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What are the essential elements of the customer journey experience for food delivery?

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**The Essential Elements of the Customer
Journey Experience for Food Deliver**

By Benjamin Famiano

April 21, 2022

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Introduction

Restaurants are a popular form of entertainment that are enjoyed by both family and friends alike. Before the Covid-19 Pandemic, there was something about restaurants, either the quality of the food, the quality of the service, or even the atmosphere that drew people in every day at many different times of the year. However, when Covid-19 swept across the world, all of that was taken away from the consumers. Due to newly imposed restrictions set up by different governments, people were no longer allowed to gather in public areas, including restaurants. This lack of consumers led to many restaurants having to shut down, in some cases permanently. Soon, restaurants were able to find new ways to adapt to this new environment. While they could not offer dine-in options, they were able to offer carry-out, curbside pickup, and most importantly, delivery. Either through their own apps or websites, or through third party delivery apps, such as GrubHub or Doordash, restaurants were able to bring the restaurant experience right to the doorstep of all its consumers.

While this was certainly the right move for restaurants to make given the current environment, it could soon prove difficult when restrictions began to be lifted. With in-person restrictions no longer limiting restaurants, some consumers quickly started to return to on-premise dining. This caused problems for restaurants as they were now confronted with the problem of trying to service on and off premise customers with only one kitchen. Restaurants had to adapt again, and the solution they discovered was in the form of ghost kitchens. Ghost kitchens are owned by the restaurant, but they are located in a different location from the original restaurant. They are usually located in rented out spaces, in buildings that look like an office building or warehouse, however the staff in ghost kitchens, while different from the staff in the original restaurants are trained to cook the same food at the same level of quality. The purpose of ghost kitchens is to fulfill off-premise orders that the restaurant receives. This means that if someone orders food using GrubHub, the person who delivers the order instead goes to a ghost kitchen to pick up the food, rather than picking the food up from the restaurant.

This study is designed to measure how consumers would react if they found out that their food delivery came from a ghost kitchen as opposed to the original restaurant. Do the consumers have certain expectations of where the food comes from when they order delivery, or do they even care where the food comes from? How the consumer reacts could affect the motivation of restaurants to implement the use of ghost kitchens or affect how they communicate with the consumer when they do decide to use them. Based on the hypotheses below, consumers in this study will either have a positive or neutral reaction to the use of ghost kitchens, or they will have a negative reaction to the use of ghost kitchens.

H₀: Knowledge of ghost kitchens has a positive or neutral effect on trust or satisfaction with delivery.

H₁: Knowledge of ghost kitchens has a negative effect on the trust or satisfaction with delivery.

Literature Review

What are the values of a good experience for on-premise dining?

Consumers consider several factors when deciding whether dining on-premise at a certain restaurant was a good experience or not. According to Boonyanit Mathayomchan and Viriya Taecharungroj in their article “How was your meal?” Examining Customer Experience using Google maps review” (2020) the four primary factors that customers look at are Food, Service, Atmosphere, and Value. Food relates to the actual quality of the food. If the food is not good, then neither was the experience. The second factor is service, which measures the level of quality of the service within the restaurant. Was the service reliable, did it provide assurance to the customer, did it offer quick tangible value, and did the service offer a high level of empathy and responsiveness? The third factor is Atmosphere. This refers to the physical environment of the restaurant. This factor is measured by looking at how comfortable the seating was, the openness of the dining area layout, the interior design, how good the music was, did it have a pleasant scent, was the lighting too dark or too bright, and was the restaurant clean. The final factor is value. The authors defined value as being whether or not the meal was worth the price that the customer paid.

In the article “Which factors influence locals’ and visitors’ overall restaurant evaluations” Ilona Pezenka and Christian Weismayer (2020), the authors proposed their own list of factors that consumers use when evaluating the on-premise dining experience. While their list did include food, service, and atmosphere, it also included several others. The first is the cultural aspect of the food. This means the food meets the expectation the consumer had for the food and its presentation regarding the culture the restaurant is trying to represent or the culture of the surrounding area. The next factor is location, which means how close the restaurant is to the home of the consumer. How far did they have to travel? The last factor is the menu. Were there interesting choices and was there a variety of options? There were some additional options such as price and cleanliness, but those fit into the definitions of value and atmosphere in the previous article.

