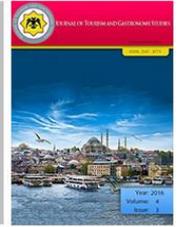




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## What Is Your Favorite Local Food Menu? Application of Conjoint Analysis on the Eastern Mediterranean Cuisine of Turkey

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### Abstract

Aim of this study is twofold; (1) investigating consumers' preference for favorite local food menu composed of regionally known soups, appetizers, main courses and desserts, and (2) understanding the criteria on which the consumers show their trade-off attitudes. Data was collected during the 01-31 May 2015 through a survey composed of 18 menu cards and 154 usable questionnaires were gathered as a consequence. Full profile conjoint analyses were applied as statistical technique in order to analyzing data. Major findings from the empirical study point to the fact that participants confer the highest importance to the main dishes while the least importance is placed on the price. The most favored menu cards reveal that those with 'Adana kebab' are of priority to the consumers. The most favorite menu card is composed of a mixture of Adana and Gaziantep cuisines. This trade-off behavior by the consumers illustrates that the more variety presented in the local menu, the higher the prices that could be charged.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The rapid developments and changes that have had an impact on all the industries in the world have also had an influence on the food-drink establishments. The growth trend of the restaurants, the increase in the variety of cuisines, newfound food preparation techniques, the ever-changing consumer trends, the advances in food transportation, the ongoing changes in consumer food habits, the emergence of aggressive sales strategies in the food-drink industry have forced the establishments to improve their gastronomy experiences (Kivela, 2003). Culinary, gastronomy, food or wine tourism, no matter how it is called; it is clear that travels with motivations for experiencing food&beverage have become a trend in many countries such as Italy, France, Thailand, Australia and Canada (Karim and Chi, 2010). Food culture and characteristics keeps the communities sharing the common history composed of people, places and culture together (Khoo and Badarulzaman, 2014) and therefore it has the ability to provide much more than “what, where and when to eat”.

In this context, the concept of “local food” has recently emerged as an alternative to the conventional food production and marketing and has consequently caught the eye of the food&beverage business and academics (Born and Purcell, 2006; Bloom, 2010; McEntee, 2010). Local foods are defined as the food that has been produced, worked upon and spread within a certain geographical area or relating to that specific area (Bloom, 2010). These foods have become part of the local culture because they have been derived from a past incident that has taken place in the region and thus have been put into a special category by the locals and have been consumed more or less on special occasions (Hatipoğlu et al., 2013). According to the research conducted by Frash et al. (2015) in various parts of Europe it has been understood that consumers associate the word “*traditional*” with “local” when it comes to talk about foods.

In recent years, the local flavors have garnered attention in the national and international field of gastronomy tourism activities (Darby et al., 2007; Zepeda and Deal, 2009; Sharma, Moon, Strohbahn, 2014). Gastronomy tourism is the type of tourism that offers foods specific to a region, which resonates the cultural identity and heritage of the region providing an advantage for the region over the competition, which in turn establishes travel motivation by presenting unique food-drink experience and significantly helps invigorate travel activities (Harrington and Ottenbacher, 2010). As gastronomy tourism enabled the promotion of the local cuisine, helped the spread of gastronomy culture from the local to the national and international level. The local food culture could provide a competitive advantage to one destination over another. Since the pronounced rise in competition between the tourism destinations, the food factor is regarded as a means to influence potential clients and boost tourism marketing (Lin, Pearson and Cai, 2011). Şengel et al., (2015) conducted a research on the local food experience of foreign tourists visited Istanbul. They discovered that the tourists were enthusiastic about foods that they didn't recognize, and their tendencies to recommend to others to try out these foods were high.

