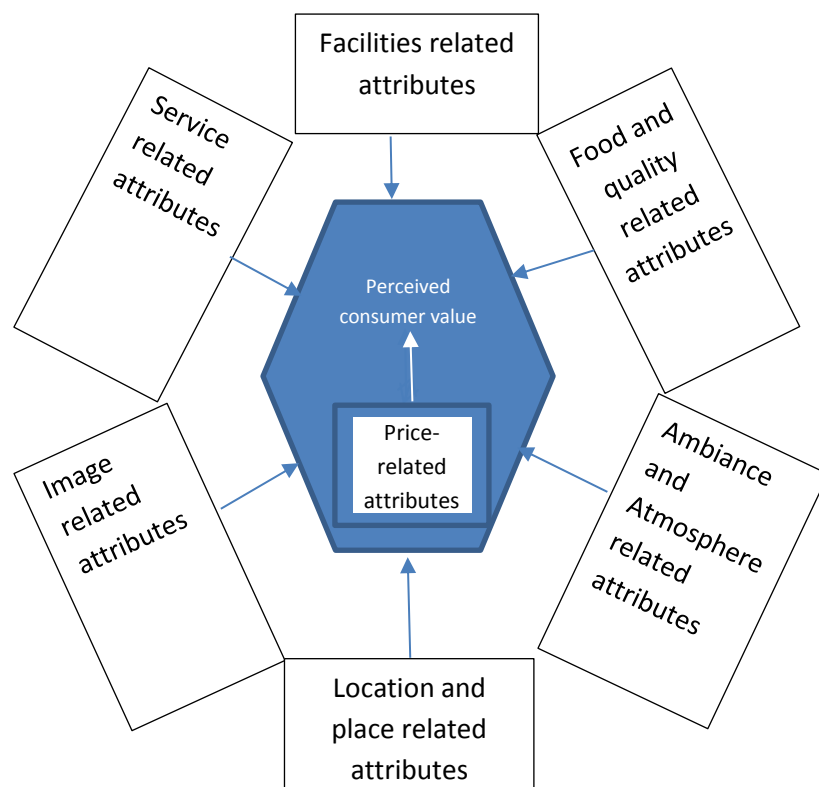


Figure 35: Relationship between restaurant attributes and perceived consumer value

The proposed model does not share the view that value for money is just another attribute that could be ranked. The focus group interviews have revealed some relationships between that perceived value and other restaurant attributes and how attributes affect price-related attributes as well. Some respondents even use rules of thumb related to price, for example comparing prices of bottles of wine and then comparing the other attributes and selecting the alternative with the highest value. This confirms Marney's (2001) assertions on the importance of perceived value as a good predictor of customer behaviour. It has been found that consumers elaborate on several attributes linking them with value for money, for example portion sizes. This confirms the assertions of Hsee (1999) about decision rules, in particular the pursuit of a better deal as a key heuristic. The model also suggests that price charged relates to other attributes. This principle underpins the quantitative stage as price is related to attribute performance. That is, higher levels of an attribute mean higher prices, so consumers would trade-off the amount they are prepared to pay against a higher level of an attribute.

5.2.9 Reduction of restaurant attributes

The data reduction looked into all the published material in which attributes are discussed under one of the seven categories and data from the focus group (see appendix 16). The first comparison of all the attributes conducting a semantic analysis resulted in a subsequent reduction of attributes, with three iterations. The results of the iterations are shown in table 9 below:

Table 9: Data reduction of restaurant attributes: iterative process

Category	First iteration	Second iteration	Third iteration	Fourth iteration
Food and drink related attributes	9	8	6	5
Ambiance and atmosphere related attributed	7	3	3	3
Facilities-related attributes	5	2	2	2
Price-related attributes	4	3	2	2
Service-related attributes	7	4	4	2
Place-related attributes	4	4	1	(*)
Image-related attributes	3	0	0	0
Total	39	24	18	14

(*): In the quantitative stage place-related attributes merged with facilities-related attributes in one question (parking and public transport are probed in the same question).

With regard to image-related attributes, it was decided that they would not be tested in the second stage of the research. In the first place, adding chef reputation and award winning restaurants would add an attribute that may be pertinent to a small number of restaurants. Secondly, branding would limit the choice to branded restaurants and, considering that most restaurants are independent; that would again limit the scope of the research. Nonetheless, it seems that restaurant branding is likely to gain importance as an issue and further research on the topic may be necessary in the near future.

5.2.10 Summing up

The first insight refers to the consumer decision process (CDP) applying the stylised EKB model (Tuan-Pham and Higgins, 2005) to structure the stages for the decision to eat out in a restaurant. Two interconnected parts with linkages were proposed for better visualisation. The first part is deemed as antecedents to the decision and the second part is labelled choice considerations. Discussion is focused on antecedents part with some references to the second part. There are three stages that are considered to be antecedents to the choice consideration part of the CDP: problem recognition, information search and consideration set formation. Some interconnections between these parts may occur. For example, endogenous activation, a feature of problem recognition, was linked to the evaluation of alternatives; this is because a craving for a particular type of food may activate the need for selecting that type of food. In this case the evaluation of the alternative is based on alternatives, rather than on attributes (alternative-based rather than attribute-based). An overview of the CDP process using the stylised EKB model can be seen in figure 36 below:

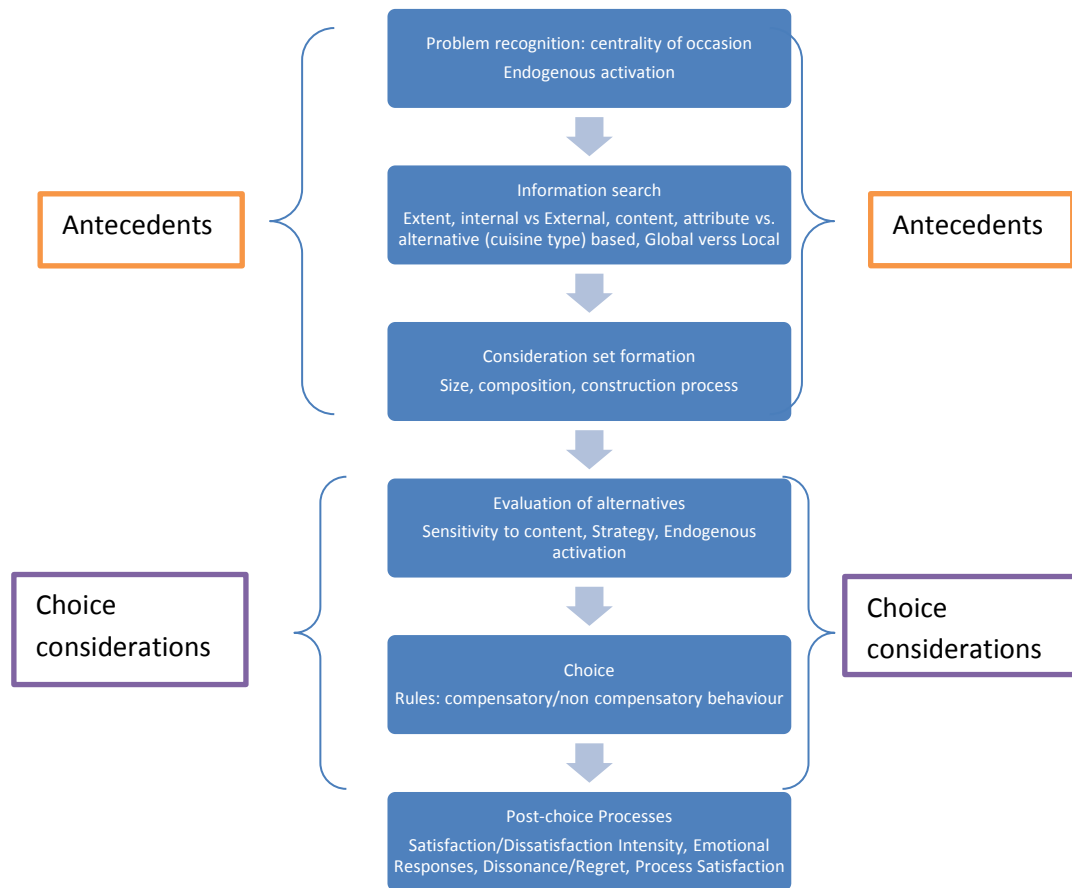


Figure 36: The Consumer Decision Process model (adapted from Tuan-Pham and Higgins, 2005)

The qualitative stage found that occasion is central to problem recognition as it seems that the needs for different occasions are different. It was also found that in this stage emotional states can affect the decision and it can even affect the whole process. For example, if the mood or emotion is to go to a particular restaurant because of an emotional connection with the staff, charitable or nostalgic feelings, then there is no need for the information search stage, etc. This is consistent with Olshavsky and Grambois's (1979) position that a decision may never occur. Indeed, emotions may play a role in the decision but for high involvement purchases as examined in the literature review there is normally thoughtful consideration. This was evidenced by copious and enthusiastic discussion about restaurant attributes and how a decision to select a restaurant was made in the focus group interviews. Nonetheless, further research on emotions seems necessary.

In terms of search information for selecting a restaurant, the research has evidenced that restaurant goers extensively engage in information search when looking for a restaurant.

Although information can indeed be searched internally, research shown that it is normally conducted externally, either by looking at the printed media, online reviews or through word of mouth, the latter being particularly important. The type of information in this case seems to focus either on content that reveals restaurant attributes, or different types of cuisine.

The qualitative stage revealed that consideration sets are not normally larger than four (4) restaurants with some exceptions for special occasions. The set composition and number seems to be largely influenced by the type of cuisine preferred, as for some respondents this was the starting point, either to narrow down the number or options or for composing the set. Composition of the set is influenced by word of mouth as new restaurants can form part of the set if recommended. Sets seem to be constructed either by including alternatives through word of mouth or by excluding alternatives, like in the case of health-related issues or when the consumer has had a bad experience with a particular type of food or in a particular restaurant. Another important aspect to exclude alternatives is location, with some consumers not prepared to travel long distances. Set construction is also based on expectations of a previous, satisfactory experience with a particular type of restaurant.

In terms of sensitivity to evaluative content, the research confirmed the tenets of the regulatory focus theory of Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005). That is, attribute information has a greater weight on how the alternative is evaluated if the content of the information is compatible with the person's regulatory focus. Restaurants that were found to be attractive on attribute dimensions (promotion) were evaluated positively. Consumers who activated prevention negatively evaluated restaurants that they would try to avoid. It also confirmed that the evaluation strategies of respondents who activated prevention are more elaborate than those who activated promotion.

It has been realised that the area of antecedents is extremely rich and several other aspects of antecedents may have emerged. Nonetheless, the objective was to offer a new perspective on how to look at the different stages of the consumer decision process using the stylised EKB model. It can be concluded that the model is very useful for structuring the different aspects of the decision of selecting a restaurant and provides a great deal of insight into the decision. The model can reveal more aspects for further research in other contexts.

The research also looked into a new way of classifying restaurant attributes. After a thorough examination of the literature and a constant comparison analysis within the literature and

between the literature and the interviews, the research arrived at a new classification of restaurant attributes. These are:

- Food and drink related attributes
- Ambiance and atmosphere related attributes
- Facilities related attributes
- Price and value related attributes
- Service related attributes
- Location and place related attributes
- Image related attributes

Also the research found that these attributes are related to perceived consumer value. This contradicts the view that value for money is just another attribute that can be ranked. Perceived value was found to influence how the other restaurant attributes are perceived. This confirms the viewpoint of Bolton and Drew (1991) about perceived value being a consumer's overall evaluation of the service, in this case the experience of having a meal in a restaurant. As a high-involvement decision, when selecting restaurants consumers pursued best value. Respondents also referred to affordability so that means that in some cases price is central to the decision and even for less price-sensitive customers who do not appreciate sales incentives, maximisation of utility is pursued. It is proposed then that restaurant attributes impinge on perceptions of value for money (perceived value). These relationships were illustrated in Figure 35. The model also proposes that price-related attributes are more closely related to perceptions of value for money because they are measured in monetary terms or have a direct value connotation. It is also proposed that all restaurant attributes have an influence on price-related attributes. For example, it may imply that a poorly located restaurant would need to offer more discounts and appear as more affordable than a better located one. It is suggested that this model is subject for further research.

Finally, this chapter looked into all the attributes discussed in the literature and in the interviews with the various terms provided. Then an iterative process for merging attributes and reducing attributes was conducted. This included a consideration of the relative importance of attributes, so that a more manageable number could be tested in the second stage (quantitative stage). From an original 39 attributes, it was reduced to 14 attributes,

which was reduced even further by the participants in the research survey in the next stage. This stage refers to the stages of choice examined as the final stage in the Consumer Decision Process examined in this thesis.

CHAPTER 6: QUANTITATIVE DATA STAGE: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

The main theme of this chapter is the presentation of results of the conjoint analysis survey conducted using Adaptive Choice Based Conjoint (ACBC). The first part provides demographic data which was then cross-tabulated. This also allowed for further reduction in the number of attributes to be tested in the conjoint task (second part of the questionnaire, which is called ACBC section of the questionnaire).