The final article that talked about the factors consumers look for was “Critical review of service quality scales with a focus on customer satisfaction and loyalty in restaurants” by Abdullah Uslu and Ramazan Eren. They also include factors such as food, service, atmosphere, environmental factors, and value. Some of the standouts from the rest of the factors include innovations, which means how unique were the menu options and were they preparing food that that the consumer never tried before. Another value was what level of an emotional response the consumer had when they ate at the restaurant. Was the environment a good catalyst for creating social bonds? If the customer was not able to have a good time with friends or family, that impacts the view of their experience. Fairness of wait was another standout. The consumer associates longer wait time with higher quality food, so did the food meet the expectation based on how long the consumer had to wait for the food to arrive. Switching barriers and costs were also factors that this article said that consumers consider, as well as brand preferences.

What are the values of a good experience for off-premise dining?

Now that we have looked at what the literature says what are the factors that consumers look at for a good on-premise dining experience, what does the literature say for what makes a good off-premise dining experience? The first article is “The value proposition of food delivery apps from the perspective of theory of consumption value” by Puneet Kaur, Amandeep Dhir, Shalini Talwar, and Karminder Ghuman (2020). The first value factor is the same as the factor for on-premise dining, which is price. No matter how the consumer is dining, they still want to have food that is at a reasonable price. The second factor is health consciousness. This only applies to the health-conscious consumers, but they want to make sure the food they are ordering will be good for their body. Like the previous the next factor is food-safety concern, the consumer will have a good experience, if they know that the food was prepared in a safe environment. The fourth factor is prestige. The consumer will have a better dining experience if they feel that using the food delivery app has somehow increased their social status. The next factor is affordances. This refers to all the features, advantages, and benefits that the app provides. This can include anything from ease of use to the variety of restaurants, or even whether or not the app has the consumer’s favorite restaurant. The final factor is visibility, which is how curious and interested the consumer is in food delivery apps. The more curious they are, the more likely they will enjoy their experience.

The next article is “online food delivery portals during COVID-19 times: an analysis of changing consumer behavior and expectations” by Durant Dsouza and Dipasha Sharma (2020). We again see food quality as a major factor, as well as safety. Another factor we see is e-service quality. This is like the service factor we saw for on-premise dining, which includes wait time, quality of customer service, and assurances, except that it applies it to an online environment. For e-service quality we see wait time, handling of personal information, and whether or not is have a tracking feature. The fourth factor is customer loyalty, which is how likely the consumer is to continue to purchase from that restaurant and how likely they are to recommend it to other consumers. The final factor is customer satisfaction. When a consumer is searching for a place to eat, they will be more satisfied with the experience if they are given discounts or offers, or if the photos of the food and the reviews are good.

The third article is “Predicting satisfaction and intentions to use online food delivery: what really makes a difference” by Katerina Annaraud and Katerina Berezina (2020). We see some of the factors we have seen before, such as food quality, customer service, fulfillment, and satisfaction. The first new factor is control. Control is how much information the consumer is given throughout the order process. This includes how long the transaction will take, what each page will talk about? The more the consumer knows, the better. The next factor is convenience. The easier the app is to use and the more time the whole process of ordering delivery saves, the better the off-premise dining experience is for the consumer. The final factor is behavioral intentions. This asks two questions of the consumer which are “will I order food delivery from this restaurant again” and “will I use this food delivery company again?” This factor does not affect the experience of the consumer, it is affected by the consumer. If the consumer has a good experience, then they are likely to answer yes to both questions.

