GUEST'S PREFERENCES FOR DIFFERENT FOODS AT HOTEL'S BREAKFAST: RESULTS OF AN ON-LINE SURVEY

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Abstract: Consumer choice and satisfaction are very important for the hotel industry. For guests, food has a big impact on satisfaction and so does breakfast. The objective of this work is to know what the preferences of guests in a hotel breakfast are and how this varies according to their characteristics. An online questionnaire was sent using social media to hotel guests (n=626). Most respondents live in Europe (62%) and they prefer fruit juices (37%) and pastries (37%) while non-European residents suggested fruits (58%) and dairy products (39%) as the main preferences. Respondents aged over 55 years old have also preferences for fruits and dairy products, whereas guests aged 18-34 prefer pastries. For families traveling with children, bread was preferred for breakfast. Moreover, guests between the ages of 18 and 34 prefer lactose-free foods; and vegans or vegetarians or guests between the ages of 35 and 54 prefer gluten-free foods; whereas those 35 or younger prefer sugar foods. Most women prefer lactose-free food and non-Europeans give more importance to low-carbohydrate food while Europeans prefer lactose-free food and vegetarians or vegans. Breakfast is a meal valued by guests. Knowing the preferences of the guests following the profile of each one will be an asset for hotel projects that can satisfy and retain their customers. As far as we are aware, this is the first assessment of travellers about their preferences in hotels breakfast.

Key words: Breakfast, hotel, food choice, satisfaction, guests, preferences

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INTRODUCTION

Knowing consumers' profile and its relationship with the service or product used contributes to the positioning strategy and competitive advantage of a company. Meeting customer needs and understanding their preferences is a challenge and requires great commitment of marketing strategies in addition to requiring great availability and, according to Otto and Ritchie (1996), also financial investment. Tourist experience and gastronomy are two fundamental topics of a trip (Getz et al., 2014; Mowinckel, 2016). These two elements can define the choice of the destination and even its subsequent evaluation (Chen and Tsai, 2007). Previous studies have also shown that food contributes to travel satisfaction and even return intention (Quan and Wang, 2004; Kim et al., 2011; Björk and Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2017).

Also, food is essential for human health. Food intake triggers the body to absorb nutrients so that it can perform essential functions. However, eating is much more than ingesting food, becoming a socio-cultural activity more than just a nutritional issue. In fact, eating involves socialization, communication, preferences, aversions, and cultural influences (Ornellas, 2001). And, that includes breakfast, which is an essential part of the daily routine and which, that when we travel, may become even more relevant. When we talk about tourism and consequently travel, we increase the importance of breakfast, since tourist and hotel guests often only take this meal for granted. For instance, when travelling with children, this can be even more difficult. With more rigid schedules and special needs, children need even more care with their diet, which intensifies the need for at least one quality meal, which can be breakfast.

Cultural diversity, food intolerances and specific individual preferences mean that breakfast served in hotels, in addition to good service, must be planned in relation to product options and qualities to satisfactorily serve its customers.

To the best of our knowledge there are no studies determining the preference of guests regarding the food served at breakfast in hotels, particularly the nutritionally differentiated food. Therefore, this study aims to find out the guest's preferences for hotel's breakfast. Thus, this study aims to assess the importance that guests attach to nutritionally differentiated foods and what are their food preferences for breakfast in hotels.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of guest satisfaction and preferences for the hospitality industry

The quality of a service or product and customer satisfaction are undeniably the two fundamental concepts in the theory and practice of services marketing. Some studies, such as Aras (2023), show that variables such as quality and satisfaction can have a positive effect on the intention to choose and/or return somewhere, however the same author reveals that the opposite effect can also happen. In today's world, where globalization generates intense competition between companies, the solution for competitive advantage lies in delivering services that satisfy customers, and in hospitality it is no different.