Food is no longer considered as just physiological need since but the characteristics of a destination and became the logical instrument in branding and promoting a specific destination as a consequence (Lin et al., 2011). This alteration let the academicians to understand what influences the consumers' local food preferences. Although the popularity of local foods has been substantially high-lightened in the gastronomy and tourism literature, (Bianchi and Mortimer, 2015) there are limited numbers of research delve into consumers' local food menu preferences. The

literature mostly focus on investigating the consumers' local food consumption and preference irrelevant of a menu cohesion (Roininen, Arvola and Lahteenmaki, 2006; Guerrero et al., 2010; Lin, Pearson and Cai, 2011; Choi and Zhao, 2014; Frash et al., 2015; Şengel et al., 2015; Mynttinen et al, 2015). Menus are an invaluable resource that provide legitimacy of the food&beverage establishments' activities and reflect the general brand image and the price range of the establishment to increase profit while shaping the consumers buying habits (Antun and Gustafson, 2005). In order to fill this gap, this study has delved into leaning consumers' favorite local food menu preferences composed of regionally known soups, appetizers, main courses and desserts. In line with this aim, local foods of three gastronomically wealth cities in Turkey's Eastern Mediterranean region were identified as a source. Besides, measuring the level of importance of food types in menu preference and to determine the criteria on which the consumers exhibit their trade-off attitudes were the secondary aim of the study.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN CUISINE OF TURKEY**

It can be said that the best proof of the historical and cultural diversification could be seen in the local cuisine. Turkish cuisine is considered as one of the major cuisines along with that of Chinese and French. Turkish cuisine hosts thriving and affluent local cuisines that have been influenced by a myriad of religions and traditions from Middle Asia, Mesopotamia, Byzantine, Mediterranean, Southern Asia and Europe over the course of a thousand years (Ertaş and Karadağ, 2013). Religions were the most significant modifiers of the eating habits and cuisine culture as it is seen in specific to Turkish cuisine. Old Turks, originally Asian, were utilizing all kinds of animals until they met with Islam. Old Turks were benefited mostly from sheep, goat and cattle as the source of meat, respectively. When Turks migrated to Anatolian territories, their cuisine culture was affected by other living societies naturally. Accordingly, Turks' meat driven cuisine was combined with local Anatolian cuisine in the long process (Karadağ, 2009).

From this time to forward, not only food varieties but also cooking styles and equipments have changed and shaped by their Islamic perceptions (Gaziantepmutfagi, 2016). Particularly, the effects of Arab diets with spice and hot pepper are quite obvious on the South-Eastern cuisine culture (Karadağ, 2009). Another significant mixer of the Turkish cuisine culture was Ottoman Empire because of its 600 years regnal duration and the number of countries under its control. Today, there are 64 different countries ranging from Central Asia to Anatolia, Middle East, the Balkans, Europe, Africa and Caucasus living within the old boundaries of Ottoman Empire. Accordingly, this blinding diversity has merged under the Turkish cuisine and reflected on different regions and cities (Gaziantepmutfagi, 2016). This great diversity of history and food culture has indispensably effected the Eastern Mediterranean Cuisine of Turkey as well. Eastern Mediterranean region is rich in meat driven foods, round and flat breads, dairy products, hot and intense spices, bulghurs and Turkish raki maden fig in opposition to Western Mediterranean regions' yoghurt driven appetizers, light seasonings, sea products, olive and olive oil, fresh vegetables and wines. Besides, cuisine of Eastern Mediterranean region differ from Western Mediterranean region with its' unique preparation and cooking techniques (Ertaş ve Gezmen-Karadağ, 2013).

### **LITERATURE REVIEW ON CONSUMERS' PREFERENCE FOR LOCAL FOODS AND MENUS**

Mynttinen et al., (2015) have examined the Russian tourists' local food experience and revealed that the

tourists' primary reason to prefer local tastes were "to eat fresh and healthy food" and "to enjoy the food". Additionally, the authors stated that in order for the tourists to experience the local flavors at the restaurants, they needed to believe that the local foods were actually local. Moreover, the prices had to be on the inexpensive side, the tourists needed to be informed about the local products, preferably in their own language and they required more information about the food culture of the destination they were visiting. Similar to Mynttinen et al., (2015), Choi and Zhao (2014) and Pestek and Cinjarevic (2014) revealed that the offering clues on local culture and lifestyle, services and healthy food are the significant attributes impacting the consumers' preference to order local food at the restaurants. Another research that has been conducted in Finland revealed that the locals thought of local foods as fresh and healthy derive mainly from the short distances transportation and sustaining the local economy (Roininen, Arvola and Lahteenmaki, 2006). When Lin et al., (2011) studied the websites and the brochures of the tourism destinations; they found that the elements published were mostly about foods that were considered healthy and their ingredients.