The final article to talk about the factors influencing the off-premise dining experience is “The effect of food delivery application on custom loyalty in restaurant” by Seong-Soo Cha and Bo-Kyung Seo (2020). The authors of this article took a different approach to what factors influence the consumer experience. The first factor they state is informative. This is like the control factor that was mentioned earlier as the more information that is provided to the consumer about the product, and the quality of the purchasing process, the better the experience for the consumer. The next factor is reliability. This is defined as the degree to which the consumer believes that the company will provide what they want and the level of trust the consumer has in the food delivery app. The more reliable the food delivery app, the better the experience. The third factor is usefulness, which is a combination of the ease of use of the app and the overall convenience of the app. The consumer will have a better experience if the food delivery app has an overall greater usefulness. The final factor is mobility, which is how easy it is to use the app on a mobile device. If the app were only useable using a desktop, the consumer might not have as great an experience if they could only use the app on their smartphone.

Methodology

To collect data on how people would react to the idea of ghost kitchens, we created a survey using Qualtrics and collected a small sample from three separate locations, those being New York City, Chicago, and San Francisco. We started the survey off by collecting the demographic data of the respondents. We collected data on gender, age, ethnicity, education level, and household income. From there we then had to screen the respondents. To do this we asked if they have used any food delivery apps in the past year. We did this because ghost kitchens are exclusively used to fulfill online orders and we wanted our respondents to be familiar with the concept of using food delivery apps. For those that said yes, they were moved to the next section of the survey that put them in the following scenario:

“Imagine you are sitting in your living room, and you suddenly realize you have not had anything to eat in a few hours and you are getting hungry. You are on your couch, wrapped in your favorite blanket, binge watching your favorite show. So, you do not feel like cooking something. You look outside and the weather is terrible, so you also do not want to go out to eat. You decided to order through delivery. As you are looking through the many different options you see there is a deal on your favorite meal from your favorite restaurant. Everything is perfect. Your food arrives in 30 minutes, and it is still warm and smells delicious. The food is terrific and tastes the same as if you were in the restaurant.”

From there, they were then asked whether or not they would be satisfied in this scenario, as well as to explain their answer. Those that said no were screened from the remainder of the process as we wanted the respondents to start the scenario with a positive viewpoint. Those that moved on were then given additional information on the scenario:

“Now, as you were eating, you get a survey from the restaurant asking how the meal was. The restaurant reveals in the survey that the food did not come from the restaurant. It came from what is called a ghost kitchen, a kitchen that is in another location, looking more like a warehouse.”

Once again, the respondents were asked if they would be satisfied in this scenario and to explain their answer. We then ended the survey by asking the respondents if they would consider ordering food from a restaurant that uses a ghost kitchen in the future, and to explain their answer.

Data Analysis

Demographics (Figures 1-6)

In total we had 305 respondents to the survey. Looking at the demographic data, we had an even spread of samples from the three locations with the range being 4. We had more females than males with a ratio of 1.38 females for every 1 male. For age, we had very few respondents who were 20 years old or younger, but very many respondents who were 60 or older. There was an even distribution of respondents ages 20-59. Looking at ethnicity, the combined sample was overwhelmingly Caucasian. For education level, most of the sample was between high school and having a bachelor’s degree, with the highest category being those that had a bachelor’s degree. Lastly for the income of the sample, most of the distribution between those with less than \$25,000 to \$200,000, with the highest number of respondents between \$50,000-\$100,000.