The ACBC section is divided into:

- Build Your Own
- Screening Section
- Choice task tournament

In the first section the respondent built the original profile of their ideal restaurant; that is why it is called “Build your Own”. The screening section entailed a trade-off exercise in which the respondent established attributes which are deemed as non-compensatory. Non-compensatory attributes are those for which a decrease in price will not compensate for a low level of the attribute, i.e. a very low level of service (poor service). After the screening section, a reduced number of options were available to the respondent and after a series of tasks, a winning choice resulted. These sections contain counts and cross-tabulations with percentages.

This chapter concludes with the HB analysis. This analysis revealed differences between one level of an attribute and another level of an attribute. For example, if little variety is option 1, medium is 2 and high is 3 the difference between the part-worth given to option 2 is much greater than 1 but not that different from 3; this means that option 1 is not acceptable and that medium variety is the lowest he would accept. Therefore, the restaurateur would not have to spend so much effort in providing variety of level 3 because that does not make much of a difference. Hence, HB analysis explicitly accounts for the differences in consumers’ preferences by estimating individual part-worths.

6.1 Cross-tabulations with more important optional attributes

This first section refers to the first part of the questionnaire in which demographic questions and selection of attributes according to occasion were tested.

6.1.1 Occasion and more important optional attributes

The first analysis consists of ascertaining the more important optional attributes for different occasions. Results are displayed in table 10.

Table 10: Occasion and importance of optional attributes (N=376)

Label	Total	6 - Decor and lighting	7 - Music	8 - Timing	9 - Range of beverages	10 - Presentation of food	11 - Portion sizes	12 - Restaurant appearance and cleanliness	13 - Location	14 - Offers
Day/night out with friends and/or family	257	66%	15%	37%	26%	83%	40%	95%	87%	43%
Romantic dinner	57	74%	32%	42%	26%	75%	42%	89%	86%	33%
Birthday party	27	67%	26%	41%	41%	78%	33%	93%	70%	33%
Special celebration, e.g. promotion at work, reunion	16	69%	19%	31%	25%	100%	56%	100%	75%	25%

It is important to note that although birthday parties and special celebrations are both, in fact, celebrations, a distinction was made between the two. Birthday parties were considered to have more of the input of the person who is celebrating his/her birthday (more of a personal decision). A special celebration may have the input of more people organising the celebration. From the above table it can be seen clearly that décor and lighting, presentation of food, restaurant appearance/cleanliness and location are the most important attributes that respondents in the study could choose (five out of nine). Timing, portion sizes and offers seem to have the same relatively low importance. The most noticeable difference is that if the occasion is a romantic dinner, music was chosen by 32% of respondents in the study compared to only 15% for a night or day out with friends and family. Also décor and lighting appear to be of high importance for a romantic dinner (74% compared to 66% for a night out). Nonetheless it appears that attributes like music and range of beverages have far less importance, with the exception of birthday parties for which more respondents in the study (41% of 27 respondents in the study) chose range of beverages as important for consideration.

6.1.2 Age groups and more important optional attributes

It is important to note that respondents in the study under the age of 19 are not considered in the survey and hence this was a filter question. Please follow the findings in table 11 below.

Table 11: Age group and importance of optional attributes (N=376)

Label	Total	6 - Decor and lighting	7 - Music	8 - Timing	9 - Range of beverages	10 - Presentation of food	11 - Portion sizes	12 - Restaurant appearance and cleanliness	13 - Location	14 - Offers
20-29	76	53%	18%	43%	36%	62%	49%	86%	75%	46%
30-39	92	67%	18%	41%	25%	80%	42%	95%	86%	34%
40-49	71	77%	13%	35%	24%	86%	41%	94%	80%	35%
50-59	82	68%	20%	33%	21%	84%	24%	89%	89%	41%
60 or over	49	59%	16%	29%	31%	94%	45%	100%	86%	41%

As in the previous cross tabulation, this table shows that music and range of beverages were the least important of the optional attributes across all age groups. The main difference was in presentation of food, considered important by only 62% of the age group 20-29 compared to 94% for the group of 60 years or over. Interestingly, the older the respondents in the study were, the more important presentation of food was found to be, with the age groups 40-49 and 50-59 being very similar (86 and 84% respectively). Another noticeable aspect is that 100% of the 49 respondents in the study in the age group 60 or over chose restaurant appearance and cleanliness as an attribute to be considered. The attribute of portion sizes showed the interesting finding that the 50-59 appear to be less concerned with portion sizes (only 24% of the 82 respondents in the study chose this attribute) compared to the younger and older respondents in the study. Range of beverages appears to be considerably more important for the youngest and oldest consumers (36% of those aged 20-29 and 31% of those over 60).

6.1.3 Frequency of eating out and more important optional attributes

A minimum frequency for eating out was required (another filter question). Hence respondents in the study who never eat out did not progress into the first part of the questionnaire. Most respondents in the study eat out for leisure on a regular basis with only nine (9) respondents in the study eat out about twice a year. The findings can be seen in table 12.

Table 12: Frequency of eating out and importance of optional attributes (N=376)

Label	6 - Decor and lighting	7 - Music	8 - Timing	9 - Range of beverages	10 - Presentation of food	11 - Portion sizes	12 - Restaurant appearance and cleanliness	13 - Location	14 - Offers
Twice a year	67%	11%	67%	22%	67%	44%	89%	67%	11%
Less than once a month but more than twice a year	63%	22%	39%	26%	83%	40%	93%	82%	34%
About once a month or slightly more	65%	14%	39%	24%	81%	45%	91%	81%	44%
About once a week	71%	22%	30%	34%	80%	29%	96%	91%	36%

The table shows that the most regular restaurant goers (89 respondents) eat out at least once a week. These are less interested in offers (36%) and in portion sizes (29%), but very interested in location (91%), presentation of food (80%) and in restaurant appearance and cleanliness (96%). It appears that more regular customers wanted to go to a place that is conveniently located even if there are no offers. Portion size did not seem to be an issue worthy of consideration as they may want to enjoy the experience, particularly visually, considering the high appreciation for restaurant appearance and cleanliness and presentation of food. It also seems that timing is not an issue of highest importance (30%).

6.1.4 Gender and more important optional attributes

Of the total of 376 respondents in the study, 156 were male (41%) and 220 (59%) were female. Please see findings in table 13.

Table 13: Gender and importance of optional attributes (N=376)

Label	Total	6 - Decor and lighting	7 - Music	8 - Timing	9 - Range of beverages	10 - Presentation of food	11 - Portion sizes	12 - Restaurant appearance and cleanliness	13 - Location	14 - Offers
Male	156	64%	16%	38%	31%	77%	46%	88%	80%	31%
Female	220	65%	19%	36%	23%	81%	35%	93%	84%	44%

The most noticeable differences are in portion sizes and 46% of men wanted to consider that attribute compared to 35% of women. Also women seemed more interested in offers and

promotions (44%) compared to 31% of men. Range of beverages was more important to men (31% v. 23%).

6.1.5 Lifecycle and more important optional attributes

Please see findings in table 14.

Table 14: Lifecycle and importance of optional attributes (N=376)

Label	Total	6 - Decor and lighting	7 - Music	8 - Timing	9 - Range of beverages	10 - Presentation of food	11 - Portion sizes	12 - Restaurant appearance and cleanliness	13 - Location	14 - Offers
Single	107	59%	22%	37%	31%	68%	38%	89%	79%	43%
Single parent	16	56%	6%	19%	6%	69%	31%	75%	69%	44%
Married/Cohabiting no children	136	72%	19%	35%	25%	85%	43%	92%	85%	35%
Married/Cohabiting with children	117	63%	13%	40%	26%	85%	37%	94%	83%	38%

The more important differences appear to be in presentation of food with married or cohabiting respondents in the study choosing this attribute (85%) compared to 68-69% of single respondents in the study. Single parents had little interest in range of beverages and in music (6%).

6.2 Build Your Own section (BYO)

This part of the questionnaire was completed by 295 respondents in the study. This section contains both the overall counts and cross-tabulations. It is important to note that since the number of respondents in the study that chose “Other occasion” was too small, this option was not considered. That is why the total number of counts are 290 and not 295 in the tables (N=290). The optional attributes, portion sizes, timing and range of beverages were chosen by few respondents in the study. With such a tiny sample comparisons are rendered meaningless and for that reason the counts were not included. Offers will be considered in order to establish what type of offer is most preferred only for the occasion “day or night out with friends or relatives”.

6.2.1 Build Your Own (BYO) counts

A full report with all the counts is in appendix 17. In terms of food quality 84% of respondents in the study went for acceptable (35%) or good food quality (49%), with Michelin-Star quality chosen by 15%. That means that normally respondents in the study are price sensitive and are

willing to trade down for less expensive options. Respondents in the study favour a quiet restaurant (71%) compared to a busy one (29%) and prioritise friendliness over knowledge when it comes to service. Few respondents in the study chose music in their BYO, confirming the low importance displayed in previous tables. 46% of respondents in the study chose a type of service that is friendly but less costly compared to 32% who were willing to pay more for service that was also knowledgeable. In terms of variety of dishes, it is less clear what the level of variety is and it seems to be linked to occasion.

It was found that parking facilities were more important than access to public transport with 41% selecting a restaurant with “good parking facilities, public transport not easily accessible”. In regard to food presentation 29% chose excellent presentation compared to 36% who selected good presentation. Only 12% of respondents in the study are prepared to pay more for outstanding presentation.

In terms of restaurant appearance, attractive furniture and tableware is preferred to innovative appearance (46% v 25%). Interestingly, a simple, clean but unpretentious restaurant was chosen by 29% of respondents in the study in this section. However, innovative design in a well-lit restaurant was chosen over conservative décor with low light (33% v 21%). Innovative décor was favoured by 57% compared to 43% who chose conservative décor. In this case, it may be considered that when it comes to deciding between a traditional, conservative design and an innovatively designed restaurant, consumers prefer a degree of innovation without going to the extreme of quirkiness. Of course, further investigation into restaurant design and appearance is necessary for ascertaining what types of concepts have more appeal for certain consumer segments. The aspect of timing seemed particularly relevant with 60% of respondents in the study choosing perfect timing as a feature of their preferred restaurant even though it was the costliest of all options. As for the least selected options, it is noticeable that respondents in the study who included portion sizes in their BYO, favour bigger option sizes over smaller portions (64 v. 36%).

6.2.2 Build Your Own: Occasion and food quality

Firstly, it is important to note that respondents in the study were shown higher prices for options with higher order in the case of food quality. Therefore respondents in the study are prepared to pay more if they selected Michelin-star standard quality, than for just good food quality and so forth. Please refer to table 15 and figure 37 on the next page.

Table 15: Cross-tabulation occasion and food quality in percentages (N=290)

	1 - Excellent quality, worthy of awards (Michelin-star standard or close to it), very impressed	2 - Good food quality, slightly better than expected	3 - Acceptable food quality, just as expected	4 - Slightly less than acceptable, needs some minor improvements
Day/night out with friends and/or family	12%	49%	38%	1%
Romantic dinner	21%	64%	15%	0%
Special celebration, promotion at work, Birthday party	23%	30%	40%	7%



Figure 37: Bar chart: Occasion and food quality

The chart shows that for a romantic dinner respondents in the study were more inclined to pay more for Michelin-star quality restaurants as 21% selected that option compared to 12% for a night out with friends/family. Also the segment who go out for a romantic dinner are less willing to accept just “Acceptable quality” (15%) compared to 38% for the segment “Night out with friends/family”. It is possible to determine whether the difference is statistically significant conducting a non-parametric test (Chi-Square test). For that purpose the original counts are shown in table 16.

Table 16: Cross-tabulation occasion and food quality (counts) (N=290)

Label	1 - Excellent quality, worthy of awards (Michelin-star standard or close to it), very impressed	2 - Good food quality, slightly better than expected	3 - Acceptable food quality, just as expected	4 - Slightly less than acceptable, needs some minor improvements	Totals
Day/night out with friends and/or family	25	105	80	3	213
Romantic dinner	10	30	7	0	47
Special celebration, promotion at work, Birthday party	7	9	12	2	30

It is not clear in the case of special celebration as percentage of acceptance for choices is high on both ends (excellent or acceptable). Thus, focus will be placed on ascertaining whether there are significant differences between romantic dinner and night out with regard to food quality. Since the number for level 4 is too small, the counts of level 4 are aggregated to level 3. Please see table 17 below.

Table 17: Comparison table Night Out and romantic dinner against food quality (N=290)

Label	1 - Excellent quality, worthy of awards (Michelin-star standard or close to it), very impressed	2 - Good food quality, slightly better than expected	3 - Acceptable (or slightly less than) food quality, just as expected
Day/night out with friends and/or family	25	105	83
Romantic dinner	10	30	7

Calculations for Chi-Square are in Appendix 18, at the 5% level of significance the χ^2 critical value for 2 degrees of freedom is 5.99. As the value of 10.69 exceeds that, the null hypothesis

is rejected. This demonstrates that consumers are prepared to pay more money for higher quality food and are less likely to accept lower quality for lower prices when the occasion is a romantic dinner compared to a night out with friends/relatives.

