

The Influence of Open Buffet System in All-Inclusive Holidays on Illusion of Control, Gluttony and Obesity

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Koc's (2013) research showed that on all-inclusive holidays tourists engaged in inversionary or liminoidal consumption and consumed food and drinks excessively both in terms of quantity and variety, not only during their holidays, but also much later after their holidays ended. This study proved that all-inclusive holidays could cause gluttony and obesity.

Moreover, tourists on all-inclusive holidays with open buffet system can make many of their consumption decisions freely in terms of what to eat and drink (Koc and Boz, 2014). The ability to make free choices on all-inclusive holidays provides tourists the opportunity to have decisional control (Noone, 2008; Koc, 2013 and 2016). Contrary to an open buffet restaurant, a tourist eating in a *à la carte* restaurant may feel that her/his decisional control is limited due to suggestions or hints of the waiter, the availability of food items and so on (Koc, 2006 and 2007).

Having decisional control by an individual may create a Pavlovian conditioning, a type of cognitive bias, or an attributional error, called illusion of control (Langer, 1975; Unzicker, 1999). Illusion of control is the proclivity of an individual to overestimate her/his ability in controlling events and the attribution of positive aspects to choices she/he has herself/himself made. This is also called illusory superiority or optimism bias (Lovallo and Kahneman, 2003; Koc, 2016).

This illusory superiority or optimism may cause an increase in the self-efficacy beliefs of an individual may have (Bandura, 1997). This in turn may lead to increased value attachment to and liking for an individual's her/or his own choices (Weiner, 2000). Illusion of control is similar to endowment effect (divestiture aversion) (Thaler, 1980) which is to do with people's assigning of more value to their own choices (Botti et al., 2014).

Koc's (2016) experimental research with 213 found interesting findings regarding illusion of control and gluttony. In the study salad as the food item was used particularly to measure the extent of illusion control because of convenience and control purposes. Various cooked dishes which may have been used in the experimental study. However, this would have made the standardisation and evaluation a lot more difficult and complicated.

Before the experiment tourists were asked to describe their ideal salads in terms of the ingredients, the preparation of the salad (e.g. in terms of how the ingredients were sliced and so on) and how their salads should look like. The guests were given a list of the available salad ingredients including the following: tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers, celery, green peppers, onions, baby onions, parsley leaves avocado, feta cheese, yoghurt, black and green olives, fresh mint, garden rocket, carrots and white cabbage. The guests had to design their ideal salads based on these above ingredients.

For each tourist about a half page of notes on their salad preferences were taken in terms of the type of and amount of ingredients (e.g. four cherry tomatoes, or peeled large tomatoes) and the presentation of salad ingredients (e.g. four non-sliced cherry tomatoes put at the top of the salad).

For 213 tourists salads were prepared before their arrival in the restaurant of the hotel.

As the tourist entered the restaurant he was presented with a small salad bowl to have her/his salad from the open buffet as s/he described before the experiment. When the tourist returned to her/his table s/he was served with another bowl of salad prepared by the hotel restaurant staff. Photos of both bowls of salads were taken for comparison reasons. Salads did not have any salt, lemon juice/vinegar, olive oil or any type of salad dressings etc. The tourist was able to add salt, lemon juice/ vinegar, olive oil or any type of salad dressings and so on at the table according to her/his preferences.

Then, the tourist was asked to taste, analyse, evaluate and compare both the salad s/he prepared and the one prepared for her/him by hotel restaurant staff by assigning a value from 1 to 10. If the tourist assigned a value of 1, this meant that the salad was a very bad salad and the tourist did not like it at all. However, if the tourist assigned a value of 10, this meant that the salad was a really good salad and the tourist liked it very much. If a guest assigned a higher value (1 to 10) to the salad s/he selected compared with the salad prepared by the hotel restaurant staff (i.e. $A > B$, A being her/his own salad, B being the salad brought by the waiter), this meant that the guest had illusion of control, as both salad bowls were very much similar, almost identical. On the other hand, if the assigned values to each salad were equal (i.e. $A=B$) this meant that the guest did not have illusion of control and s/he evaluated the salads correctly, again as both salad bowls were very much similar. If the guest assigned a lower value to the salad s/he selected this also meant that there was no illusion of control. This, in fact, meant that the guest made a mistake in her/his evaluation. The evaluations of all guests regarding both salads together with their demographic variables such as age and gender were recorded and entered on a spreadsheet.

The findings of the study were as follows:

Out of the 213 tourists 132 of them, about 62 %, had illusion of control, i.e. assigned higher points to the salads they chose themselves than to the salads which were prepared by hotel restaurant staff, though both salads were very much similar in nature, almost identical.

As a tourist's age increased s/he tended to assign higher values to salads prepared by the hotel restaurant staff. This may be attributable to the tourist's paternalistic feelings or feeling of pity for the hotel restaurant staff and her/his intention not to jeopardise the careers of hotel employees. As a result, as people got older, they tended to show more concern, empathy and paternalistic feelings towards service providing personnel.

In conclusion, the study showed that illusion of control was a relatively common phenomenon among tourists and it caused individuals to attach more value and enjoy the food items that they themselves choose more. This, in turn may increase the liking and overconsumption of food and drinks when people are on all-inclusive open buffet holidays. This means that all-inclusive open buffet holidays may cause gluttonous behaviours and perhaps eventually contribute to increased levels of obesity in the society. The study has important implications for tourists, practitioners in accommodation establishments and public policy makers.

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