The hospitality industry suffers from the increased expectations of consumers who are increasingly demanding, and, in contrast, it is known, that the success of this industry is based on customer satisfaction, not only in the accommodation service, but also in the other services offered by the accommodation, such as food for example (Kapera, 2015), including breakfast. Nowadays customers are more informed and seek services that exceed their needs and offer products of their preference. Consumers select a product from a set of alternatives using individual choice criteria that meets or exceeds their motivations and needs. Motivation is a very relevant factor for consumers and stands out for influencing the choice of a destination (Pérez Gálvez et al., 2023). Understanding consumer choice is therefore fundamental in hotel marketing (Bettman et al., 2008). Customer satisfaction becomes a priority for hotel developments for several reasons, such as in customer loyalty, increased sales, and positive word-of-mouth publicity (Ha and Jang 2010).

Knowing consumers and catering to their preferences is a great differentiator for a hotel or resort and can make a difference in guests' stay (Kapera, 2015). Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000) showed that hotel image and customer satisfaction with reception, housekeeping, food and beverage and price are important factors in determining customer loyalty. Knowing your customers and gaining their loyalty, in addition to being an important sustainability factor for hotel businesses, generating greater competitiveness and benefits in relation to the competition, makes marketing initiatives more assertive (Leite-Pereira et al., 2022). Choice behaviors are influenced not only by cognitive attributes, but also by affective and sensory attributes, especially in the restaurant area, where the act of eating involves a number of attributes in addition to physical, emotional and social ones. Thomé and Hoppe (2018) presented the five theories on consumer choice behavior: the ability of the product to fulfill its purpose is the functional value; the social value relates the personal choice with the social one; already when the feeling interferes in the choice is an emotional value; the epistemic value is related to a new product; and the conditional is a set of values associated with the choice.

Regarding choice in food, social and emotional values are very important because eating habits are related to feelings and social and personal values, memories pleasures or aversions that can influence choices (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Lease et al., 2014). The restaurant service in hotels and the breakfast meal, aims to satisfy the culinary preferences and needs of guests, or even external customers who may enjoy this service that can vary greatly depending on the size of the hotel, its location and mainly according to its target audience (Kapera, 2015). The range of services offered by hotel restaurants is diverse and depends on several factors mentioned above. To be successful, hotel owners and managers need to take a closer look at hotel restaurants and to consider the customer's point of view (Hu et al., 2009).

With breakfast it should be no different. This highly rated meal on hotel sales platforms (Leite-Pereira et al., 2020) is important for guests as an integral part of a new routine, where it may become the only balanced meal of the day. It is true that individuals have their own food preferences but often, even foods that are not part of a person's daily meal routine, can become a preference when it comes to hotels. Furthermore, some foods are not even chosen as part of the meal, but the fact that they are available already pleases the customer, bringing satisfaction. The diversity of foods in breakfast was the dimension most valued by guests in a publication about this meal, made by Leite-Pereira et al., 2020, followed by food quality, which shows that a varied offer of products in the breakfast lunch is important for guest satisfaction and, according to McCall and Lynn (2008), the availability of food also helps to create the establishment's identity. However, there is still no evidence about guests' preferences in breakfast.

Therefore, the following research hypotheses were proposed for the present study:

H1a: There are differences in breakfast food preferences according to nationality of guests.

H1b: There are differences in breakfast food preferences depending on guests' age.

H1c: There are differences in breakfast food preferences between men and women.

H1d: There are differences in breakfast food preferences among families traveling with children.

Guests' preferences for nutritionally differentiated foods at breakfast

The habit of eating breakfast improves short-term memory, problem-solving efficiency, it is also related to the improvement of metabolic parameters related to cardiovascular disease risks and the decrease of abdominal circumference. This meal taken in a proper way, i.e., with the inclusion of foods rich in fiber, fruits and whole grains for example, is also related to controlling body weight and reducing the risk of developing hypertension (Anderson et al., 2009). Breakfast, for being a meal so valued by guests (Leite-Pereira et al., 2022), can be an important focus for the hotel to differentiate itself before the competition, generate positive comments from customers and consequently make them loyal. Singh and Alhamad (2022) in a recent study on breakfast, it was concluded that this meal was one of the attributes that influenced accommodation booking decisions and the rating given by guests to hotels, however, this influence did not occur when the guests' motivation was for religious tourism.