6.2.3 Build Your Own: Occasion and service

As with food quality, higher levels of services mean a higher price. Five categories of service quality (SQ) are defined below. SQ1 is the highest level and SQ5 is the lowest level.

SQ1: Knowledgeable and extremely attentive and very friendly

SQ2: It could be more knowledgeable, but attentive, friendly, welcoming and relaxed

SQ3: Friendly and welcoming but could be more attentive, not very knowledgeable

SQ4: Attentive but a bit obtrusive and not particularly friendly or welcoming

SQ5: Relaxed and friendly, tries hard but leaves too much to be desired

Table 18: Cross-tabulation service and occasion (percentages) (N=290)

Label	SQ1	SQ2	SQ3	SQ4	SQ5
Day/night out with friends and/or family	30%	48%	18%	0%	3%
Romantic dinner	38%	43%	15%	0%	4%
Birthday party	42%	32%	16%	11%	0%
Special celebration, e.g. promotion at work, reunion	18%	55%	9%	18%	0%

The results of this table are graphically represented in the bar chart below.

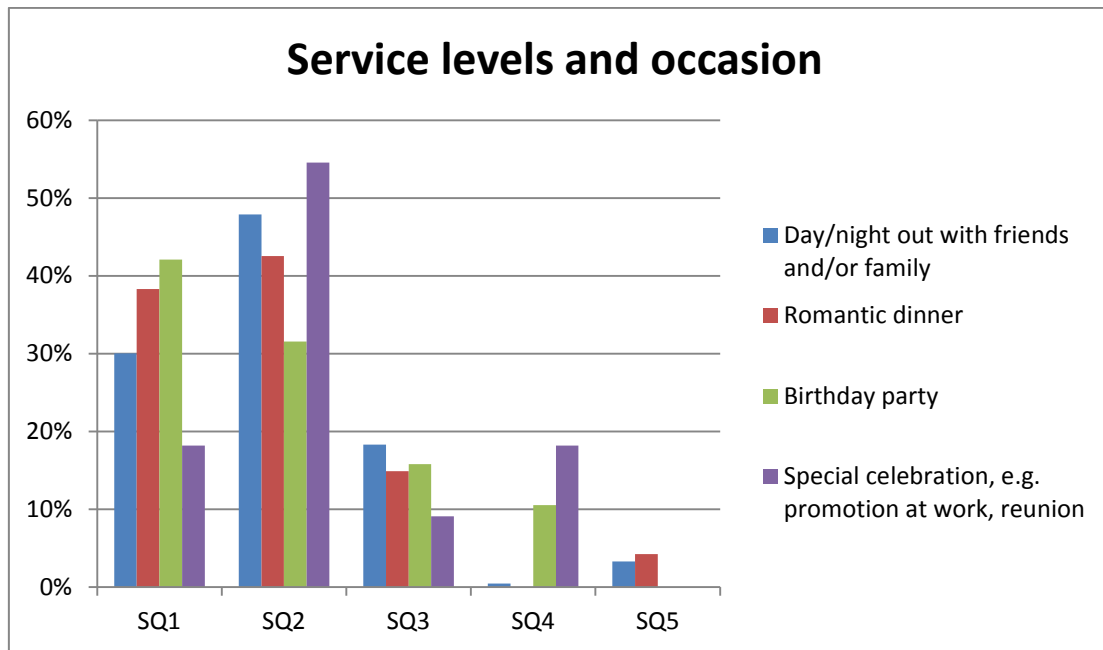


Figure 38: Bar chart occasion and level of service

It is noticeable that respondents in the study tended to favour friendly service even if less knowledgeable as they seemingly were less prepared to pay more for knowledgeable service. There is more likelihood of paying more for knowledgeable service in the case of a birthday party or a romantic dinner. Interestingly, attentive but obtrusive service has less preference than poor service that shows only friendliness as a positive feature, except in the case of birthday parties where attentiveness appears to be more important than friendliness. As may be expected, low levels of service have minimal acceptance even if less expensive, thus showing non-compensatory behaviour.

6.2.4 Build Your Own: Occasion and atmosphere

In this case noise environment is a proxy for atmosphere. This is because it provides an impression between two types of ambiance that can be found in a restaurant, the busy type mentioned by respondents in the study in the focus group interviews or a quieter type. There is no price difference associated with any of these options. Results are displayed in table 19 and graphically in figure 39 below.

Table 19: Cross-tabulation Occasion and atmosphere (N=290)

Label	1 - Quiet, customers can engage in private conversations	2 - Busy, great atmosphere even if slightly noisy
Day/night out with friends and/or family	71%	29%
Romantic dinner	77%	23%
Birthday party	53%	47%
Special celebration, e.g. promotion at work, reunion	64%	36%

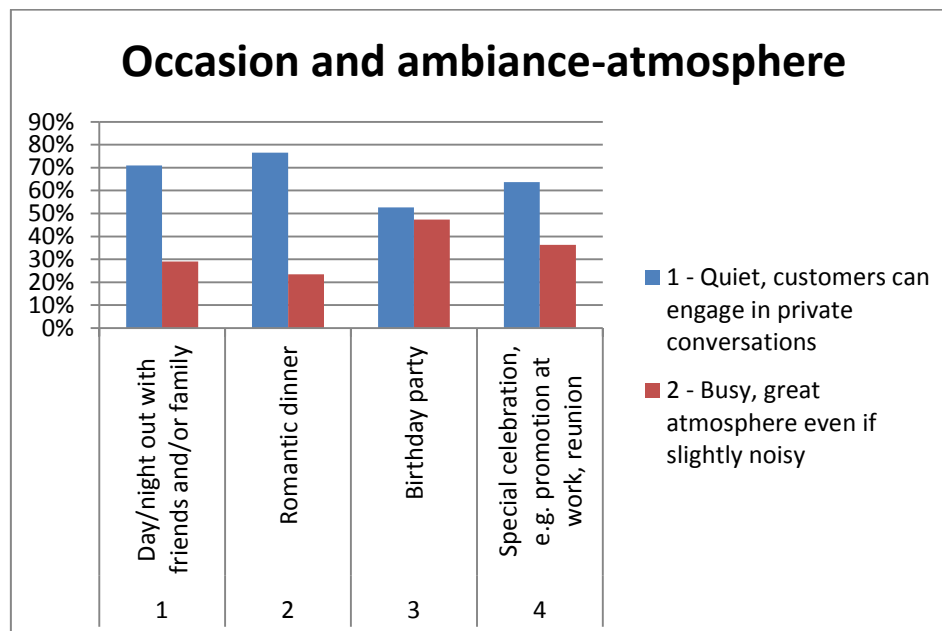


Figure 39: Bar chart occasion and atmosphere

Notably, it was found that there was higher preference for a quieter atmosphere for all occasions with higher acceptance for a slightly noisy atmosphere in birthday parties.

6.2.5 Build Your Own: Occasion and menu options

Another fixed attribute was menu options, in which the greater the variety the more consumers are prepared to pay. The inclusion of specials in the menu makes the total amount that consumers had to pay the highest. Please see the findings in table 20 and figure 40 below.

Table 20: Cross-tabulation occasion and menu options (N=290)

Label	1 - Little variety but great dishes	2 - Great dishes in a varied menu. Great variety of vegetarian options, no specials	3 - Great dishes, varied menu with vegetarian options and specials
Day/night out with friends and/or family	28%	37%	35%
Romantic dinner	34%	28%	38%
Birthday party	21%	37%	42%
Special celebration	18%	36%	45%

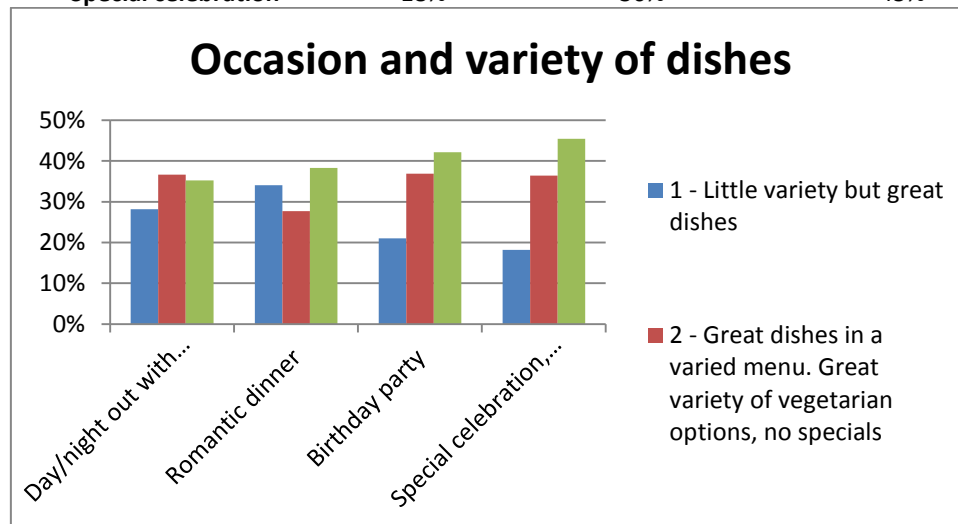


Figure 40: Bar chart occasion and variety of dishes

Noticeably, consumers were prepared to pay more for greater variety in the case of parties than in the case of a normal night out with friends and family or for a romantic dinner. It seems that there are significant differences and for that reason a non-parametric test (Chi square) was conducted. Calculations are shown in Appendix 19. At the 5% level of significance the χ^2 critical value for 4 degrees of freedom is 9.49. As the value of 15.82 exceeds that, the null hypothesis is rejected and it is possible to say that there is a relationship between occasion and the variety of dishes that consumers would like to have to choose for that particular occasion.

Table 21: Observed v. Expected frequencies occasion and variety of dishes (N=290)

	Observed	Expected	
Night out/1	60	44.06897	27%
Night out/2	78	57.28966	27%
Night out/3	75	77.85517	-4%
Romantic/1	16	13.28966	17%
Romantic/2	13	16.53103	-27%
Romantic/3	18	17.17931	5%
Parties/1	6	8.482759	-41%
Parties/2	11	10.55172	4%
Parties/3	13	10.96552	16%

Table 21 shows that with 1 being less variety and 3 being the greatest variety; it can be observed that consumers opted more for less variety on a night out (27% more than expected) and 4% less than expected for greater variety. On the contrary, in parties the expected frequency for less variety is 41% less than expected and 16% more than expected for greater variety. Therefore consumers seemed to want more variety in the case of parties. The data in the case of romantic dinners is less conclusive.

6.2.6 Build Your Own: Occasion and restaurant appearance/cleanliness

Please follow findings in table 22:

Table 22: Cross-tabulation occasion and restaurant appearance/cleanliness (N=290)

Label	Total	1 - Clean but unpretentious	2 - Clean with attractive furniture and tableware	3 - Clean, quirky and innovative
Day/night out with friends and/or family	257	24%	37%	20%
Romantic dinner	57	23%	32%	21%
Birthday party	27	11%	37%	19%
Special celebration, e.g. promotion at work, reunion	16	19%	44%	6%

Restaurant goers wanted something remarkable and attractive but without too much quirkiness and innovation regardless of the occasion. The greatest percentage that chose innovative design was 21% (romantic dinner as the occasion). It seems that attractive furniture and tableware is more appreciated than innovative appearance.

6.2.7 Build Your Own: Occasion and location

Please see findings in table 23 and figure 41.

Table 23: Cross-tabulation occasion and location (N=290)

Label	1 - Public transport and parking not easily accessible	2 - Good parking facilities, public transport not easily accessible	3 - Good public transport facilities, limited parking	4 - Good parking and public transport connections	Totals
Day/night out with friends and/or family	7%	42%	20%	31%	189
Romantic dinner	10%	30%	30%	30%	40
Birthday party	8%	46%	23%	23%	13
Special celebration, e.g. promotion at work, reunion	13%	50%	13%	25%	8

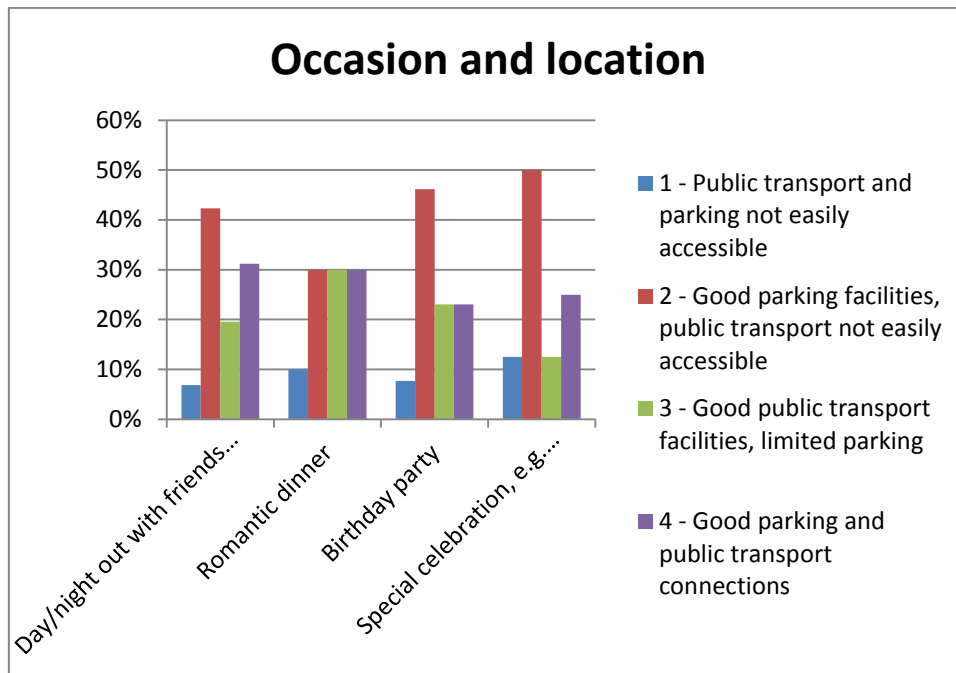


Figure 41: Bar chart occasion and location

It can be noticed that respondents in the study were not willing to accept going to restaurants with restricted accessibility regardless of how less expensive the poorly located restaurant is. For celebrations and parties, the option with ample parking facilities was preferred. Interestingly, parking seems more important than public transport connections for all occasions, except in the case of a romantic dinner where results were less conclusive with some willing to pay more for the best located restaurants.