Kızıllırmak et al., (2014) examined the significance of the local cuisine of Trabzon in the content of the menus at 13 restaurants including the hotel restaurants. The research results established that the most of the restaurants served local foods, however, the information whether the foods served were local or not was missing. A similar research was conducted by Hatipoğlu et al., (2013) in Capadoccia's Gelveri (Güzelyurt) district on six rural tourism food-drink establishments and discovered that the menus did not give special importance to the local foods. It is important that the local products take places in the menus of restaurants, supposed to be reflected the regional cuisine culture. Some ways to add excitement and vitality to the traditional menus are secret in the variations of the menus such as adding information as to the cooking methods of the items, new additions regarding the shapes, colors, temperatures, sizes and contents of the food (Antun and Gustafson, 2005). Bernstein et al., (2015), found in their research that the restaurants offering varieties in their menus were regarded as unmatched and preferable to the restaurants that offer fixed menus. Moreover, if such restaurants are locally known and famous for their menus then these establishments are not only admired but are likely to draw in repeat customers. Mynttinen et al., (2015), suggested that the usage of the language of the people own language (other than English) could increase the tourists desire to partake of the local cuisine. Thus, the menu can be regarded as a communication tool whereby offering the customers a warm welcome rather than just an inventory of the establishments food&beverage roster. On the one hand, the menus offer the food&beverage portfolio of the establishment and on the other; the menus could show the establishment's regard for the customers' health and well-being. For example, in the research by Antun and Gustafson (2005) where a comparison of the upscale restaurants and private dinner clubs was conducted, the customers' preferences for the healthiest items on the menus were documented by comparing the menus' offering: beef, pork products, fish and salad.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Aim of the Study**

Aim of this study is twofold; (1) investigating consumers' favorite local food menu preferences composed of regionally known soups, appetizers, main courses and desserts and (2) understanding the criteria on which the consumers show their trade-off attitudes. In line with this aim produced 18 different menu cards were asked to rank

from most favorite to least favorite by the participants according to their subjective evaluation (taste perception, preparation information, familiarity, locality, price, etc.). Appearance and content of the foods handled in this research could be seen in Appendix 1.

### **Data Collection Tool**

The attributes of the local menus were shaped in three stages. Firstly, articles, web pages and books which were specifically related to Eastern Mediterranean Cuisine were investigated in order to determine a set of attributes deemed important by various authors. After determining the most recurring and significant menu attributes from the literature, the second stage where interviews with locals in Mersin who were familiar with Eastern Mediterranean Cuisine was executed. The preliminary interview is the first stage in a conjoint analysis that occurs before any design of actual cards can be undertaken (Orme, 2010). Therefore, to make the menu attributes case-specific and adaptable to the local environment, face-to-face interviews, lasting approximately 20 minutes; with 30 tourism management graduate students were conducted. The participants were asked to name their most favorite dishes from Eastern Mediterranean Cuisine. They listed a total of 62 different foods which were then grouped into main categories to shape the final menu items on a list and subsequently, the most recurring foods were defined and grouped. As a result, twelve foods involve in four food groups (soups, appetizers, main courses, desserts) represent the cuisine of Adana, Hatay, Gaziantep have been identified. Menu prices were determined for the each menu according to answers the “how much money are you willing to pay” question from the 30 graduate students and managers of the seven restaurant in Mersin. Table 1 represents the defined attributes and levels.

**Table 1.** Determined Attributes and Levels

<b>Menu Items</b>	<b>Types</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Cuisine</b>
Soups	Yüksük Soup	Soup with meat pastry and chickpea	Adana
	Lebeniye Soup	Yoghurt soup with tiny stuffed meatball, chickpea and wheat	Gaziantep
	Ayran Aşı (yoğurt) Soup	Cold yogurt soup with chickpea and wheat	Hatay
Appetizers	Sarımsaklı Köfte	Burghul ball with garlic	Adana
	İçli köfte	Stuffed meatballs	Gaziantep
	Saç Oruğu	Ovened stuffed meatballs in metal tray	Hatay
Main dishes	Adana Kebap	Traditional Turkish Kebab	Adana
	Patlıcan Kebap	Aubergine Kebab	Gaziantep
	Tepsi Kebap	Oval Kebab in metal tray	Hatay
Desserts	Karakuş	Deep fried pastry with walnut	Adana
	Baklava	Multilayered flaky pastry with walnuts, pistachios etc.	Gaziantep
	Künefe	Oven shredded pastry with cheese filling in syrup	Hatay
*Prices	Adana: 35 TL (13,1\$)	Gaziantep:45 TL (16,86\$)	Hatay:55 TL (20,61\$)
1US\$=2,6675 TL/29.05.2015			