The particularities of breakfast, such as the diversity of options, the quality of the food and the facilities are the features most appreciated by guests (Leite-Pereira et al., 2020) and among the variety of food options may be nutritionally differentiated foods. These foods have become a trend in recent years, not only by individuals with specific

nutritional needs, allergic or with some food intolerance, but most often by the fashion that has settled around these foods that are said to be relevant in the general well-being of the individual and even in aesthetic issues (Oliveira et al., 2018; Braga et al., 2019). Focusing on individuals with food allergies and intolerances who need to be careful about their diet and tailor their routine to these conditions, travel should encompass the entire strategy of food options, at least at the destination accommodation, as it can often be a challenge to find the specific foods for their diet.

Foods with specific nutritional compositions such as restricted or free of sugar, fat, gluten or lactose are examples of the most common foods that hotels can make available at breakfast. However, as we mentioned before, the tendency for nutritionally differentiated foods increases, such as: foods with high protein content, low carbohydrate percentage, foods rich in fiber, among others (Zopf et al., 2018; Lagiou et al., 2007). Thus, either by trend or by guest need, hotels could make a variety of these foods available to satisfy their guests. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed for the study:

H2a: There are differences in food preferences for products for specific nutritional needs in hotel's breakfast according to the nationality of guests

H2b: There are differences in food preferences for products for specific nutritional needs in hotel's breakfast according to the age of guests

H2c: There are differences in food preferences for products for specific nutritional needs in hotel's breakfast according to the gender of guests

H2d: There are differences in food preferences for products for specific nutritional needs in hotel's breakfast for guests traveling with children

METHODOLOGY

Data collection

An online questionnaire was developed specifically to assess behavior intention of guests towards breakfast (Leite-Pereira et al., 2022) and for the current study. The questionnaire was developed for guests according to references from the tourism and hotel industry (Illum et al., 2010; McCarthy et al., 2010) a method also used in studies in the gastronomy area (Lee et al., 2015). For this study, 6 questions were considered to answer hypotheses (Table1) and questions on:

- Information about the last stay in a hotel where breakfast was served.
- Questions about hotel's breakfast.
- Questions about personal information with questions related to age, sex, nationality, among others.

Most of the questions in the questionnaire were open questions. Also, questions using the 5-point Likert scale or with scales ranging from "not at all important" to "extremely important" were also used (Nemoto and Beglar, 2014), in addition to multiple questions choice. Most answers were mandatory, except for open questions. This questionnaire was presented both in Portuguese and in English and validated after the first test with 15 answers, with only minor changes, namely in translations.

Hypothesis	Questions		
	Which products do you like the most when you		
	have breakfast in hotels? Please indicate the top 3 +		
H1a: There are differences in breakfast food preferences among guests according to the country of residence.	Country of residence?		
H1b: There are differences in breakfast food preferences among guests' age.	Age?		
H1c: There are differences in breakfast food preferences between men and women	Gender?		
H1d: There are differences in breakfast food preferences among families traveling with children.	With whom did you travel?		
	Please identify which products are most important to you considering a specific diet (e.g., gluten free, lactose free, low carb, sugar free) +		
H2a: There are differences in food preferences for products for specific nutritional needs in hotel's breakfast according to the age of guests	Age?		
H2b: There are differences in food preferences for products for specific nutritional needs in hotel's breakfast according to the nationality of guests	Country of residence?		
H2c: There are differences in food preferences for products for specific nutritional needs in hotel's breakfast according to the gender of guests	Gender?		
H2d: There are differences in food preferences for products for specific nutritional needs in hotel's breakfast for guests traveling with children.	With whom did you travel?		