6.2.8 Build Your Own: Occasion and food presentation

Findings in table 24 below:

Table 24: Cross-tabulation occasion and food presentation (N=290)

Label	Total	1 - Presentation needs some improvement	2 - Acceptable presentation, almost as expected	3 - Good presentation, slightly better than expected although unpretentious	4 - Excellent overall food presentation	5 - Outstanding food presentation, beautiful and tempting
Day/night out with friends and/or family	179	3%	22%	38%	28%	8%
Romantic dinner	37	3%	14%	35%	27%	22%
Birthday party	16	0%	31%	13%	31%	25%
Special celebration, e.g. promotion at work, reunion	11	0%	9%	45%	36%	9%

It can be noticed that respondents in the study were prepared to pay more for outstanding presentation in the case of special events like a romantic dinner (22%) or a birthday party (25%), compared to Day/night out with friends and families (8%). Remarkably, most respondents in the study showed willingness to pay more for presentation better than expected. That is shown if levels 3, 4 and 5 are added; since the totals are: 74% (day/night out) and 84% (romantic dinner).

6.2.9 Build Your Own: Occasion and décor and lighting

Please read the findings in table 25.

Table 25: Cross-tabulation occasion and décor and lighting (N=290)

Label	Total	1 - Conservative decor, low lights	2 - Conservative decor, mid to well lit	3 - Innovative decor, low lights	4 - Innovative decor, mid to well lit
Day/night out with friends and/or family	190	13%	17%	17%	28%
Romantic dinner	48	23%	13%	23%	13%
Birthday party	14	36%	21%	14%	29%

Low lights were preferred in all occasions, although the sample of respondents in the study choosing birthday party was relatively small (only 14 respondents in the study). In terms of conservative or innovative décor the results were inconclusive and it seems that more research is needed in this respect.

6.2.10 Build Your Own: Occasion and offers

The number of respondents in the study who chose this option was relatively small, only 6 for birthday parties and 3 for special celebration. The number for romantic dinner was also small (13), and it was found that 31% do not want any type of sales incentives. This small sample renders these results meaningless. Therefore it is considered that focus must be made on the occasion of day/night out with friends and family. Please refer to results in table 26 below:

Table 26: Cross-tabulation occasion and offers (N=290)

Label	Total	1 - Restaurants that do not use offers or sales incentives to attract customers	2 - Vouchers for free items, money off coupons, e-coupons	3 - Attractive pricing, e.g. set menus, children menus, drinks included with meals	4 - Seasonal or time-related offers e.g. early bird, happy hour, day of the week, only this week
Day/night out with friends and/or family	97	6%	45%	33%	15%

The tables show that direct discounts, in the form of coupons are preferred (45%). Interestingly attractive pricing was also chosen by 33% of respondents in the study. Seasonal offers had little preference. It also confirms that the respondents in the study who chose offers as an optional attribute are price sensitive as only 6% chose restaurants that do not offer incentives.

6.3 Screening section

This section “screens” options for testing in the next task. However, it also results in counts of options that are not accepted by consumers regardless of its low price (unacceptables) and also counts of “must haves”, which are required levels of an attribute regardless of its higher price. It is considered that unacceptables are a better indicator of non-compensatory behaviour. For that reason, the section will only discuss counts of unacceptables, where a differentiation has been made between fixed attributes and optional. 295 respondents in the

study responded to the screening section of the questionnaire. A report with all the unacceptable counts can be found in appendix 20.

6.3.1 Fixed attributes

Consumers were less forgiving when it comes to food quality with 32% of the respondents in the study selecting the level of food of slightly less than acceptable needing minor improvements as unacceptable. That was the lowest level of food quality available to be selected and 4% found unacceptable food that is just “good”. Thus, in total 36% consider food that is just good or slightly below expectations as unacceptable.

That was followed by the attribute of service. 23% of respondents in the study were not willing to accept service that is “relaxed and friendly, tries hard but leaves too much to be desired” and 10% found unacceptable the level “attentive but obtrusive service that is not particularly friendly”.

With a much lower degree of rejection were aspects such as little variety 6% and noisy atmosphere 6%, which are the other fixed attributes worthy of mention.

6.3.2 Optional attributes

The attribute of timing showed non-compensatory behaviour. For this feature 31% would not accept having to wait considerably for the courses and to be seated. This was followed by location, with 21% of respondents in the study considering that location that has limited parking facilities or public transport connections was unacceptable. Presentation of food was the other relevant attribute exhibiting non-compensatory behaviour. Presentation that is below expectations was deemed as unacceptable by 15% of respondents in the study and “almost as expected” was unacceptable for 4%.

6.4 Counts of the winning concept

This part of the questionnaire was completed by 243 respondents in the study. These respondents in the study first selected a restaurant with certain characteristics in the BYO section. Then in the screening section, respondents in the study were “screening” options that were unacceptable or that should have certain requirements. In the winning concept section they had to select the restaurant that had the most acceptable features for the price that they were prepared to pay. Thus, the price alongside other characteristics was presented and respondents in the study chose the preferred concept. This section will contain overall data in terms of preference, not differentiated by occasion or by any other demographics. More

insight about differences in levels and occasions is provided in the Hierarchical Bayes Analysis section. Counts of the winning concepts are in appendix 21.

6.4.1 Fixed attributes

Acceptable food quality, just as expected had almost the same preference as the next level (Good food quality, slightly better than expected (34.5% v. 33%). The highest level (Michelin-star or equivalent) was less preferred overall (26%). That level may be preferred if the occasion is a romantic dinner, confirming what was found in the BYO counts. For menu options, the preferred level was the intermediate level of variety without specials (39.5% v. 33%). Greatest variety was preferred if the occasion was a birthday party or a special celebration. That may be because consumers assume the greater the variety the more it can cater to the more varied tastes of a greater number of people on that occasion. All the same, the preference for little variety but greater dishes is significantly high (27.16%). This possibly means that there is a significant market segment of consumers who do not mind a shorter list of items in the menu if the quality is right. The winning concept exercise found that after several screens, service appears to grow in importance in this section when compared to the BYO section and the highest level of service (knowledgeable and extremely attentive and very friendly) has 40 % preference compared to 29% and 18% for the next levels. This means that one segment of consumers is very appreciative of a higher level of service even if they have to pay more for it. This contrasts with the finding of BYO whereby 32% preferred the highest level. This means that a good number of consumers are willing to pay more for better service, contradicting Tse's (2001) findings examined in the literature review. In terms of ambiance, clearly consumers prefer a quieter ambiance (65 % v. 35%); in this case it can be noted that parties may have a higher acceptance for busy places as also found in the BYO section.

6.4.2 Optional attributes

The most selected attribute in this section was "Restaurant cleanliness and appearance" with 233 completes. The findings confirmed what was found in the BYO section, about attractive furniture and tableware, which is preferred to innovative appearance (44% v 29%). The preference for a clean but unpretentious restaurant was evidenced by 27% of respondents in the study choosing the option, almost the same as in the BYO section (29%). This result is revealing as many restaurateurs are spending large sums of money on unique designs, when basic attention to smaller details in décor, furniture and tableware are what consumers seem

to be looking for. In this case, the choice of a quirky, innovative appearance did not mean a higher price, and even so this option was not highly favoured by respondents in the study.

Second in number of selections was location (210 completes). This section confirmed that having the choice of either parking facilities or public transport connections, parking facilities appear to be more important. In this case, 37% of respondents in the study preferred parking facilities to 25% who chose public transport connections. Likewise, a significant number (27%) were willing to pay more for a restaurant that has both features. It also confirmed that respondents in the study were not willing to accept going to restaurants with restricted accessibility as only 11% went for this option regardless of it being less costly.

Thirdly rated in order of completes was food presentation (199). As expected non-compensatory behaviour was noticed as only 7% of respondents in the study went for presentation that needs some improvement, regardless of its lower cost. The winning choice was “Good, slightly better than expected although unpretentious” (32%) which is the intermediate level. The next higher two levels excellent or outstanding were chosen by 23% and 21%. This means that for the respondents, who chose presentation to be included as an optional attribute, there is some spread and further information is needed from the Hierarchical Bayes (HB) analysis of utility scores.

The fourth attribute in order of completes was décor and lighting (175). In this case, there was significant dispersion as 48% went for low lights compared to 52% for mid-to well lit. A slightly higher preference was noticed for innovative décor (57%) compared to conservative décor (43%). Once more, the HB analysis of utility scores can be more enlightening.

The next attribute in order of completes was Offers (101). As expected, if consumers included this aspect in this section a low number was expected to go for no offers or sales incentives (13%). Here the preference for “free items, money-off coupons, e-coupons” (36%) appears to be almost as high as “Attractive pricing” (set menus, children menus, drinks included, etc.) with 34%.

The least selected attributes in number of completes were portion sizes (98), timing (88) and range of beverages (66). It was found that for consumers who included portion sizes, bigger portions are preferred to smaller portions; notwithstanding that food may be wasted (64% v. 36%). For consumers who thought that timing is important perfect timing is worth paying more for (48%), with slight delays being least preferred regardless of lower price. And for

those who considered that range of beverages is important an ample drinks list is worth paying more (48%).

6.5 Hierarchical Bayes HB analyses

6.5.1 Undifferentiated Hierarchical Bayes analysis (Generic HB)

The ACBC counts gave a general sense of direction of the data but the HB analysis can provide more detailed insight, particularly between levels of attributes. The first analysis was provided by the HB report (appendix 22) and it is about results for attributes for the entire sample. The generic HB analysis had a Root Likelihood (RLH) of 0.610, well over 0.33 (chance level). The RLH is a measure of how well the average utility part-worth of every respondent fits the data, with 1.00 being a perfect fit. In the first place, a glance at average importances provides an idea of what attributes are more important for consumers. Obviously, the price attribute is positively correlated with other attributes. For that reason its average importance when using summed pricing is irrelevant.

6.5.2 Average importances

The most important attribute, confirmed by other researchers in the literature review and in the ACBC counts was quality of food with 15.64%; second in importance was service with 11.16%. Atmospherics, as discussed in the literature review, is a complex issue that was further divided into other attributes such as a noisy or quiet ambiance (5.17%), décor and lighting (3.25%) and music (1.48%). If all these aspects are added together, this aspect showed an importance of 9.91%. Location seemed to be another important attribute with 6.92%, followed closely by food presentation that had an average importance of 5.74%. Interestingly, the attribute of menu options, included as a fixed attribute in the study only measured an importance of 3.58%, which was close to the attribute of restaurant appearance and cleanliness (3.43%). Appearance was combined with cleanliness as obviously a low level of cleanliness would not be accepted by respondents in the study as shown in the literature. But even when the features of appearance (unpretentious, innovative, or quirky) were included the importance of this attribute did not seem to increase. Interestingly, although a large percentage of respondents in the study decided to include it in the second part (over 90% for all occasions), the importance was considerably minimised when considered as a trade-off attribute in the second part of the survey (ACBC task). It seems that respondents in the study considered that it was an important attribute that restaurants must have but one that has less weight when other attributes have to be traded-off. The latter confirms the findings of Titz

(2004) who found that cleanliness was important only when not present. Thus, it is not generally part of the considerations when selecting a restaurant. Timing was even considered more important (4.60%). Aspects such as portion sizes and offers had low relative importance, 2.04% and 2.09% respectively. Finally the least important attribute was range of beverages with 1.39%.

6.5.3 Average part-worth utilities

Average part-worths are scaled to zero. The software calls this zero-centred diffs (see appendix 23). This section will focus on the most remarkable differences of the most important attributes discussed above, namely, quality of food, service, location, food presentation or when the analysis of the ACBC counts was not conclusive.

With reference to food quality there were no major differences between the part-worths of the higher levels, the one worthy of awards with 59.38 and good food quality with 57.95; however there was a significant difference from the next level of acceptable quality with a part-worth of 12.80. This means that customers were prepared to pay more for something that was better than expected, but it seemed that the high price associated with top-end restaurants made the difference between the restaurants with “Excellent” quality and “Good” food quality relatively small.