### **Sampling Procedure**

The participants of the study are residents of Mersin and have been defined as consumers who are familiar with the aforementioned cuisine in the study. Data were collected by two researchers with the convenience sampling procedure during the 01-31 May 2015 and 154 usable questionnaires were gathered totally. Before the data collection, participants have been informed about the ranking process and critical evaluation criteria (taste perception, preparation

information, familiarity, locality, price, etc.) that could help participants to rank menu cards successfully. Each application of the menu cards took approximately 20 to 30 minutes. With regards to the sufficiency of the sample size, Hair et al., (2010) mentioned that although small scale studies, as small as 50 respondents could provide a brief glimpse into the preferences of respondents, 200 participants could provide an acceptable margin of error. Therefore, sample size of this research should be taken carefully into consideration when making generalizations.

**Analysis Technique**

In order to define consumers’ preference for the most favourite local menu and to understand consumers’ trade-off attitudes conjoint analyses (CA) has been applied. Conjoint analysis is a multivariate technique that helps in understanding how consumers arrive at certain determinations as to goods and/or services (Hair et al., 2010). What makes conjoint analysis a powerful technique is helping in the manipulation of pricing and marketing decisions according to consumer trade-offs (Ding et al., 1991). Hair et al., (2010) state that consumers are able to provide their best judgments on a product by breaking down its elements and assigning a value to each one. The combination of all attributes yields consumers preferences such as: what elements in a product hold the most importance, which combinations yield the most desirable product and what kind of trade-offs consumers are willing to make (Ostrom and Iacobucci, 1995). As mentioned in Xu and Yuans’ (2001) principle, the number of scenarios should equal to at least 1.5 times the number of parameters. The number of parameters is determined by the formula  $[n(k-1) + 1]$  where n=the number of attributes, and k=the number of levels for each attribute. According to Xu and Yuan’s (2001) principle 11 cards at least should be created in this study considering 5 attributes and 3 levels. As a result, 18 profile and 3 simulation cards were produced by the statistical program. Table 2 provides the information on the 18 cards that the consumers evaluated.

**Table 2.** Attributes and Levels of Produced Profile Cards

No	Soups	Appetizers	Main dishes	Desserts	Prices
1	Yüksük	Saç Oruğu	Tepsi Kebabı	Künefe	55 TL
2	Lebeniye	İçli Köfte	Patlıcan Kebabı	Karakuş	55 TL
3	Ayran Aşı	İçli Köfte	Tepsi Kebabı	Karakuş	45 TL
4	Yüksük	Saç Oruğu	Patlıcan Kebabı	Künefe	45 TL
5	Ayran Aşı	İçli Köfte	Adana Kebabı	Künefe	55 TL
6	Lebeniye	Saç Oruğu	Tepsi Kebabı	Baklava	35 TL
7	Ayran Aşı	Sarımsaklı Köfte	Tepsi Kebabı	Baklava	45 TL
8	Ayran Aşı	Saç Oruğu	Patlıcan Kebabı	Karakuş	35 TL
9	Ayran Aşı	Sarımsaklı Köfte	Patlıcan Kebabı	Künefe	35 TL
10	Lebeniye	Sarımsaklı Köfte	Patlıcan Kebabı	Baklava	55 TL
11	Yüksük	Sarımsaklı Köfte	Tepsi Kebabı	Karakuş	55 TL
12	Lebeniye	İçli Köfte	Tepsi Kebabı	Künefe	35 TL
13	Ayran Aşı	Saç Oruğu	Adana Kebabı	Baklava	55 TL
14	Lebeniye	Saç Oruğu	Adana Kebabı	Karakuş	45 TL
15	Yüksük	İçli Köfte	Adana Kebabı	Baklava	35 TL
16	Yüksük	İçli Köfte	Patlıcan Kebabı	Baklava	45 TL
17	Lebeniye	Sarımsaklı Köfte	Adana Kebabı	Künefe	45 TL
18	Yüksük	Sarımsaklı Köfte	Adana Kebabı	Karakuş	35 TL
S1	Yüksük	Sarımsaklı Köfte	Adana Kebabı	Karakuş	35 TL
S2	Lebeniye	İçli Köfte	Patlıcan Kebabı	Baklava	55 TL
S3	Ayran Aşı	Saç Oruğu	Tepsi Kebabı	Künefe	45 TL