Figure 1

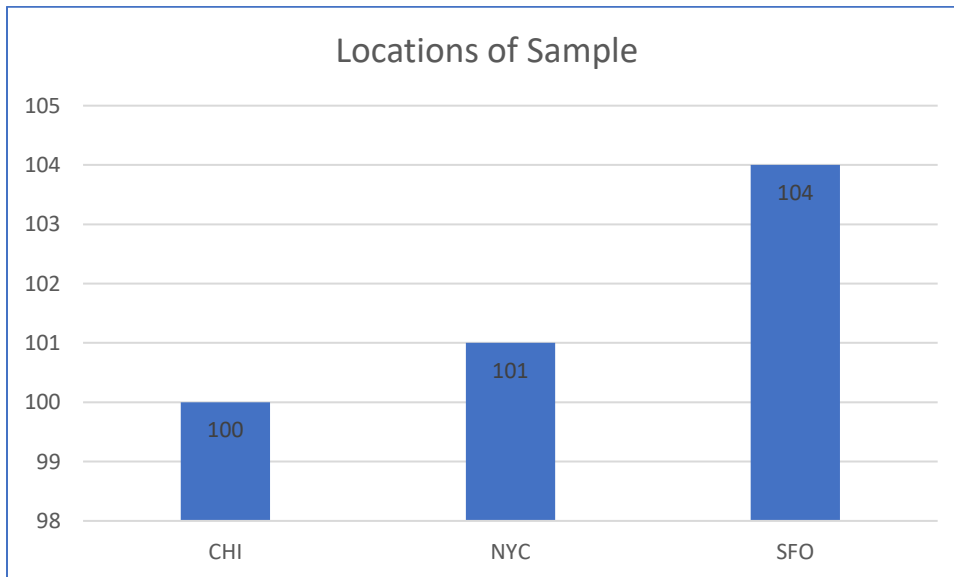


Figure 2

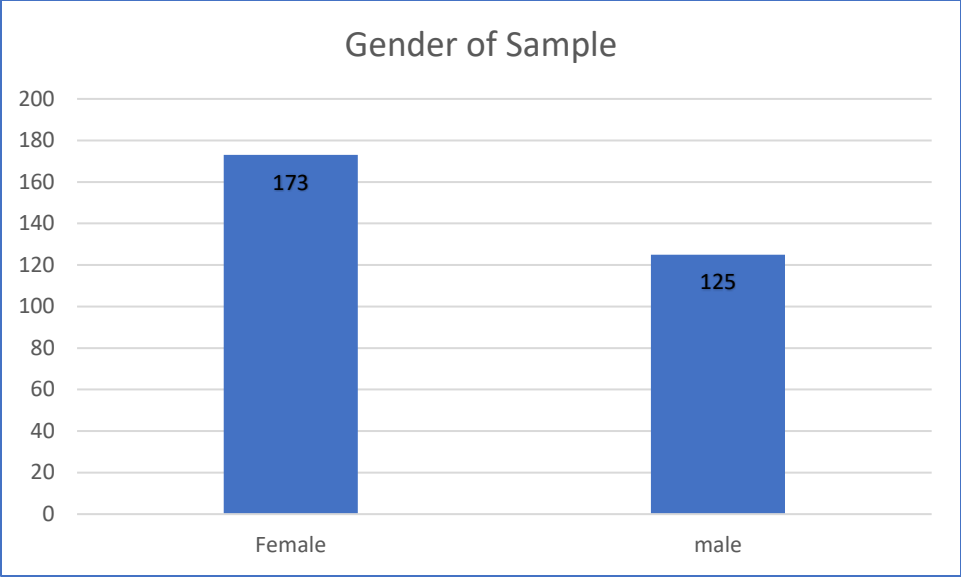


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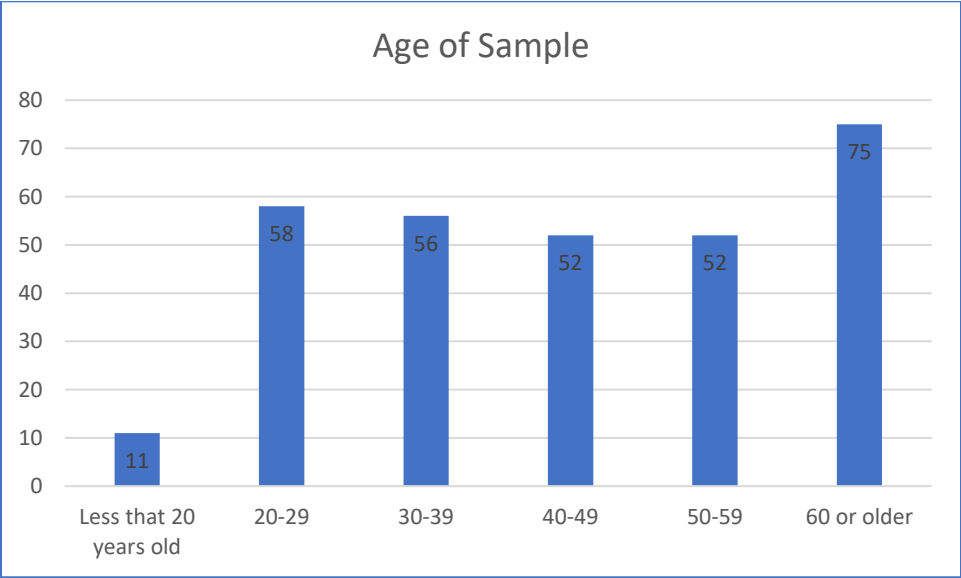