The results on service confirmed what had been found in the counting analysis of the winning concept. The difference between the highest level (59.10) and the next level (42.26) was significant but not as much as the next level (Friendly and welcoming but could be more attentive, not very knowledgeable) with 15.07. Curiously, there was a higher preference for relaxed and friendly service that is poor in general lines (-52.69) to an attentive service but that is obtrusive and not very friendly or welcoming (-63.74).

The results about location were more informative in the HB analysis. The highest difference is between the highest level (good parking and public transport connections) that had a utility of 27.37 and the next level (Good public transport facilities but limited parking) with a utility of 13.28. The latter was almost as preferred as the option with good public transport facilities and limited parking (utility of 11.18). It appears that a good location was of great importance because it was highly selected in the winning concept task, and selected as an important attribute by most frequent restaurant goers (91% selection). It seems to imply that if a restaurant is well located in terms of good parking facilities and with good public transport,

this may have a considerable influence on the decision made. The small difference between the less well-located restaurants means that they are identified as far inferior from well-located restaurants and then may not be selected.

Interestingly, for food presentation the highest utility was found for the highest level (19.15) but not markedly distant from the following levels 15.31 and 16.58; however, it dropped significantly for the next level (Acceptable presentation, almost as expected). This means that a certain “Wow factor” is necessary when consumers listen to references about food presentation in a particular restaurant, if this is to be an influencing factor in the decision.

The HB analysis of utility scores for décor and lighting clarified that innovative décor was highly preferred to conservative décor with a slight preference for mid to well lit (5.03 v. 4.11) compared to the highest level of conservative décor (-3.53).

Finally, the analysis of utilities confirmed that offers such as money-off coupons and attractive pricing (bundles, etc.) had almost the same level of preference (4.90 v. 5.25). Perfect timing was confirmed to be significantly more preferred than the next level (29.72 v. 9.69) with the level being 7.52. That means that with regard to timing, perfect timing increases the likelihood of a restaurant being selected.

6.5.4 HB analysis with covariates

This analysis will first have an overview at importances and then at significant different differences between levels.

6.5.4.1 Importance of attributes for every occasion

In this case, birthday parties and promotions were analysed as one occasion. Table 27 shows a comparison of average importances per occasion.

Table 27: Average importance per occasion after HB analysis with covariates (N=243)

Average importances	Night out	Romantic dinner	Celebration
Menu options	3.46738	3.87355	3.74518
Quality of food	14.89511	19.42922	14.89218
Ambiance	5.08359	5.20291	4.71228
Service	11.00266	11.61236	10.76776
Decor and lighting	3.19808	3.52710	4.18147
Music	1.07049	2.48502	2.26708
Timing	4.72612	3.79944	5.36347
Range of beverages	1.28338	1.61218	1.61170
Presentation of food	5.74639	5.71077	5.29097
Portion sizes	1.99633	2.48500	2.41267
Restaurant appearance and cleanliness	3.41042	3.12187	4.82273
Location	7.49623	6.52617	5.12068
Offers	2.31540	0.97106	1.84378

As for the most important attributes evaluated above, a significant difference was noticed in the importance of quality of food for a romantic dinner compared with quality for a night out or a celebration (19.42 compared to 14.89). That means that the couple going for a romantic dinner are willing to pay more for the highest quality, whilst they are not concerned about timing (3.79), compared to 5.36 for a celebration or a night out). This means that timing is of utmost importance for restaurants organising parties as it is an important consideration in consumers' minds. Offers are of more importance for a normal night out with friends and family, with slightly less importance for celebrations but far less important for a romantic dinner occasion (0.97). Location seems to be more important for a night out with friends and family as well (7.49 compared to 6.52 for a romantic dinner and 5.12 for a special celebration). This may be because for a normal night out a convenient location with accessibility for different types of people is crucially important for selecting a restaurant. The aspect of restaurant appearance and cleanliness appeared to be more important for celebrations, as well as décor and lighting and music. Presentation of food has almost the same importance for all occasions and portion sizes and range of beverages showed no differences in respect of occasion either. The least important attribute is music. Music is more than twice as important for a romantic dinner (2.49) and a celebration (2.27) if compared to a normal day or night out with friends/family (1.07).

Attribute importance offers an indication, but more detail is needed to compare levels of attributes for particular occasions.

6.5.4.2 Difference in levels of attributes for every occasion

This section discusses every attribute. In some cases, the number of respondents in the study who chose to answer a particular attribute was particularly low. That is highlighted. Table 28 shows the differences between levels for menu options.

Table 28: Utility part-worth for menu options after HB analysis with covariates (N=243)

Menu options	Night out	Romantic Dinner	Celebration
Little variety but great dishes	-13.06	-22.29	4.73
Great dishes in a varied menu. Great variety of vegetarian options, no specials	6.48	7.39	4.73
Great dishes, varied menu with vegetarian options and specials	6.59	14.90	13.50

It can be noticed that greater variety was preferred if the occasion was a romantic dinner (14.90 compared to 7.39 for the next level). If the occasion is a party, greater variety was also important (13.50 compared to 4.73 for the next level). This confirms the findings in the counts of the winning concept. Table 29 shows the analysis of food quality and occasion.

Table 29: Utility part-worth for quality of food after HB analysis with covariates (N=243)

Quality of food	Night out	Romantic Dinner	Celebration
Excellent quality, worthy of awards (Michelin-star standard or close to it), very impressed.	51.07	91.99	72.06
Good food quality, slightly better than expected	54.83	79.73	37.18
Acceptable food quality, just as expected	18.39	-6.47	4.97
Slightly less than acceptable, needs some minor improvements	-124.29	-165.27	-114.23

In this case, the examination by occasion provide much more insightful information that the one obtained by counting. It confirms that if the occasion is a romantic dinner, the utility is the

greatest for the highest level, however the difference between the highest level and the second highest is greater if the occasion is a celebration, which shows a difference of about 35.00 (72.06-37.18). For romantic dinner the difference is about 12.00 (91.99-79.73). Acceptable food quality had a much greater rate of acceptance (18.39) compared to romantic dinner (-6.47) or celebration (4.97) if the occasion was a normal day out with friends, Again, non-compensatory behaviour was observed across all segments as food of a sub-standard quality evidenced a remarkably low utility.

Table 30 shows the attribute of service per occasion for eating out.

Table 30: Utility part-worth for service after HB analysis with covariates (N=243)

Service	Night out	Romantic Dinner	Celebration
Knowledgeable and extremely attentive and very friendly	58.25	61.31	57.26
It could be more knowledgeable, but attentive, friendly, welcoming and relaxed	41.54	49.53	41.03
Friendly and welcoming but could be more attentive, not very knowledgeable	16.79	12.19	3.94
Attentive but a bit obtrusive and not particularly friendly or welcoming	-60.84	-81.77	-46.75
Relaxed and friendly, tries hard but leaves too much to be desired	-55.74	-55.49	-55.49

Differences were not remarkable for the first two levels, and this means that customers were prepared to pay more for best quality of service. Interestingly, customers attending a party needed a type of service that is also knowledgeable. This is shown in table 32, as less knowledgeable service showed a utility of 3.94, compared to 16.79 for a day/night out with friends and family and 12.19 for a romantic dinner. Service of poor quality had a remarkably low utility, which confirms non-compensatory behaviour. Table 31 showed the HB analysis with covariates of food presentation and occasion.

Table 31: Utility part-worth for food presentation after HB analysis with covariates (N=243)

Food presentation	Night out	Romantic Dinner	Celebration
Presentation needs some improvement	-43.34	-30.45	-37.29
Acceptable presentation, almost as expected	-6.11	-25.05	-8.08
Good presentation, slightly better than expected although unpretentious	16.14	10.25	26.03
Excellent overall food presentation	16.61	16.17	12.49
Outstanding food presentation, beautiful and tempting	16.69	29.08	6.85

The HB analysis with covariates confirms that non-compensatory behaviour is evidenced because of the low utility for the lowest level of service (1). This analysis revealed that in the case of a romantic dinner, presentation is of great importance because of the high utility for the highest level (29.08) compared to the next level (16.17), whereas for a night out with friends, there is almost no difference for the three highest levels and that for a celebration, good presentation, slightly better than expected but unpretentious was preferred, which means that customers were prepared to pay more for other attributes but that presentation just has to be slightly better than expected. Overall food presentation was found to be important because “acceptable presentation, almost as expected” showed low utility. Therefore, non-compensatory behaviour was observed for the lower levels. It is found that the threshold is good presentation, slightly better than expected.

The next table looks into location and occasion.

Table 32: Utility part-worth for location after HB analysis with covariates (N=243)

Location	Night out	Romantic Dinner	Celebration
Public transport and parking not easily accessible	-56.31	-44.88	-32.12
Good parking facilities, public transport not easily accessible	9.81	9.70	19.23
Good public transport facilities, limited parking	11.79	24.29	6.18
Good parking and public transport connections	34.71	10.88	6.71

Apart from the fact that poor accessibility had low utility for all occasions, the other levels presented notable differences. Customers were prepared to pay more for a well-located restaurant for a normal night out with friends and family. This may imply that when a night out with friends or family is planned, a convenient location for all attendees is needed. They may come by different means of transport. It may explain why it had the highest utility and it showed a considerable difference from the less convenient two levels below. However, for a romantic dinner when there are two eating out public transport connections was preferred over parking. That means that they were prepared to pay more for other attributes like food presentation or food quality and service but not for the best located restaurant. In the case of celebrations, where preparations are made well in advance, highest utility is placed on a restaurant with good parking facilities (19.23), with less willingness to pay more for a well located restaurant with both good parking facilities and public transport connections (6.71).

6.6 Conclusions

This chapter showed the use of conjoint analysis in a very complex decision. When more insight was needed the HB analysis clarified what was not conclusive in the ACBC counts, adding more depth to the overall analysis of restaurant attributes.

Firstly a study of most important optional attributes, demographics and occasion was conducted. Décor and lighting, presentation of food, restaurant appearance/cleanliness and location were found to be the most important optional attributes. Timing, portion sizes and offers seem to have the same relatively low importance. The most noticeable difference is that if the occasion is a romantic dinner, music was chosen significantly more than for a night or day out with friends and family. Also décor and lighting appeared to be of high importance for a romantic dinner. In general, attributes like music and range of beverages had far less importance, with the exception of birthday parties. In terms of age groups, food presentation is significantly more important for older segments. Also important for older customers, was restaurant appearance and cleanliness, which was selected by all the respondents aged 60 or over. Interestingly, portion sizes were more important for younger respondents and the over 60s, people in the middle aged groups being less concerned about portion sizes. This could imply that the middle aged groups (30-59) have more concerns about their health than their younger or older counterparts. With regard to the demographic variable of frequency of eating out, the most regular restaurant goers were less interested in offers; and in portion sizes, but very interested in location, presentation of food and in restaurant appearance and cleanliness.

It seemed that more regular customers placed particular importance on finding (a) well-located place(s) that they could easily access and in the enjoyment of the meal experience. This is evidenced because of the calm, relaxed approach to the experience (timing was not selected a great deal) and because eating profusely is not pursued (portion sizes not an issue) but they highly estimated restaurant appearance and cleanliness and presentation of food. About differences in attribute importance by gender, more men considered portion sizes as an optional attribute than women. Women seem more interested in offers and promotions than men. Few differences were found in lifecycle segments with presentation of food being more selected by married or cohabiting couples than by the single respondents.

After that the next tasks in the survey resulted in a number of counts. When trading off price, respondents are willing to accept food quality of acceptable or good quality so as to avoid the premium attached to award-winning restaurants. Higher levels were preferred if the occasion is a romantic dinner. The survey also revealed that a significant percentage of respondents favoured a quiet restaurant with higher acceptance of a slightly noisy atmosphere for birthday parties. Attractive furniture and tableware was preferred to innovative appearance and clean but unpretentious restaurants are also appreciated to a high degree. Contrastingly, innovative décor was chosen more than conservative décor. Overall, the survey revealed that quirky, innovative design is not sought after. This is an interesting finding, particularly because this attribute was not linked to higher prices. It means that spending a great deal of money in design will not draw more customers but that spending that money on attractive furniture and tableware is wiser (and less costly). For this smaller sample, timing seems particularly relevant with 60% of respondents selecting the level of perfect timing as a feature of their preferred restaurant regardless of its higher price. When occasion was considered, respondents were prepared to pay more for Michelin-star standard food quality for romantic dinners than for a night out with friends/family. It was found that menu variety is more important if the occasion is a party, in which case consumers are prepared to pay more. Location is another key attribute, and poor accessibility was not accepted. Parking was found to be more important than public transport connections for all occasions, except romantic dinners. This exercise also confirmed the paramount importance of parking facilities with low acceptance for restaurants with restricted accessibility regardless of their being less costly. Price sensitive consumers were found to have the same preference for “free items, money-off coupons, e-coupons” as for “Attractive pricing (set menus, children’s menus, drinks included, etc.”. The highest level of food presentation, outstanding, is more highly selected for romantic dinners or a birthday

party and significantly less for the occasion of Day/night out with friends and families. For menu options, the preferred level was the intermediate level of variety without specials and the higher level of variety was preferred if the occasion is a party. It seems that party goers expect food of great variety to cater for different tastes. Nonetheless, the preference for “little variety but greater dishes” is significantly high. This may mean that quality supersedes variety. Respecting service, it was found that as the survey progressed, in the last tasks (after further reasoning and trading-off attributes) the significance of higher levels of service increases. For instance, the highest level of service (knowledgeable and extremely attentive and very friendly) had the highest (40%) preference compared to the lower levels. This means that a good number of consumers are willing to pay more for better service. As for the least selected options, respondents favour larger portions over smaller portions.