**FINDINGS**

When 154 CA questionnaires is glanced according to socio-demographic characteristics of the sample, it is determined that the participants are spread out in a balanced way when their gender and the frequency with which they dine out is taken into account. By a majority, they belong to middle or below middle income groups and the ages are 39 years of age or below.

**Table 3:** Participants’ Socio-Demographic and Dine Out Statistics (n=154)

Sex	n	(%)	Age	n	%
Male	71	46,1	Age 29 or below	59	38,3
Female	83	53,9	Age 30-39	53	34,4
<b>Monthly income</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>	Age 40-49	18	11,7
1000 TL or below	55	35,7	Age 50 or above	24	15,6
1001 TL-2000 TL	36	23,4	<b>Monthly dine out frequency</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
2001 TL-3000 TL	39	25,3	1-2	37	24,0
3001 TL-4000 TL	14	9,1	3-4	43	27,9
4000 TL or above	10	6,5	5-8	35	22,7
			9 or more	39	25,3

Subsequent to the giving brief information about sample, the conjoint analyses was put into action. The primary observation from the analyses is the model’s reliability. In order to test the correlation between the actual and predicted preferences, namely the integrity of the fit for conjoint model, Pearson’s R statistic was calculated for the entire group and each individual respondent ( $p \leq 0,05$ ). Due to the fact that some respondent may not take their job seriously enough, individuals with Pearson’s R correlation statistics could be below 0.50 and should be removed from the sample (Moskowitz and Krieger, 2003). As a result, Pearson’s R correlation was calculated as 0.83, which indicates a very good fit. None of the single menu cards’ Pearson’s R was found below the reference point. Good fit indicates a balance between what is expected and observed in respondents’ choice preference (Hair et al., 2010). Table 4 provides the scores of five attributes and levels of each attributes.

**Table 4.** Part-worth Utility Scores of Relative Importance for Each Attribute Level

Attributes	Relative Importance	Rank	Levels	Part-worth Scores
Soups	% 14,73	4	Yüksük	,306
			Lebeniye	-,221
			Ayran aşı	-,085
Appetizers	% 15,48	3	Sarımsaklı köfte	-,090
			İçli köfte	,420
			Saç oruğu	-,330
Main dishes	% 39,77	1	Adana Kebab	1,187
			Patlıcan Kebab	-,724
			Tepsi Kebab	-,463
Desserts	% 16,60	2	Karakuş	-,587
			Baklava	,333
			Künefe	,253
Prices	% 13,41	5	35 TL	-3,714
			45 TL	-4,000
			55 TL	-4,286
Pearson R= 0,832, sig=0.000 / Kendall’s tau= 686, sig=0,000				

According to Table 4, the results of the respondents indicate that; the most important attribute is the main dishes (%39.77). The most desired level of this attribute is ‘Adana Kebab’ which is a globally known traditional taste. The

second most important attribute is desserts (%16,60), and for this attribute, the level with the highest utility score is “baklava”, which is a globally known flavour as well. The third ranked attribute is appetizers and the most desired level of this attribute is “içli köfte” which is a stuffed burghull balls with seasoned minced meat. Similarly ‘yüksük soup’ is the most desired level of soups which is ranked fourth in importance. The least important attribute was identified as price. Generally, price have been evaluated by the researchers since its manipulative characteristic, that is, to the large extend consumers would desire to have their favourite product at minimum price. However, price attribute has been found as least important agent for participants and its manipulative effect did not show up. The most desired level of this attribute is 35 TL, which was expected when looked at from the customers’ perspective. Through the use of the part-worth utility and constant scores available in Table 4, scores belonging to 18 menu cards have been calculated and presented in Table 5 (see Table 2 for menu list of the profiles).