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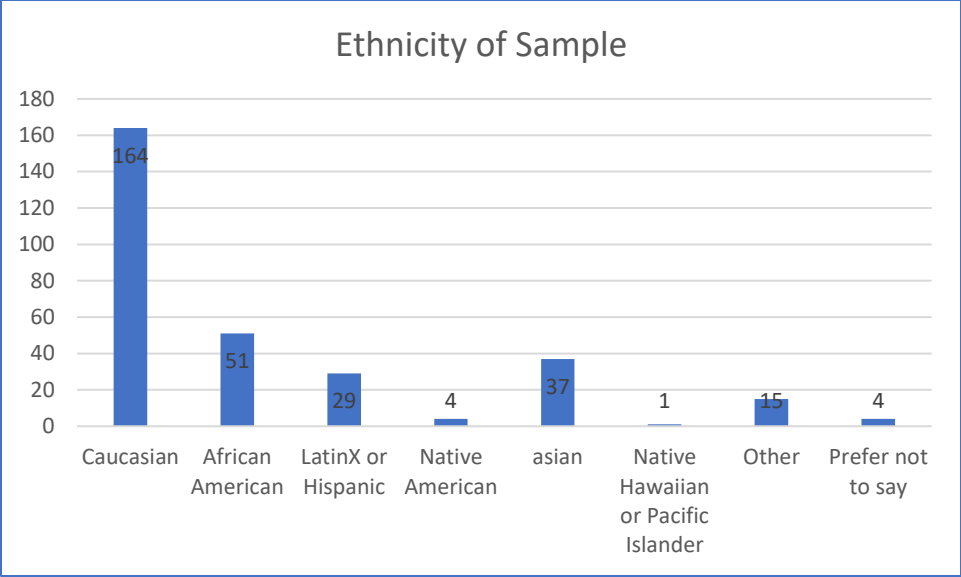