The survey confirmed non-compensatory behaviour in various attributes, like food quality and service with low acceptance for lowest levels regardless of these having a lower price. Timing was another important attribute and a substantial percentage of all unacceptables referred to having to wait for the courses or to be seated. This becomes then an aspect that restaurant managers must consider as critical. Location is another attribute that shows non-compensatory behaviour with an important number of respondents considering that location that has limited parking facilities or public transport connections is unacceptable. Presentation of food is deemed to be the other relevant element exhibiting non-compensatory behaviour because only a small percentage of respondents selected presentation that needed some improvement, regardless of its lower cost.

The HB analysis provided more detail about differences in preferences for attributes than the counts. The most important attribute, confirmed by other researchers in the literature review and in the interviews was quality of food with 15.64%. Second in importance was service with 11.16%. Atmospherics, as combining ambiance (noisy or quiet), décor and lighting and music showed an importance of 9.91%. Location followed with 6.92%, then food presentation with 5.74%. Menu options, although included as a fixed attribute in the study, only measured an importance of 3.58%, similar to restaurant appearance and cleanliness (3.43%). Aspects such as portion sizes and offers had low relative importance, 2.04% and 2.09% respectively. Finally the least important attribute was range of beverages with 1.39%. The HB analysis looked at significant differences between levels in order to determine, for example, minimum levels of services that are required. Concerning food quality, it was found that customers are prepared

to pay more for something that is better than expected, but it seems that the high price associated with top-end restaurants makes the difference between the restaurants with award-winning standards and the next lower level relatively small, therefore for most customers having to pay more for the option of Michelin-star standards was rather unaffordable. The results about service confirmed what had been found in the counting analysis. The difference between the highest level, friendly, welcoming and knowledgeable (59.10) and the next level (42.26) is significant, but more significant is the difference from the next level (Friendly and welcoming but could be more attentive, not very knowledgeable) with 15.07. It was found that there is a higher preference for relaxed and friendly service but is poor in terms of attentiveness and knowledge (-52.69) to an attentive service that is nonetheless obtrusive and not very friendly or welcoming (-63.74). Concerning location, the difference between the highest level - good parking and public transport connections - with 27.37 and the next level (Good public transport facilities but limited parking) with 13.28 is significant. The next level (good public transport facilities and limited parking) had a very similar utility (11.18). It can be concluded that well-located restaurants have a higher likelihood to be selected than less-well located ones. In the case of food presentation a certain "Wow factor" is found to be important for a restaurant to be selected when considering this attribute. This is because the difference in utility between the second level (acceptable presentation, almost as expected) and the third level (Good presentation, slightly better than expected) was found to be significant for all occasions. Innovative décor is highly preferred to conservative décor with a slight preference for mid to well-lit.

Finally, the analysis of utilities confirmed that offers such as money off coupons and attractive pricing (bundles, etc.) have almost the same level of preference (4.90 v. 5.25). Perfect timing is confirmed to be significantly more preferred than the next level (29.72 v. 9.69). This seems to imply that timing is another key factor when considered. When importances are considered for an occasion that is a romantic dinner it is confirmed that there is a willingness to pay more for the highest quality, whilst they are not concerned about timing (3.79) when compared to the result of 5.36 for a celebration or a night out. This means that timing is of great importance for restaurants organising parties. Offers are of more importance for a normal night out with friends and family, with slightly less importance for celebrations and far less important for a romantic dinner occasion (0.97). Location seems to be important for all occasions but more particularly for a normal night out. The aspect of restaurant appearance and cleanliness appeared to be more important for celebrations, as well as décor and lighting and music.

Presentation of food has almost the same importance for all occasions as have portion sizes and range of beverages. The less important attribute of music is more than twice as important for a romantic dinner (2.49) and a celebration (2.27) compared to a normal day or night out with friends/family (1.07). As for differences in utilities the HB analysis in general confirmed the results of the counts. The discussions above can be summarised in three tables. Table 33 aggregates the attributes of décor and lighting, ambiance (noisy or quiet) and music and dancing into one single attribute that will be titled atmospherics. It shows 1 as the most particular attribute for that occasion and so forth:

Table 33: Ranking of importance of attributes by occasion

Attribute	Night out	Romantic dinner	Celebration
Quality of food	1	1	1
Service	2	2	3
Atmospherics	3	3	2
Location	4	4	6
Presentation of food	5	5	5
Timing	6	7	4
Menu options	7	6	8
Restaurant appearance and cleanliness	8	8	7
Offers	9	11	10
Portion sizes	10	9	9
Range of beverages	11	10	11

Table 34 displays the minimum level that respondents consider of that particular attribute. Lower than that level it is unlikely that the restaurant will be selected.

Table 34: Minimum level required for most selected attributes

Attribute/Occasion	Night out	Romantic Dinner	Celebration
Food quality	Acceptable food quality, just as expected	Good food quality, slightly better than expected	Acceptable food quality, just as expected
Service	Friendly and welcoming but could be more attentive, not very knowledgeable	Friendly and welcoming but could be more attentive, not very knowledgeable	Friendly and welcoming but could be more attentive, not very knowledgeable
Food Presentation	Good presentation, slightly better than expected although unpretentious	Good presentation, slightly better than expected although unpretentious	Good presentation, slightly better than expected although unpretentious

Table 35 summarises general preferences for the other six attributes, of which only ambiance is a fixed attribute.

Table 35: General preferences for six (6) restaurant attributes

Attribute	General preferences/importance
Ambiance	Quiet is preferred with higher acceptance for noisier ambiance in the case of parties.
Music and Dancing	Not an important attribute. Not highly accepted for a normal night out. More accepted as low background music in the case of romantic dinners and parties where some acceptance for audible music is also evidenced.
Portion sizes	For those who included this attribute to be considered, larger portion sizes are preferred.
Appearance and cleanliness	An important attribute as highly selected to be considered. Attractive furniture and tableware is preferred to an innovative appearance. This contrasts with the preference for innovative décor. This means that they would like the restaurant to look contemporary but without quirky, extravagant design.
Offers	For price sensitive consumers, who selected this attribute, either money off or attractive pricing (set menus, etc.) are preferred to seasonal offers (early bird, happy hour) which have very low acceptance.
Range of beverages	Generally of little importance, slightly more importance in the case of parties where greater variety may be sought after.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide an outline of the main findings, together with the implications that the findings have for the restaurant industry. The chapter also examines the limitations of the research and areas for further research. The chapter starts with a synopsis of the stages of the Consumer Decision Process (CDP) applying the stylised EKB model of Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005). These stages are summarised in the chapter as well. This is followed by a discussion of a new model for restaurant attributes, looking into a new classification of restaurant attributes and the relationship between attributes and consumer perceived value. Finally, the findings of the quantitative stage were summed up. This stage explored the aspect of importance of attribute for different occasions for eating out and the required minimum levels of attributes that consumers are looking for when eating out, also for different occasions. After that there is a discussion on the implications of these findings for further research and implications for the restaurant industry. The chapter concludes with a reflection about the limitations of the research undertaken.

7.1 The Consumer Decision Process

The first contribution of this research is the proposal of a consumer decision process model for understanding the different stages and features of the decision to select a restaurant. In the context of this thesis, researchers such as Kivela *et al.* (1999) have elaborated on dining satisfaction and the variables that affect return patronage but seemingly have not attempted to look at the decision from a broader perspective. That broader perspective is provided by approaching the decision of selecting a restaurant applying a consumer decision process model. One of these models, the EKB model has been widely used to investigate consumer decision making, for example to study online consumer behaviour (Lin *et al.*, 2010; Darley *et al.*, 2010). A newer version, the stylised EKB model (Tuan Phan and Higgins, 2005) adds the motivational perspective lacking in the traditional version. The stylised EKB model does not distinguish clusters of stages but the researcher has found that they could be sub-divided. The first three stages (previous to evaluating alternatives) were labelled “antecedents”. The stages “evaluation of alternatives” and “choice” are related to the choices that consumers make when selecting a restaurant. These are called “choice considerations”. Choice considerations are connected with the aspect of restaurant attributes, although in the model it is acknowledged that choices could be made not only on the basis of attributes but also based on

alternatives (i.e. type of cuisine). Since post-choice processes are beyond the scope of this research they were not examined. Nonetheless these post-choice processes are occasionally mentioned by respondents in the research as there are linkages between the selection of restaurants based on attributes and the satisfaction that they expect based, for example on past experiences.

The Consumer Decision Process using the model of Tuan-Pham and Higgins (2005) was then broadly divided into two parts, antecedents and choice considerations.

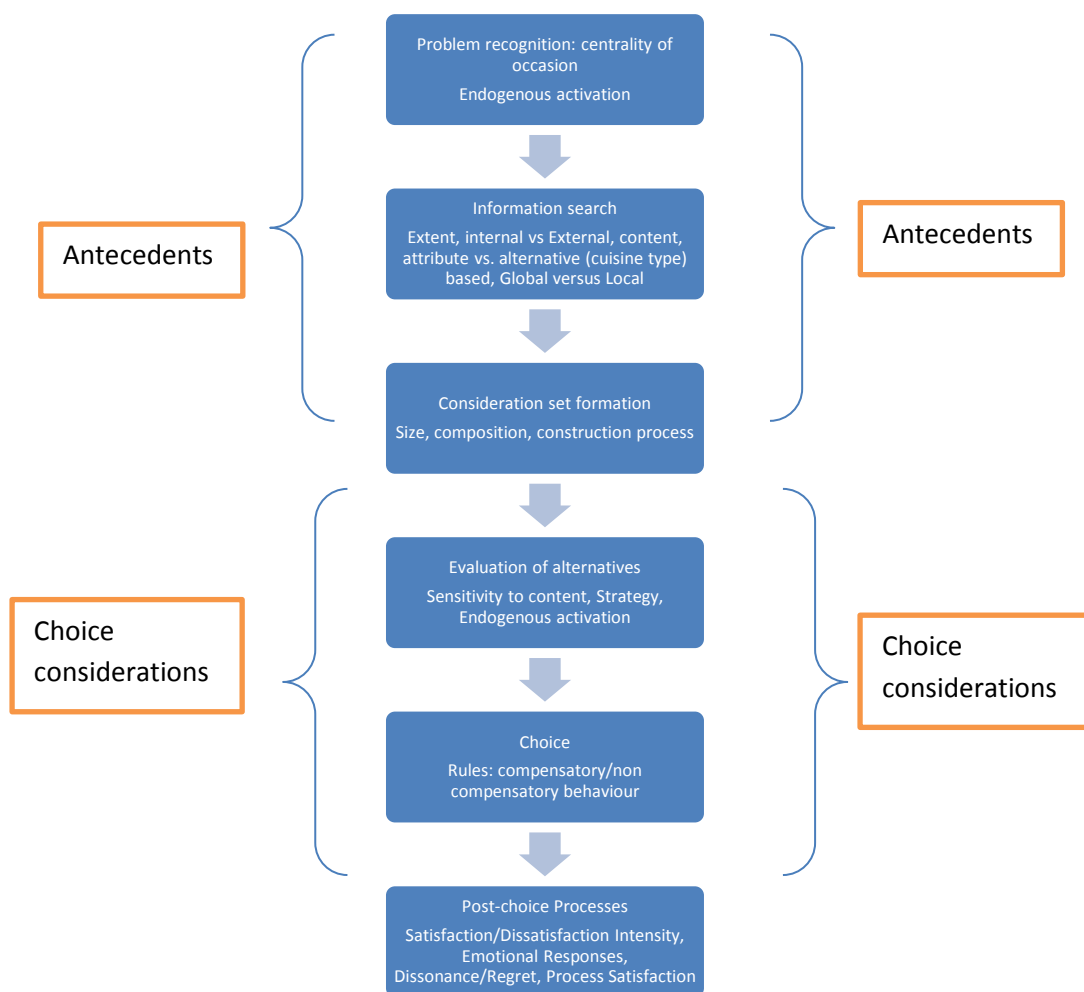


Figure 36: The Consumer Decision Process model (adapted from Tuan-Pham and Higgins, 2005)

As examined in the literature review, problem recognition is a critical stage in the consumer decision process. The qualitative stage of the research found that occasion is central to

problem recognition as it seems that the needs of consumers are influenced by the occasions. Several researchers have cross-tabulated importance of restaurant attributes with occasion and other demographic variables. For example, Kivela *et al.* (1999) evaluated occasion as another demographic factor, with the same weight as dining out frequency. The research has found that occasion is not just another factor but a central consideration. The suggestion that analysis of the selection should be based on occasion for eating out is deemed to be another key contribution of this research.