**Table 5.** Cards Scores According to Guests’ Preferences\*

<b>Profile No</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1	8,98	13
2	8,102	17
3	8,785	14
4	9,005	12
<b>5</b>	<b>10,989</b>	<b>2</b>
6	9,105	11
7	9,195	9
8	8,06	18
9	9,14	10
10	8,512	15
11	8,38	16
12	9,775	7
13	10,319	5
14	9,549	8
<b>15</b>	<b>12,032</b>	<b>1</b>
16	9,835	6
<b>17</b>	<b>10,629</b>	<b>3</b>
18	10,602	4

\*Card Score = Constant score + b1 (soup) + b2 (appetizer) + b3 (main dish) + b4 (dessert) + b5 (price)

By doing so, the three most desired local menu profiles have been defined. This process provided an insight into what guests prefer in a local menu and how it shapes the trade off behaviours. When the Table 5 is taken into account, the strong dominance of ‘Adana kebab’, ‘İçli köfte’, ‘Yüksük soup’ and ‘Baklava’ becomes quite evident. The first 5 top cards reveal that while menus with ‘Adana kebab’ are the priority of the participants, even though others vary. The most preferred card number is 15 and the least preferred is 8, both of which share the same price point at 35 TL, however, the contents of their menu are completely different from one another. The least preferred 5 cards consist of food other than ‘Adana kebab’, and mostly involves ‘Karakus’ dessert at the cost of 55 TL each. Even its least importance among the food attributes, this finding suggests that price might be partially a factor in the choice of the menu. Besides, participants prefer menus with Adana Kebab as the main course, and they do not gravitate toward ‘eggplant kebab’ and ‘karakus’ dessert. For example the menu numbers 5 and 13 have prices of 55 TL, but they happen to be graded in the top 5, reason being that the main course in the menu is “Adana kebab” and

the dessert is either “baklava” or “künefe”. This finding demonstrates that the participants can compromise where price is concerned if they see the foods they like on the menu.

The three most preferred cards were investigated to understand consumers’ trade-off attitudes. As a result, consumers’ top preference is the card that offers a mixture of Adana and Gaziantep foods. The participants tend to choose the soup and the main course from Adana’s cuisine while showing more of a greater interest in Gaziantep’s warm appetizer and dessert. The fact that the price of this card is 35 TL has undoubtedly had an affect on its appeal. Thus, card number 15 demonstrates that the participants want to obtain the foods they like for the best possible price. Card number 5 is the second best menu that the participants liked the most. In this profile, the soup and main course from Adana cuisine were preferred whereas, hot appetizer from Gaziantep and dessert from Hatay were chosen respectively. Consequently, it is fair to deduce that consumers might favour a menu that combines the three different cuisines at an extra cost of 10TL. Lastly, when the third popular menu, which is card number 17, is investigated, it shows similarities with the second popular menu since this one also offers a rich regional variety.

Accordingly, it is noted that the consumers prefer Adana’s cuisine for the hot appetizer and the main course, Gaziantep’s cuisine for the soup and Hatay’s cuisine for the dessert. It is also noted that the preferences of the consumers who are willing to pay 55 TL for this menu is greatly influenced by the choice of Künefe as dessert. As it was previously noted in Table 4, dessert preference is second in importance right below the main course as a determining factor in consumers’ preferences. The simulation cards that reflect the cuisines of Adana, Gaziantep and Hatay offer findings conducive to the market share of the menus that are offered to the consumers. Hair et al., (2010) states that simulation cards will provide information on the frequency of preference and market share of the profiles with the help of the maximum utility model and probabilistic models (Bradley-Terry-Luce and Logit). Before the interpretation of the simulation cards, it is important to note once more that Pearson R and Kendall’s Tau correlation values, which show the reliability of the conjoint analyses, are statistically meaningful and their reference points have evidently been surpassed.

