

The attractiveness of green restaurants among the youth

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Abstract: *The growing interest of the population in a healthy life is a constant of modern society. The culinary habits are essential elements in this respect. Concerns about the opening of green restaurants are related directly to the people's intentions to serve meals in such public catering establishments. The present article analyses the views of the youth on the attributes considered to be significant to outline the activity of green restaurants and the prospects of their consumption within these restaurants. The results obtained show the young people's willingness to eat in green restaurants, as well as their availability to allocate higher amounts of money for the consumption of healthy foods.*

Key-words: *green restaurants, youth, attractiveness attributes*

1. Introduction

Tourism, and especially the hospitality industry, cannot disregard the responsibility of contributing to environmental degradation and climate change (Kasim, 2009). Previous studies demonstrate that the adoption of environmental measures by the hospitality industry generate significant economic benefits (Blanco, Rey-Maquieira and Lozano, 2009), customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kassinis and Soteriou, 2003) for the industry, as well as a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions (Bohdanowicz, 2009).

Considering that, in any business, customers' needs and desires are essential factors in the management process, this article presents the results of a quantitative marketing research among young consumers in order to assess their specific interest in green restaurants. The main objectives of the research presented in the article are the following:

- Identifying the youth's concerns regarding the consumption of green products;
- Ranking the consumers' selection attributes in a green restaurant;
- Identifying the youth's intentions to consume green food products in green restaurants.

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2. Literature review

Since 1990, the American Green Restaurant Association (GRA), a non-profit organization, has promoted the implementation of green practices in restaurants (Business and the Environment, 2008). These practices include the following dimensions: energy efficiency, water conservation, pollution prevention, environmental health, reuse and recycle programs, green purchasing, green materials, sustainable foods, and green designs of buildings and space.

As a way of assuming their environmental responsibility, managers of restaurants are expected to respond to several green trends, such as green consumerism and green restaurants (Chou, Chen and Wang, 2012, p. 703), while promoting movements in favour of local foods, organic foods and low-carbon foods (Feenstra, 2002). It is well known that organic products are often bought not only for environmental motives, but also for personal reasons, such as health or taste (Bălăşescu, 2016, p. 266).

Green restaurants enable, on the other hand, the creation of genuine and important tourism brands which can generate an important contribution to tourism development, through promoting local, regional and national traditional recipes which, also, determine a high use of local ingredients. Creating a competitive advantage depends on superior technology, quality or brand strength (Boşcor, 2016, p. 31).

For the long-term sustainability of the local food and beverage industry, a full range of important factors such as the quality of food, service, ambience and price are considered (Liu, et al., 2014, p. 61). Within all of these elements, quality is one of the utmost relevance. Quality awareness should start from the product design idea, when identifying customer needs (Madar, 2016, p. 201); quality management is an organizational strategy based on the idea that higher performance is achieved only by involving the perseverance of the entire organization in continuous improvement processes (Neacşu, 2015, p. 105). The quality of the product is the basis for sustaining competitive advantages for many companies (Brătucu and Boşcor, 2008, p. 110).

3. Results and discussions

The research method chosen was the survey based on questionnaires, and the sample included 264 students from the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business Administration in Braşov. The majority, 95,5% out of the respondents, respectively, consider themselves as being concerned with environmental issues; also, 34,1% of the subjects are informed about the presence of green restaurants on the market, while none out of the respondents has a consumption experience in a green restaurant.

Another objective followed in the paper was to assess consumers' selection attributes in a green restaurant. Thirteen attributes were taken into account and considered important for the green restaurants' management:

- use of organic ingredients (1);
- inclusion in the menu of a list of dishes which are not prepared by frying procedures (2);
- inclusion in the menu of a list of vegetarian dishes with low energy consumption during cooking (3);
- preference for salads instead of cooked dishes (4);
- preference for fruits instead of cakes (5);
- preponderance of traditional recipes using local ingredients (6);
- use of renewable energy (7);
- reducing product portion in order to decrease ingredient consumption (8);
- reducing product portion in order to avoid food wasting (9);
- choosing dishes mainly based on their nutritional value, the taste becoming therefore a secondary attribute (10);
- paying special attention to ingredients (11);
- offering numerous nutritional information about the dishes (12);
- The restaurant's reputation (13).

Respondents have granted scores from 10 (the most important) to 1 (the most unimportant) for each of the thirteen attributes; the weighted average values obtained for these attributes are presented in Figure 1.