Several contributions to knowledge are derived by looking at the decision of selecting a restaurant using the stylised consumer decision process stages. In first place, information search appeared as a debated issue in the research. It was evident that the number of media and the eagerness to talk about restaurants attest to the fact that many restaurant goers engage extensively in information search when looking for a restaurant. Although information can indeed be searched for internally, research shows that it is normally conducted externally, either by looking at the printed media, online reviews or through word of mouth, the latter being particularly important in the restaurant context. The type of information in this case seems to focus either on content that reveals restaurant attributes, or different types of cuisine. The search can be structured by alternative (Type of cuisine), in which consumers can find restaurants listed under a particular type of cuisine in printed or online media, or by attributes. The search is particularly affected by location and restaurant-goers have to decide whether to search globally (i.e. all of London) or locally. The dimensions considered included: driving distance, convenience for everyone to meet up, vicinity to entertainment area and public transport available. Secondly, with regards to consideration set size, the qualitative stage revealed that sets are not normally larger than four (4) restaurants with some exceptions for special occasions. That is consistent with the findings of Hauser and Wernerfelt (1990) of sets of 3-7 for a range of products and services. Nonetheless, a more current and contextualised quantitative research on this particular topic is necessary. Concerning consideration sets, the largest set mentioned was four restaurants. The set composition and number seems to be largely influenced by the type of cuisine preferred, as for some respondents this was the starting point, either to narrow down the number of options or to enable respondents to compose the set on the basis of a particular type of cuisine (i.e. a set of Italian restaurants). Composition of the set is influenced by word of mouth as new restaurants can form part of the set if a restaurant is recommended. Sets seem to be constructed either by including alternatives through word of mouth or by excluding alternatives, like in the case

of health-related issues or when the consumer has had a bad experience with a particular type of food or in a particular restaurant. Another important aspect to exclude alternatives is location, with some consumers not prepared to travel long distances. Set construction is also based on expectations of a previous, satisfactory experience with a particular type of restaurant.

Another contribution to knowledge refers to the motivational aspects of the consumer when deciding to select a restaurant. In the particular stage of evaluation of alternatives and more specifically about sensitivity to evaluative content, the research seems to have confirmed the regulatory focus theory of Tuan-Phan and Higgins (2005). That is, attribute information has a greater weight on how the alternative is evaluated if the content of the information is compatible with the person's regulatory focus. For instance, restaurants that are attractive on attribute dimensions (promotion) have been evaluated positively. A respondent evaluated very positively a type of cuisine (he claimed to adore it), another evaluated positively references to authenticity, and evidence was also found with reference to several other attributes. On the other hand, some consumers who have activated prevention seem to evaluate negatively restaurants that they would try to avoid, for example restaurants with a dress code, or that have spicy foods. In terms of evaluation strategy, promotion-focused respondents seem to rely on heuristic modes of evaluation (rules of thumb), whereas prevention-focused consumers use more systematic modes of evaluation. For instance, a promotion-focused respondent evaluates in terms of taste and convenience; that is about the type of food and whether it is convenient. A respondent who raised the issue of allergies (prevention focused) was very vocal about several aspects like driving distance, where he would park, made reference to style, location and price and seemed very elaborate on how he evaluated restaurants. That also confirms Tuan-Phan and Higgins' (2005) propositions about evaluation strategy. On the other hand, it seemed obvious that states of promotion and prevention can be endogenously activated. The respondent who raised the issue of allergies was also concerned about noisy restaurants. It was noted that the state of prevention (avoiding those restaurants) was endogenously activated by the alternatives. The evaluation of alternatives was represented by the different attributes and levels of attributes which were chosen by the researcher. Respondents could discard attributes that they would not consider important or that they would avoid, for instance music where strong opinions about it being part of a restaurant ambiance emerged from the interviews. The next stage, the choice stage, is about how a particular option is selected once those attributes and levels of attributes have been set.

The research has also made a contribution in terms of how consumers use decision rules when selecting a restaurant. In the choice stage, focus was made only on the rules that are used to arrive at the selected option. This research has shown both compensatory and non-compensatory behaviour. Compensatory behaviour is demonstrated when the winning concept is different from the original concept selected in the Build Your Own section of the survey. Non-compensatory behaviour is evidenced when particular options with attributes that have low levels are not chosen, especially food-related attributes, i.e. poor food quality, which not selected regardless of price decreases. As for decision rules, the focus group interviews appear to show that different respondents use different rules. For example, when presented with the full profile, it can be inferred that the lexicographic rule applies because food-related attributes, like food quality or food presentation, have scored highly in importance. It can also be noticed that the satisfaction rule also applies because of the significant differences in utility that can be found for consecutive levels of an attribute.

7.2 A proposed model of restaurant attributes

The literature review has looked into several classifications of restaurant attributes, some in other different contexts, such as the Five Aspects Meal Model, or in need of an update such as the Meal experience model of Campbell-Smith (1967). In addition, many researchers have looked into price as just another attribute, and this research has shown that price should not be considered as such. This refined classification has the following attributes: food and drink-related attributes, ambiance and atmosphere-related attributes, facilities-related attributes, price-related attributes, service-related attributes, location and place-related attributes and image-related attributes. This research has also revealed that perceived value is interrelated to the other restaurant attributes. In the quantitative stage of the research, the use of summed pricing is informed by the tenet that perceived value is central and contingent upon the level of other attributes. This led to suggesting a model which shows the relationships between attributes and between attributes and perceived consumer value (Figure 35). The researcher considers that this is the central contribution of this thesis to the body of knowledge.

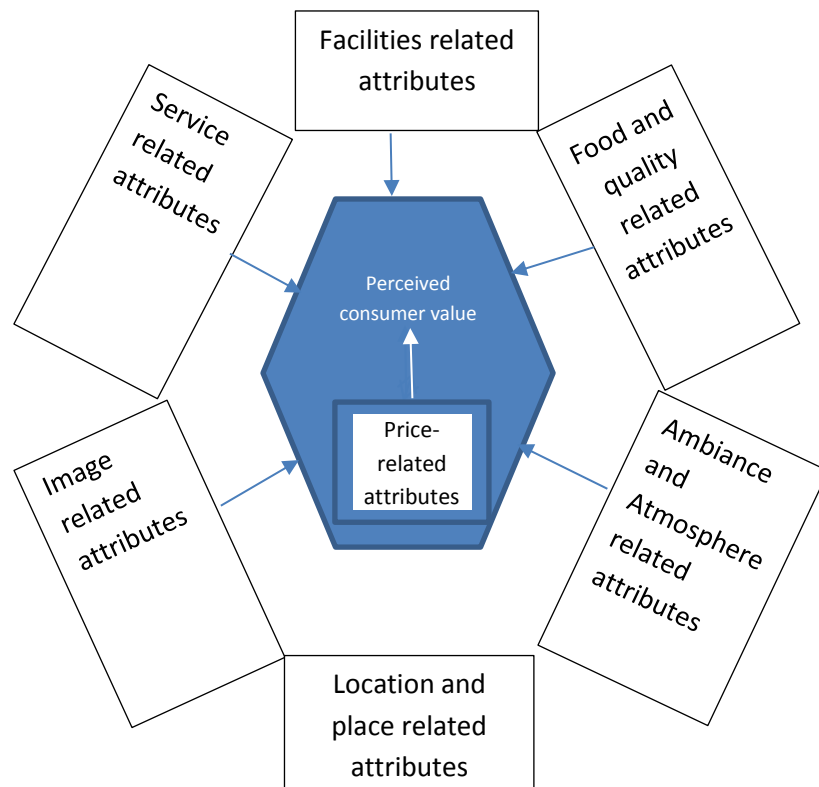


Figure 35: Relationship between restaurant attributes and perceived consumer value

It should be noted that the model proposes that price-related attributes are more closely related to perceptions of value for money because they are measured in monetary terms or have a direct value connotation. It is also proposed that all restaurant attributes have an influence on price-related attributes. For example, a poorly located restaurant would need to offer more discounts and appear to be more affordable than a better located one.

It is suggested that this model is subject to confirmatory factor analysis. This is discussed in 7.5.

7.3 Ascertaining attribute importance

Another important contribution entails the quantitative research design based on discrete choice analysis. Discrete choice experiments are widely used in other research contexts. For instance, de Bekker-Grob *et al.* (2012) reviewed 682 papers using discrete choice analysis in health economics, but there is little evidence of use in current hospitality settings. Studies like

the one of Koo *et al.* (1999) and Verma and Thompson (1996) either have limited predicting power or focus on a few attributes to consider. This elaborate methodological design involved several stages. In the first stage respondents could reduce the number of attributes so that a more manageable number could be considered in the other stages. The second stage involved the selection of an ideal restaurant concept. The third stage helped in refining the choices and ascertaining decision rules and the in last stage a final preferred restaurant concept was defined. Every stage resulted in valuable data for further analysis of attribute importance and minimum levels of attributes.

In general, décor and lighting, presentation of food, restaurant appearance/cleanliness and location were found to be the most important optional attributes. Timing, portion sizes and offers seem to have the same relatively low importance.

When occasion was considered, respondents were prepared to pay more for Michelin-star standard food quality for romantic dinners compared to the occasion of a night out with friends/family. The highest level of service (knowledgeable and extremely attentive and very friendly) had highest preference compared to the next levels. This means that a good number of consumers are willing to pay more for better service, contradicting Tse's (2001) findings. In terms of ambiance, clearly consumers preferred a quieter setting. The respondents in the study favoured friendly service even if less knowledgeable as the latter is more costly, but higher preference for knowledge was noted if the occasion was a birthday party or romantic dinner. In general, respondents preferred a quieter atmosphere for all occasions with higher acceptance for a slightly noisy atmosphere for birthday parties. It was found that menu variety is more important and consumers are prepared to pay more only if the occasion is a party. Location was another key attribute, and poor accessibility was not accepted. Parking was more important than public transport connections for all occasions. The highest level of food presentation, outstanding, was more highly selected for romantic dinners or a birthday party, compared to day/night out with friends and families. Noticeably, respondents were prepared to pay more for higher levels of food presentation, with the threshold being presentation that is slightly above expectations.

There were important findings about non-compensatory behaviour. It was found that low levels of food quality and service have low acceptance regardless of their lower price. In the specific case of service, timing was another important sub-attribute and an important percentage of all unacceptables referred to having to wait for the courses or to be seated. This

becomes then an aspect that restaurant managers must consider as critical. Location is another attribute that shows non-compensatory behaviour with an important number of respondents considering that locations with limited parking facilities or public transport connections are unacceptable. Presentation of food is deemed to be the other relevant element exhibiting non-compensatory behaviour.

The HB analysis found that the most important attribute, confirmed both by other researchers in the literature review is quality of food, while second in importance is service. Atmospherics, considered as a combination of ambiance (noisy or quiet), décor and lighting, and music was the third most important attribute, then location, followed by food presentation. Menu options, although included as a fixed attribute in the study, measured a very low importance, similar to restaurant appearance and cleanliness. Aspects such as portion sizes and offers displayed low importance. Finally, the least important attribute was range of beverages.

Regarding food quality it was found that customers are prepared to pay more for something that is better than expected, but it seems that the high price associated with top-end restaurants makes the difference in preference between the restaurants with “Excellent” quality and “Good” food quality relatively small, therefore for most customers having to pay more for Michelin-star or equivalent quality is not an option. In the case of food presentation, it was confirmed that a certain “Wow factor” is important for a restaurant to be selected when considering the attribute of food presentation. Innovative décor is highly preferred to conservative décor and concerning lighting, a slight preference for mid to well-lit was found. Finally, the analysis of utilities confirmed that offers such as money-off coupons and attractive pricing (bundles, etc.) have almost the same degree of preference. Perfect timing for seating customers or for serving meals was highly selected even if it attracts a higher price. This implies that timing is another key factor when considered, particularly for consumers organising parties. Offers are of more importance for a normal night out with friends and family, with slightly less importance for celebrations and far less important for a romantic dinner occasion. The discussions above can be summarised in four tables. Table 33 aggregates the attributes of décor and lighting, ambiance (noisy or quiet) and music and dancing into one single attribute that will be titled atmospherics. It shows 1 as the most particular attribute for that occasion and so forth:

Table 33: Ranking of importance of attributes by occasion

Attribute	Night out	Romantic dinner	Celebration
Quality of food	1	1	1
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Location	4	4	6
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Timing	6	7	4
Menu options	7	6	8
Restaurant appearance and cleanliness	8	8	7
Offers	9	11	10
Portion sizes	10	9	9
Range of beverages	11	10	11

Table 34 displays the minimum level that respondents consider for that particular attribute. Lower than that level it is unlikely that the restaurant will be selected.