As seen in Table 6 it can be said that profile 1 is the most utilitarian, profile 3 is placed second and profile 2 was the least according to Max Utility and Logit scores. Besides, when looked at BTL statistics, it can be said that, if profile 1 were to be introduced in the market it is estimated to capture the highest market share; followed by profile 2 and 3 respectively. Logit serves the same purpose with BTL, showing the estimated market share of each profile (Hair et al., 2010). In accordance with these results, it is observed that there are obvious differences between the consumers most favourite menu preferences and the simulation profile cards. Even though the first one from the simulation profiles seems to indicate that it might be the most effective one to help increase the market share of the establishments, from the consumers preferences standpoint ‘karakus’ dessert is not a well liked dessert, additionally, ‘içli kofte’ is preferable to ‘sarımsaklı köfte’ as a hot appetizer. On the other hand, although Gaziantep cuisine’s ‘içli kofte’ and ‘baklava’ are very popular flavors, the consumers were not enticed by the ‘eggplant kebab’ from the same region. Therefore, when the findings of the simulation cards’ market shares are evaluated, it is important to pay particular attention to the consumers’ favourite cards as well.

**Table 6.** Simulation Profiles Analysis Results

No.1	Levels	Score	Max. Utility	BTL	Logit
1.Adana Cuisine	Yüksük soup, Sarımsaklı köfte, Adana kebab, Karakuş	10,603	51,9%	37,6%	51,7%
2.Gaziantep Cuisine	Lebeniye soup, İçli köfte, Aubergine kebab, Baklava	9,308	21,4%	32,5%	23,5%
3.Hatay Cuisine	Ayran aşı soup, Saç oruğu, Oval kebab, Künefe	8,589	26,6%	30,0%	24,8%
Pearson R= 0,832, sig=0.000 / Kendall's tau= 686, sig=0,000					

## IMPLICATIONS

As a result of the study, it has been understood that the participants are willing to pay premium price, providing they should have the menu composed of the variety of foods from different cuisines. This result coincides with the results of the research by Bernstein et al., (2015), which demonstrated that the local menus offering varieties are most liked and are most likely to be chosen again. Conception of ‘*the highest income desired corresponds with the food variety in the menu planning*’ is a well known fact (Antun and Gustafson, 2005). This research paper’s results also coincides with the results of the study of Frash et al., (2015) that shows the menus with favourable local flavours would fetch higher prices. Another output of this research that corresponds with the literature is a finding that might not be recognized at first glance but will emerge after careful investigation of the menu preferences. There is no ‘eggplant kebab’ or ‘oval kebab in metal tray’ dishes in the first preferred 5 menu cards that the consumers picked. Furthermore, it is noted that ‘eggplant kebab’ and ‘oval kebab in metal tray’ crop up in the least preferred 5 menu cards as the main course. The reasons behind these preferences could be that the least favored two dishes are oily and indigestible. During the application of the survey the participants evaluated the menus as a whole and have listed their assessments as such; ‘oily’, ‘indigestible’, ‘tiring the stomach’, ‘causing weight gain’, ‘carbohydrates’, etc. Consequently, it is possible to maintain that the consumers’ menu preferences are aligned with their expectations of enjoying variety of healthy and fresh foods as stated by Roinuinen et al., (2006); Choi and Zhao (2014); Pestek and Cinjarevic (2014); Frash et al., (2015) and Mynttinen et al., (2015). Despite the similarities between the research findings, Mynttinen et al., (2015) have determined that foreign tourists have expectation of lower prices, nevertheless, in this research, the local population indicated that price is the least important element as the study of Choi and Zhao (2014) and if the menu reflected the local cuisine well enough, they would be inclined to pay the highest price which in this case was 55 TL.

The findings of the research offer series of noticeable results for the food&beverage establishments as well. The findings of the research show the significance of the main course and the desert for consumers’ menu preferences. It is understood that the consumers who pay special attention to main dishes are willing to change menu preferences providing that they have the dessert that they like. Although the main course is imperative in the consumers’ preference for menus, influence of “Adana kebab” is widely observed in the menu preferences. Adana kebab takes place in the first top 5 most preferred menus. This situation could be resulted from the majority of the

participants live in Mersin and as Adana is the closest in proximity to Mersin compared to the other cities, Adana's cuisine holds more sway in Mersin. Hence, restaurants offering Adana kebab in their menus could create a reference point for their other regional flavours thanks to their quality of Adana kebab. Additionally, the restaurants in Hatay and Gaziantep should be able to duplicate their success with their own regional dishes in the presentation of the region's most indispensable dish, the Adana kebab.