Table 1. Relation between research hypothesis and the survey questions

Participants

The LimeSurvey program was used to prepare the questionnaire and its link was sent through the participants' social networks (Whatsapp, Facebook and emails) between 05/29/2020 and 08/14/2020. The chosen population was unknown, and a non-probabilistic sample was taken (for convenience). A total of 626 valid questionnaires were analyzed.

List of variables and statistical analysis

The questionnaire data were exported and analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) programme. Proportions and Chi-square were used to describe and determine differences among groups with p<0.05 considered significant.

RESULTS Guests' profile

In Table 2 and Figure 1, the most relevant characteristics of the guests answering the questionnaires for our study are included. A total of 626 questionnaires were analysed. Forty-four percent were participants with ages between 35 and 54 years old and 431 were answered by women (69%). Sixty-two percent were living in Europe (62%). When describing the travel itself, 77% of guests answered that the reason for staying in the last hotel they visited was leisure or vacations and 57% were couples (32% without and 25% with children).

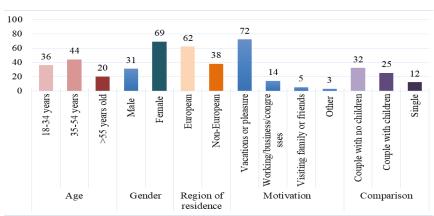


Figure 1. Guests' main characteristics

Table 2. Relevant characteristics of the guests

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Age (years) n (%)				
18-34	227 (36)			
35-54	272(44)			
<u>>55</u>	127 (20)			
Gender n (%)				
Male	195 (31)			
Female	431 (69)			
Region of residence n (%)				
European	385 (61,5)			
Non-European	241 (38,5)			
Motivation n (%)				
Vacations or pleasure	482 (77)			
Working/business	64 (10)			
Congresses or exhibitions	25 (4)			
Study	13 (2)			
Health	2(0)			
Visiting family or friends	34 (5)			
Religion	2(0)			
Gastronomy	1 (0)			
Other	3 (0.5)			
Companions n (%)				
Couple with no children	199 (32)			
Couple with children	159 (25)			
Single	75 (12)			

When asked about their overall satisfaction about the hotel's breakfast they visited lastly, 75% answered that they were satisfied and 63% thought that the specific foods were important to be present on breakfast.

Validation of hypotheses

Couple with no children

Couple with children

In Figure 2 and Table 3, the differences between the preferences of breakfast foods served and their relationship with the different nationalities of guests was presented. It was found that the nationality of the guests has an influence among breakfast food preferences, which confirms hypothesis H1aWith the majority of respondents residing in Europe (61.5%), we found that they tend to prefer fruit juices (37%) and pastries (37%). As for those residing outside Europe (38.5), the most suggested foods were fruit (58%) and dairy products (39%).

Fruits **Bread** Pastries Milk/yogurt Coffee **Eggs** Juices Region of residence (%) 0.032 0.001 < 0.001 0.212 0.122 0.001 0.064 48 48 30 37 European 37 23 30 39 Non-European 58 56 24 25 37 23 0.003 0.045 < 0.001 < 0.001 0.771 0.281 0.063 Age (years) (%) 44 31 47 19 26 30 39 18-34 35-54 55 49 24 35 31 37 28 >55 20 23 38 27 27 27 61 0.001 Gender (%) 0.082 0.076 0.057 0.064 0.161 0.149 47 47 28 30 30 37 Male 33 Female 54 53 34 28 25 37 23 0.099 0.018 0.856 0.808 0.990 0.261 0.487 Companions (%)

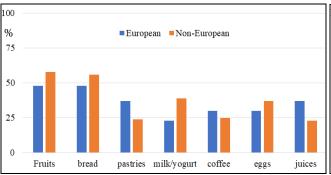
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Table 3. Relevant characteristics of the guests and their food preferences in breakfast