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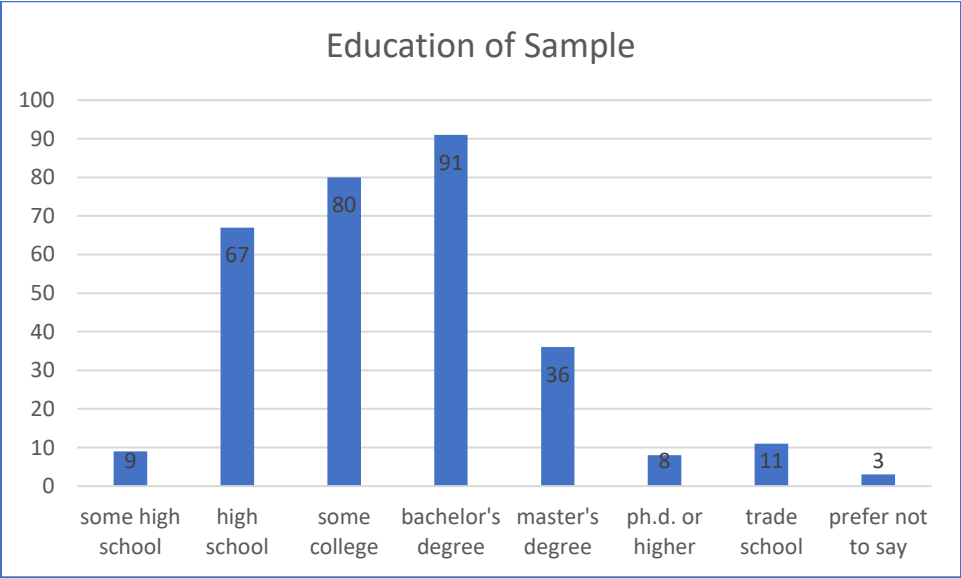
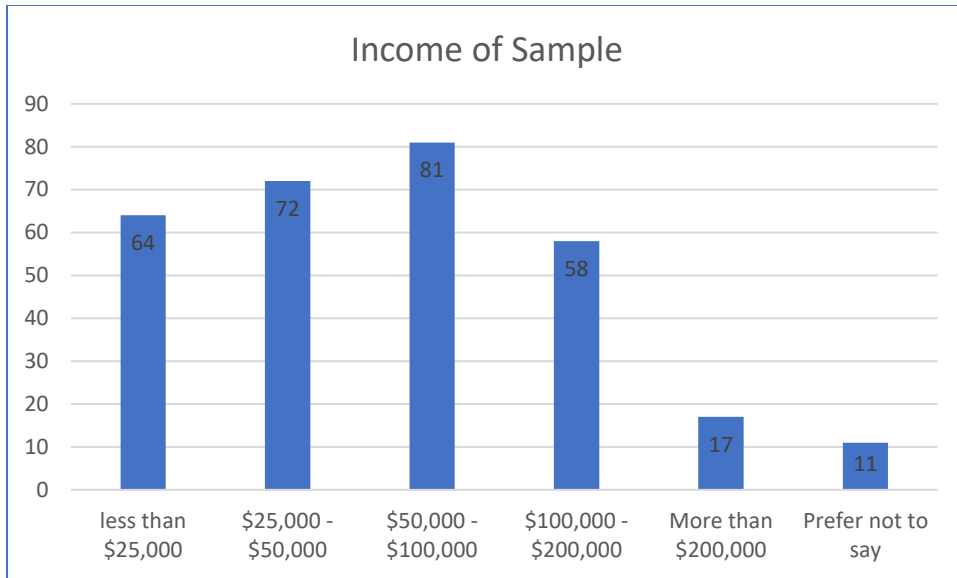


Figure 6



Screening (Figures 7-13)

When asked if they used food delivery apps in the past year, 219 of the 305 respondents said yes, which means 86 in total were immediately screened from the process. Now that the total sample size has been reduced by 28%, it would prove useful to look at the demographics to see if they have changed at all. The locations of the sample are not as even as they were before as now the range is 14. The ratio of females to males is like what it was before, as it jumped up only to 1.44 females for every 1 male. We can see a huge change in the age of the sample as now the highest number of respondents has shifted away from those who are 60 and older and over to those ages 20-39. Caucasian is still the most represented ethnicity of the sample. What is interesting is that education level and income all look the same in terms of the ratio, so the most represented groups are still the same for both of those demographic categories.