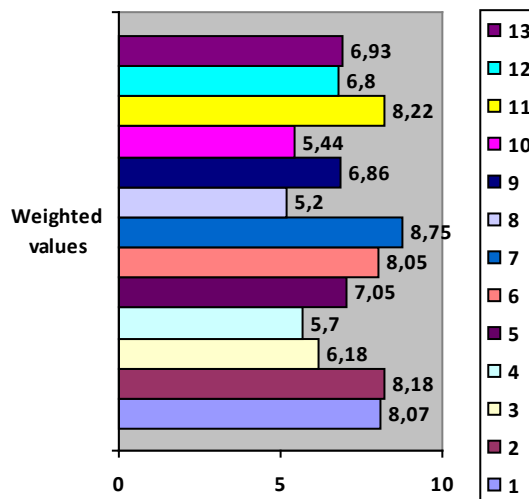


Fig. 1. *Weighted average values granted to selection attributes in a green restaurant*

The results obtained show that the highest average values were recorded for the predominant use of traditional recipes with local ingredients - average value 8.75, followed by the careful selection of ingredients with an average value of 8.22, while the preference towards the dishes which do not use frying procedures has obtained an average value of 8.18.

The most irrelevant attributes for the green restaurants' activity have been the following: reduced portions in order to reduce food consumption (5.2), choosing dishes mainly based on their nutritional value, the taste becoming therefore a secondary attribute (5.44) and the preference for salads instead of cooked dishes with the average value of 5.7.

Respondents were also asked to highlight whether they would be willing to pay a larger amount of money to dine in a green restaurant. The results emphasize the high share of those who responded affirmatively, the percentage of them being 68.2%.

Finally, the respondents were asked to assess the probability of dining-out in a green restaurant in the near future, as shown in Figure 2.

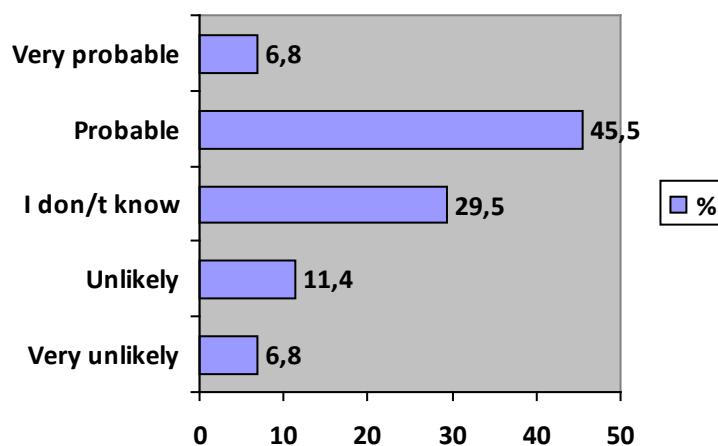


Fig. 2. *Distribution of answers regarding the possibility of eating in a green restaurant in the near future*

Most of the respondents, namely 45.5%, expressed their availability to serve meals in green restaurants, followed by the undecided respondents, representing 29.5% of the population surveyed. The average answer rate for this question is 3.34, thus highlighting the propensity of the group of young people surveyed to eat in restaurants that offer healthy meals.

4. Conclusions

The selection of menus is one of the organization fundamentals of a green restaurant. This article highlights the attributes that exert the highest levels of attractiveness among young consumers, attributes which focus mostly on the content of the menu lists that define the offer of these restaurants. The need for the increased consumption of healthy food is high, as statistics from recent years place Romania among the countries situated on an average level in terms of the standardized rate of mortality among the Member States of the European Union (Ștefan and Chițu, 2016, p. 347).

The increasing presence of green restaurants depends, among other things, on encouraging managers to adopt green practices, which can be accomplished by increasing managers' knowledge, sharing successful examples of implementing green measures, obtaining more and more information on customers' needs and values, and by reinforcing managers' environmental responsibility and beliefs.

At the same time, green restaurants can exert an important attraction to visitors. A special and unique memorable gastronomic experience is an indispensable asset to any successful tourist destination (Fox, 2007). Gastronomy tourism development initiatives utilize locally produced foodstuffs and beverages to strengthen regional tourism products, enhance visitors' experiences, and help maintain and enhance the viability of local food production and processing sectors (Boyne, Hall and Williams, 2003, pp. 131–154). In this respect, a more aggressive, more consistent and more efficient policy of promoting the country brand would increase confidence in the Romanian products (Bărbulescu, 2016, p. 315).

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