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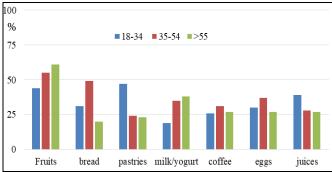
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Figure 2. Breakfast food preferences among the different nationalities



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Figure 3. Differences in breakfast food preferences between guests' ages

When determining the differences between guests' preferences for foods offered at breakfast and their age, we note that respondents aged fifty-five and above have preferences for fruits and dairy products, while guests aged 18-34 prefer pastries, confirming **H1b** (Figure 3 and Table 3). Among men and women, eggs are the big difference between preference, as forty of the men cited this food as relevant for breakfast, confirming **H1c** (Figure 4 and Table 3).

When analyzing the guests' food preferences in relation to company on the trip, it was found that among families traveling with children, bread was preferred for breakfast (Figure 5 and Table 3), confirming **H1d.**

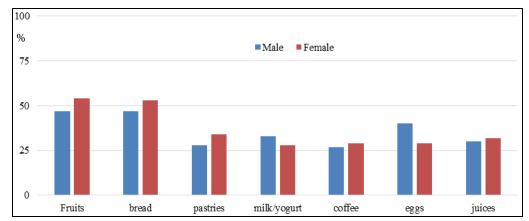


Figure 4. Differences in breakfast food preferences between genders (axis represents percentage of respondents)

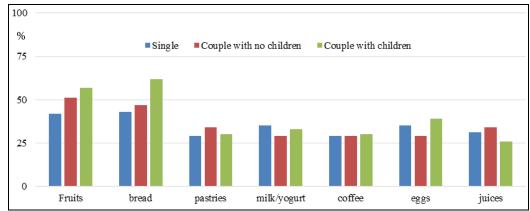


Figure 5. Differences in breakfast food preferences and the relationship to company during the (axis represents percentage of respondents)

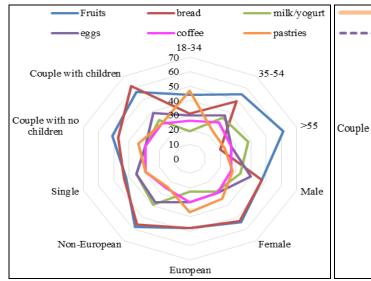


Figure 6. Differences between food preferences for a specific diet at breakfast and the relationship between the guests (axis represents percentage of respondents)

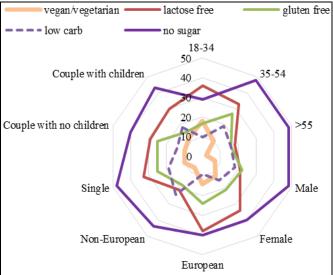


Figure 7. Differences between food preferences for a specific diet at breakfast and the relationship between the guests.

(axis represents percentage of respondents)

In Figure 5, we can see in summary how guests' preferences for breakfast foods vary according to their characteristics. Questions about the importance of the presence of nutritionally differentiated foods, as well as the guests' preference about them were included in the questionnaire. Table 4 presents the results of these questions

according to the characteristics relevant to this article. About the nutritionally differentiated foods the following hypotheses were tested. The preferences among products for a specific diet was evaluated among the guests and it was found that sixty-three percent of the guests responded with some type of preference. Regarding age, guests between the ages of 18 and 34 prefer lactose-free foods and vegans or vegetarians, guests between the ages of 35 and 54 prefer glutenfree foods, and the age group 35 and older prefer sugar-free foods, confirming **H2b** (Table 4 and Figure 6). Most women prefer lactose-free food, and regarding the local of residence of the guests, non-Europeans give more importance to low-carbohydrate food, while the residents in European prefer lactose-free food and vegetarians or vegans, conforming to hypotheses **H2c** and **H2a** (Table 4 and Figure 7). As for the analysis regarding guests' preference for specific dietary foods and its relation to guests traveling with children, there were no statistically significant differences, refuting **H2d**.