Table 34: Minimum level required for most selected attributes

Attribute/Occasion	Night out	Romantic Dinner	Celebration
Food quality	Acceptable food quality, just as expected	Good food quality, slightly better than expected	Acceptable food quality, just as expected
Service	Friendly and welcoming but could be more attentive, not very knowledgeable	Friendly and welcoming but could be more attentive, not very knowledgeable	Friendly and welcoming but could be more attentive, not very knowledgeable
Food Presentation	Good presentation, slightly better than expected although unpretentious	Good presentation, slightly better than expected although unpretentious	Good presentation, slightly better than expected although unpretentious

7.4 Implications for the restaurant industry

The first implication for the restaurant industry is that positioning restaurants should be based on targeting those consumers that look for restaurants for particular occasions. The research has found that the required levels of attributes may vary according to the occasion. For example, when occasion was considered, respondents were prepared to pay more for Michelin-star standard food quality for romantic dinners than for a normal night out with friends/family. Generally, music was not highly sought after, with some acceptance for romantic dinners and celebrations. Restaurant appearance and cleanliness appeared to be more important for celebrations, as well as décor and lighting. Greater variety of menu options was preferred if the occasion was a romantic dinner or for parties. Timing was particularly important for parties as well. Respecting location this research has revealed that customers were prepared to pay more for a well-located restaurant for a normal night out with friends and family. This implies that convenience for all attendees may have been a key consideration in the decision, whereas in a romantic dinner a restaurant with better public transport connections was preferred. Occasion also affected how consumers chose a restaurant by considering décor and lighting. Low lights are preferred for a romantic dinner with preference

for innovative décor whereas for a night/day out with friends and family mid-to well-lit is preferred.

The research has highlighted the centrality of perceived value. For example, when considering attributes, consumers use rules of thumb whereby they compare similar levels of service, food quality and use simple indicators such as the price of bottles of wine to decide. Hence, restaurateurs should concentrate on what offers more value to the consumers. For example, when investing in new restaurants, key to the decision is location, so a good location seems to be a vital factor for the decision to select the restaurant. In terms of food quality, it has been confirmed that the threshold is food quality as expected. Customers have a high appreciation for service that is attentive, knowledgeable and friendly and are prepared to pay more for that service. Interestingly, friendliness is preferred over attentiveness, if attentiveness borders on intrusiveness. An important finding is that consumers are not looking for an innovative, quirky type of design. Even though some restaurateurs spend great amounts of money on décor, consumers do not find higher value in eccentric design. This is even stressed by the fact that in the survey consumers would not have to pay higher prices for innovative décor (which could be the case), and still they preferred a more sober interior decoration and design. Also, it was found that having other aspects of the service right is much more important than providing offers, which in some cases respondents found to be detrimental to their perception of value.

7.5 Implications for further research

The proposed model in figure 35 establishes multiple relationships for which dependence relationships need to be established. This can be done with structural equation modelling (SEM), for which a pictorial representation using a path diagram is required. Path diagrams are then the base for path analysis which calculates the strength of the relationship. The path diagram is depicted in figure 42.

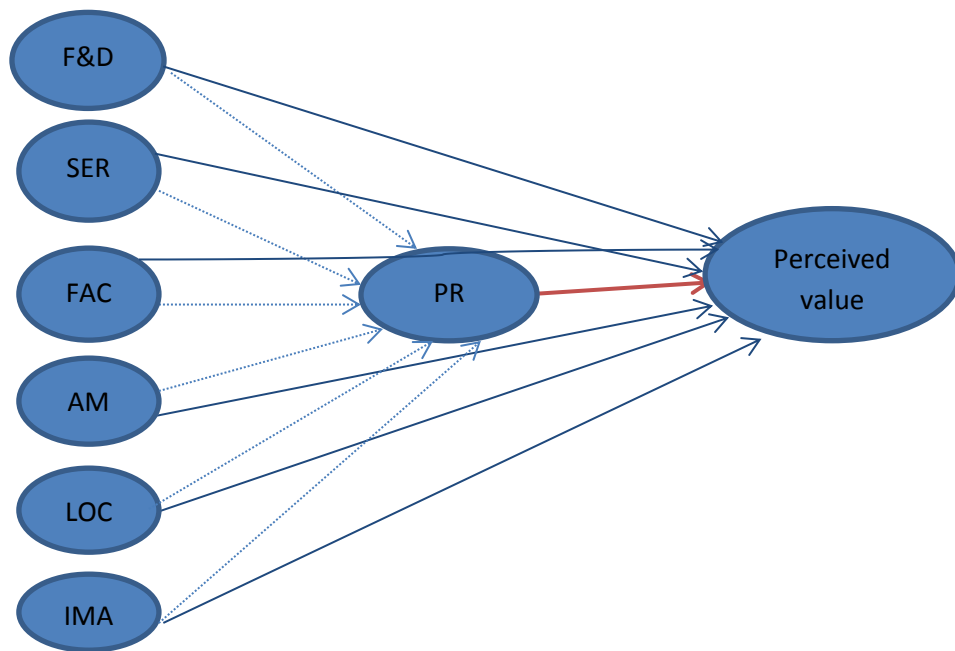


Figure 42: Path diagram for proposed model

In SEM, the different grouped attributes, e.g., food and drink-related attributes; are called dimensions or factors; then there are particular indicators of those dimensions. These dimensions are further divided into indicators or items. Table 36 shows only an indicative list which may be modified when further research is conducted. In this case F&D are Food and Drink; related are F&D factors, AM are ambiance factors, FAC are facilities factors, SER are service factors, LOC are location factors and IMA are image factors. The items for those dimensions are independent variables (also called exogenous constructs). All these factors affect PR (price factors) and these relationships in the diagram are represented by blue arrows. Price factors also affect the perceptions of value (green arrow). At the same time factors other than price factors also affect value (red arrows). PR and VALUE are dependent variables (endogenous constructs). Note that price in figure 42 has been called price-related attributes, such as sales incentives or pricing strategy. This can be named as an exogenous construct about the need for attractive pricing, either in the way of presenting offers or discounts of any kind or by pricing the menu (set menus, children's menus, drinks included) in an attractive way. In this case that would not be subdivided but may be called "Need for attractive Pricing".

Table 36: Evaluative dimensions and items for testing the model in figure 35

Evaluative Dimensions (factors)	Indicators (items)
Food and Drink related (F&D)	X1 Freshness of ingredients X2 Cooking Skills X3 Type of Cuisine/Authenticity X4 Portion Sizes X5 Food Presentation X6 Range of beverages X7 Menu variety X7 Uncommon food
Ambiance-related (AM)	X8 Décor and lighting X9 Noise X9 Music & Dancing X10 Other customers
Facilities-related (FAC)	X11 Cleanliness Hygiene X12 Appearance X13 Architecture and layout X14 Tableware X15 Parking facilities
Service-related (SER)	X16 Waiting time to be seated X17 Waiting time to be served X18 Welcoming/Friendliness X19 Attentiveness/Interaction X20 Knowledge of service people
Location-related (LOC)	X21 Driving distance X22 Distance to entertainment area X23 Availability of public transport
Image-related (IMA)	X24 Chef Reputation X25 Award winning restaurants X26 Branding

It is also suggested that this model is compared with competing models. In this case two competing models could be tested. In one model six attributes affect the “attractive pricing” which then affect perceptions of value, in this case attractive pricing is a mediator (if that is the case the model would take the shape shown in figure 43 below.) Another competing model would be that not all six attributes in the proposed model affect perceptions of value, but only location or image related because they can be assessed prior to experiencing the meal whereas service, ambiance, food and drink and facilities can only be assessed through recommendations or reviews.

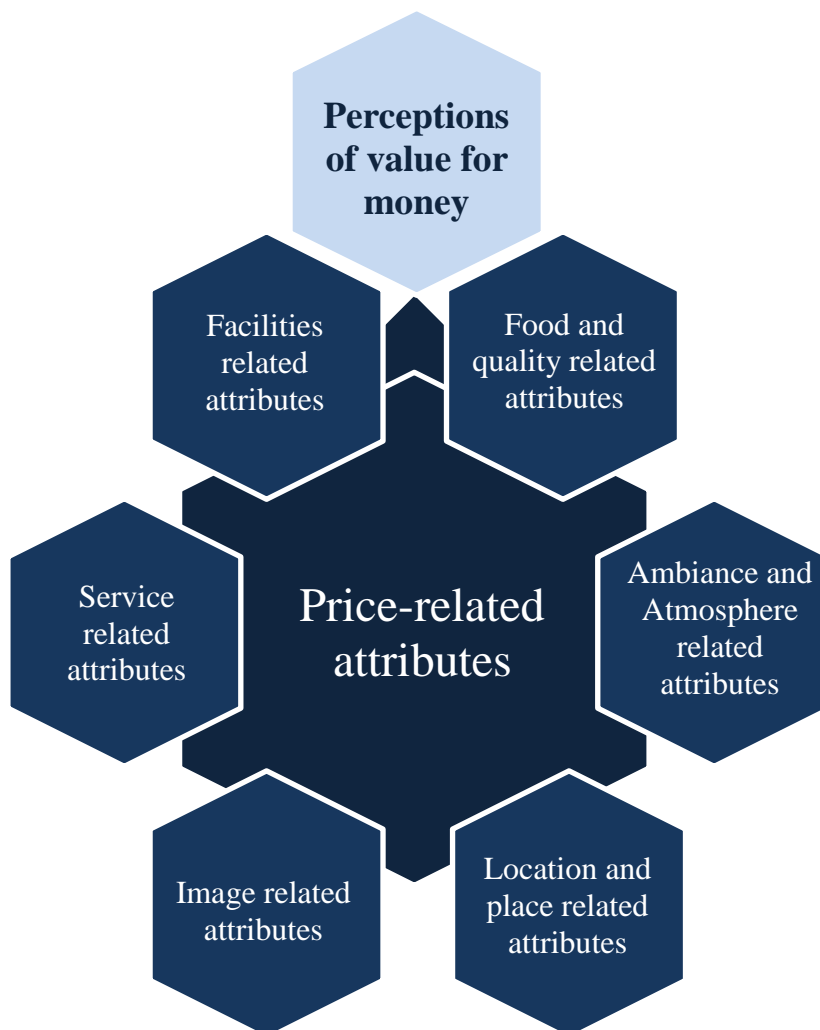


Figure 43: Competing model: Price-related attributes as a mediator to perceptions of value

In the thesis several aspects which are discussed in various sections of chapter 5 are areas for further research, for example the influence of brands and in general a more thorough investigation of image-related attributes. In the consumer decision process there are also many areas for further research, for example, the aspect of establishing emotional connections with consumers is an interesting area of research that is worthy of investigation. Likewise, a deeper understanding of the dynamics and relationship of groups and group decision making is also important to research as decision makers may be influenced by others.

In terms of the consideration set size, the findings of small consideration sets need validation, probably by conducting contextualised quantitative research on this area of consideration sets. As for the rules, the research demonstrated that respondents use different types of decision rules. However the investigation in terms of decision rules is deemed to be exploratory, needing further exploration. This can be conducted with in-depth interviews with consumers who have selected restaurants.

Finally, the research has taken the approach of a rational consumer with emotions playing a role in the decision. There was evidence in the interviews that emotions may take priority over reason in some situations. The study of how emotions are triggered seems an exciting area that is worthy of further research.

7.6 Reflections on limitations of this research

Great efforts were made to enhance the credibility of the research. Nonetheless, as for any piece of research, it is also necessary to acknowledge the inherent limitations of it. In terms of reflections about epistemology, discussion involves definition of the research questions, data collection methods and the method of analysis. In hindsight, attempting a full discussion of all the antecedents for the decision of selecting a restaurant and the processes involved in the short space of a PhD thesis was rather ambitious. Hence, it has to be acknowledged that the main contribution of this thesis with regard to the CDP process is centred about proposing a framework for understanding the various stages of the process. In regard to data collection methods, the use of the full profile approach in the online survey and the several tasks that respondents had to complete made the survey fairly long and the rate of incomplete surveys was perhaps too high. Of course, it was a compromise between having a shorter survey completed by a larger number of respondents with reduced insight, or alternatively a smaller sample with more detailed insight. The latter seems to have been proved to produce more discerning results. However, it has to be conceded that being able to reach to a larger population would have enhanced accuracy indicators, but there were resources constraints and restrictions on participant recruitment that made a larger sample difficult. On the other hand, respondents had to recall an occasion for selecting a restaurant, and there are problems when respondents are asked to recall. If possible, research could take the form of an experiential survey in which respondents are indeed answering questions about how they selected that particular restaurant for that particular experience. Of course, that will be more demanding and entails liaising with a restaurant business to make it possible plus the

monetary problem of incentivising the respondents for increased participation in the survey. Further research should be made on particular occasions for selecting a restaurant and on an examination of other occasions, for example business dining.

In the quantitative stage, it would have been beneficial to have had a greater sample of different occasions for eating out and to have analysed the data with a market simulator provided by the software company. This adds another direction of research that can be pursued. Additionally, although research bias was avoided, the formation of levels of attributes was shaped to some degree by the researcher's experience in the restaurant business. Although a process of piloting and verification was conducted, it would have been beneficial with more resources and time to have included more people involved in the restaurant business in the definition of levels of attributes.

Despite its limitations, it is considered that several worthwhile contributions can be drawn from this research. In the first place, it provides a framework for the understanding of how consumers select restaurants. Secondly, it offers a new classification of restaurant attributes and additionally a model that looks into their relationships and particularly the key relationship with perceived consumer value. Thirdly, it offers a methodological design for the use of discrete choice analysis for the decision of selecting a restaurant. Finally, it delivers insights into the importance of restaurant attributes for several occasions with interesting implications for the restaurant industry. Furthermore, it offers food for thought in terms of how to take this research further with new directions also being indicated.

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