The responses of the participants show that Gaziantep's world famous dessert "Baklava" is admired than Hatay's famous dessert "Künefe". One of the reasons behind this perception could be resulted from Künefe's high calories structure due to its syrupy consistency. Thus, it would be to the restaurants' advantage to add baklava to their dessert menu apart from Gaziantep. The participants have given varied responses to the matter of the soup and did not assess soup as an important factor in their choice of menus. That being said, Yüksük soup was the most preferred soup, thus the restaurants should take notice of this little clue. Another factor that the restaurants should take into consideration is the importance placed on 'ıçli köfte' by the participants in the appetizer category. Içli köfte goes in top two menu cards for menu preferences on the contrary, the participants did not assign a priority to the menus with Eggplant Kebab and Saç Oruğu. The first possible reason behind this preference could be derived from their oily fatty structure and participant could have been evaluated menus with these food as indigestible. The second possible factor may well be that the participants might have thought that Mersin would not be an ideal destination for them to eat these delicious foods. Granted that the best examples of regional dishes are usually consumed at a specific destination from where they originated. Nevertheless, since the Eastern Mediterranean cuisine culture has spread to most of these destinations, there needs to be restaurants that could reflect the originity of these foods as good as possible. Thus, the restaurants that have developed the cooking techniques and offer such dishes would be able to reach a wide group of clientele based on the variations of their menus and in turn increase their bottom line.

## **LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES**

The results of this research have to be assessed by keeping in mind a series of limitations. The first limitation of this study is the sample size which was made up of 154 people. Even though it is a difficult and time consuming process to collect data from the consumers using the cards produced by conjoint analysis, Hair et al., (2010) have revealed that reaching 200 in number as the sampling size is an important factor in achieving generalizations. Another limitation of the research is about the scope. The research variables have limited to four types of food and price, however, attributes effecting restaurant preference and gastronomy experience. Therefore, in future researches noting down the restaurant attributes on the menu cards would greatly benefit in the comparison of this research results.

For future studies it is possible to add local/regional drinks (if they exist) to the menu cards and also add the local flavours of the other Eastern Mediterranean region cities such as Osmaniye, Kilis and Kahramanmaras. Besides, this research could have been conducted on the local and foreign tourists visiting the region and the results could have been compared. Lastly, in this research, the difference between the participants' demographic attributes impact on local menu preferences was not investigated. In the future studies the participants' demographic

attributes as well as their gastronomy traits might be taken into consideration when researching the differences in their menu preferences.

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**Appendix 1.** Appearance and Contents of the Foods Evaluated by the Participants

A d a n a	<p><b>Yüksük Soup</b></p>  <p>Soup with meat pastry and chickpea</p>	<p><b>Sarımsaklı Köfte– Appetizer</b></p>  <p>Burghull ball with garlic</p>	<p><b>Adana Kebab – Main dishes</b></p>  <p>Traditional Turkish Kebab made of lamb ground meat and spices</p>	<p><b>Karakuş – Dessert</b></p>  <p>Deep fried pastry with walnut</p>
G a z i a n t e p	<p><b>Lebeniye Soup</b></p>  <p>Yoghurt soup with tiny meatball, chickpea and wheat</p>	<p><b>İçli Köfte – Appatizer</b></p>  <p>Stuffed meatballs</p>	<p><b>Patlıcan Kebabı – Main dishes</b></p>  <p>Kebab made of lamb ground meat with aubergine</p>	<p><b>Baklava – Dessert</b></p>  <p>Multilayered flaky pastry with walnuts, pistachios etc.</p>
H a t a y	<p><b>Ayranaşı Soup</b></p>  <p>Cold yogurt soup with chickpea and wheat.</p>	<p><b>Saç Oruğu</b></p>  <p>Ovened stuffed meatballs in metal tray.</p>	<p><b>Tepsi Kebabı – Main dishes</b></p>  <p>Oval Kebab in metal tray made of ground meat or small cuts of meat.</p>	<p><b>Künefe – Dessert</b></p>  <p>Oven shredded pastry with cheese filling in syrup.</p>