	No sugar	Gluten free	Lactose free	Vegan/ Vegetarian	Low carb
Region of residence (%)	0.471	0.216	< 0.001	0.021	< 0.001
European	40	24	38	14	9
Non-European	44	18	21	7	24
Age (years) (%)	0.002	0.035	0.014	0.001	0.079
18-34	29	17	36	18	10
35-54	48	27	33	10	19
>55	48	16	18	2	16
Gender (%)	0.203	0.889	0.018	0.192	0.528
Male	48	22	21	7	18
Female	40	21	34	12	15
Companions (%)	0.556	0.106	0.864	0.821	0.629
Single	48	25	33	10	19
Couple with no children	40	25	29	10	14
Couple with children	43	15	30	12	18

Table 4. Differences in food preferences for a specific diet among guest characteristics

DISCUSSION

Guest's food preferences

Food preferences vary among individuals. Factors such as gender, age, and culture are among those characteristics that may influence one's eating habits and preferences, but in some cases, preference overrides an individual's actual nutritional needs. One of the foods mentioned as a preference by the guests in our study was **milk and its derivatives**. These foods are sources of calcium and protein, and their consumption brings health benefits, such as avoiding the loss of bone mass common in older age (Kurajdova and Táborecka-Petrovicova 2015; Macdonald, 2010). It is known, however, that the benefits evidenced with the consumption of dairy products in adulthood stem from their intake in childhood. Even so, later consumption may bring some benefits, such as reducing the risk of bone fractures due to the combination of calcium and vitamin D, being important to highlight that in a more advanced age group it may be important to supplement these components (Fernández et al., 2015). In our manuscript, adults over 55 years old are more likely to choose milk/yogurt for breakfast, perhaps because of the well-known benefits we reported above.

Also, regarding dairy products, specifically milks and yogurts, mentioned in the questionnaires, it was found that non-Europeans gave more importance to these foods when compared to Europeans. In fact, even though the recommendation of dairy intake is 220 kg per capita/year (Francisciová, 2014), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reports that Europe has an annual per capita consumption of dairy products (with the exception of butter) of 210 kg (Hjartåker, 2002).

Another food mentioned as a preference by the guests were the **fruits**. One of the results of this article showed that adults over the age of 55 have a greater tendency to eat fruit which in nutritional terms makes sense. Fruit are foods rich in vitamins, minerals and fiber, help in decreasing the incidence of some types of cancer, metabolic diseases and in improving the immune system (Tsugane, 2004; Esmaillzadeh et al., 2006; Hsu et al., 2005). Specifically in an older population, fruit also adds micronutrients and bioactive compounds to the diet to prevent the onset of chronic diseases (Silveira et al., 2015).

In contrast, **pastries**, which included cakes, pancakes, waffles, and other sweets, were the most commonly cited option in terms of preference by guests between the ages of 18 and 34 years old. But we all know how sweets are fun! This preference comes already from the choices made by young people in their day-to-day lives, be it fast food habits, processed foods and drink (Levy et al., 2010; Moreno et al., 2010).

Specific nutritional needs

The large variation in consumption of dairy products across the different continents can be partly explained by different ability of the population to digest lactose. The highest prevalence of lactose indigestibility is found in the Far East (90%) and the lowest in northwestern Europe with an incidence of up to 10%. In Mediterranean countries, the prevalence is between 60 and 70% (Hjartåker et al., 2002). One of the results obtained from this survey was in fact that European respondents showed a tendency to place importance on lactose-free foods (in concordance with the previously description).

The demand for lactose-free foods in individuals without nutritional restrictions is justified by the same for presenting benefits such as greater intestinal comfort, however, there are studies that do not support these benefits without a real need (Corozolla and Rodrigues, 2016). Even proven lactose intolerance is not a justification for not ingesting milk, since this

situation can be controlled and/or treated (Fernández et al., 2015). Consumption of yogurts and other fermented dairy products containing lactase to aid digestion, as well as consumption of low-lactose milks, are both insightful ways to avoid the associated symptoms (Turck, 2013). For Macdonald (2010) and Agostoni and Turck (2011) a consumption of approximately 250ml of milk/day can be tolerated even in individuals diagnosed with lactose intolerance if consumed with other foods.

About **eggs**, a food rich in protein and fat, which is in agreement with the study published by Prim et al. (2010). It was another important result of our article that showed it to be the choice of men for breakfast. This choice may be justified by the looking for more caloric options, the search for satiety, or by the concern with maintaining muscle mass.

According to Paslakis et al. (2020) **vegetarians or vegans** are mostly young, female and have low body mass index, a fact also reported by reported by Timko et al. (2012). Still about the study by Paslakis et al. (2020) the respondents believe that vegetarian or vegan diets can lead to nutritional deficiency. Our results showed that among young people (18 to 34 years), among young people, there was a greater preference for vegetarian or vegan foods which is in line with the study of Suleiman et al. (2009) that reports this trend among young people.

About **lowcarb foods**, which makes use of them justify this choice through the benefits of weight loss, improved cholesterol levels, appetite control, among other factors that this type of food promises, but are not always scientifically justified. According to Colombarolli et al. (2021) the consequence of a lowcarb diet is to avoid insulin peaks and high glucose uptake, besides inducing fat as an energy source.

Another benefit according to Hu et al. (2012), a lowcarb diet can not only make the individual lose weight, but also treat metabolic syndromes, in addition to improving the lipid profile, factors also confirmed by Gilberto and Tavares (2020), however, for Oliveira et al. (2018), this type of restriction has a greater cognitive restriction and food compulsions. In this study, non-European individuals place great importance on low-carbohydrate foods.

CONCLUSION

Knowledge of the consumer profile is essential for the success of an enterprise. This is also true for the restaurant area where it is essential to know the preferences of consumers in order to satisfy them. Food preferences are part of an individual context and that also shapes the health and nutrition status of an individual. The options offered by hotels in their breakfasts and appreciated by customers, satisfied or even surprised, can cause loyalty and positive comments, attracting other guests and generating better scores on websites or hotel sales platforms. Therefore, hotels should be aware of their guests' needs and preferences and serve breakfasts that are appreciated by them.

Practical Implications

For a hotel enterprise, to increase the knowledge about their guests is always an asset. Knowing what their preferences are and meeting them brings guest satisfaction, which can generate loyalty and positive comments on hotel sales platforms and websites. Breakfast is an attribute highly valued and commented by guests on online platforms and meeting their needs and preferences in this meal can be a differential for the hotel. There are several needs and several customer preferences, but to adapt an important meal for guests with products that they prioritize makes the enterprise different because it provides satisfaction and even surprise, increasing the possibility of return and loyalty, a differential from the competition

Theoretical Implications

To our knowledge, this type of study on guests' breakfast preferences had not yet been done. A questionnaire that covers guests of diverse nationalities and assesses food preferences and suggestions from them about the foods available at a hotel breakfast is a continuation of previous studies that have measured the importance of this meal for choosing a hotel and its importance for guest satisfaction and return intention (Leite-Pereira et al., 2019; Leite-Pereira et al., 2020).

Limitations and Future Research

The present study used online questionnaires to be filled out by guests, the use of face-to-face questionnaires in this type of study that includes satisfaction or preferences for food, could be done, since moments after tasting a food is the ideal time to measure this satisfaction. Studies concerning the meals provided by the hotel units or the food made available should be done; meals, such as breakfast, are valued by the guests, and knowing the profile of the customers is essential to obtain satisfaction and advance against the competition.

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