Figure 7

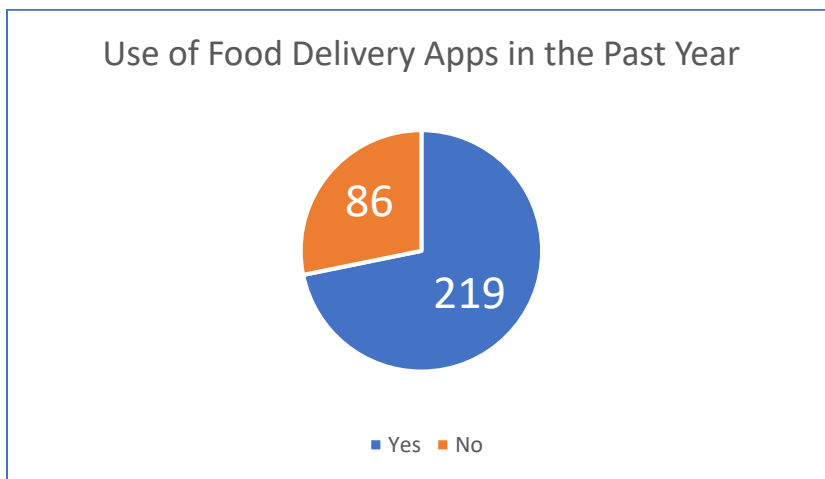


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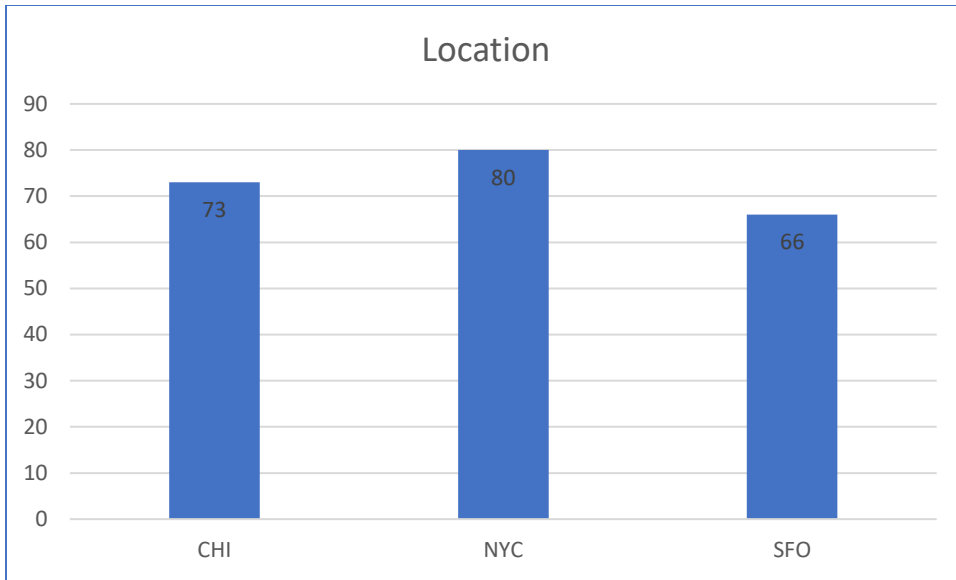


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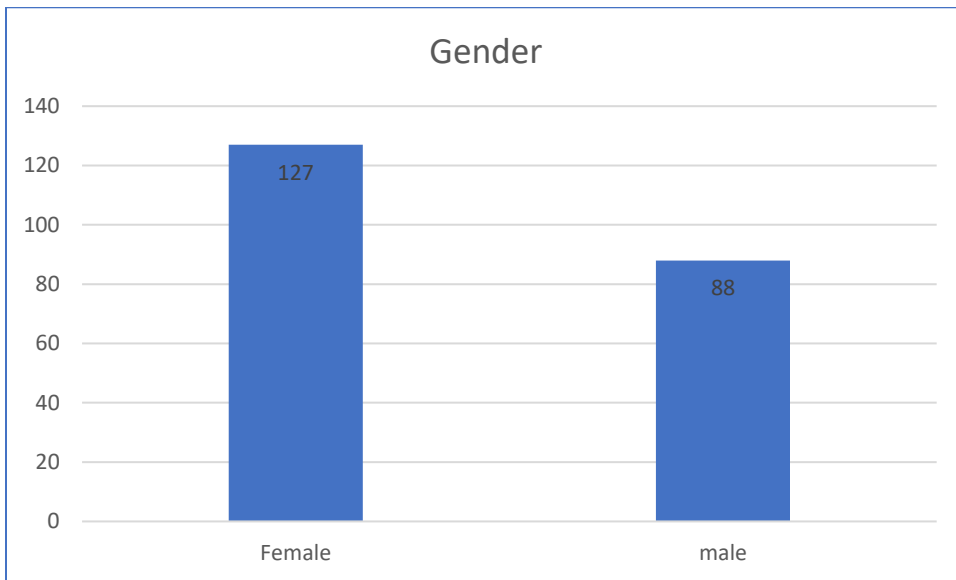


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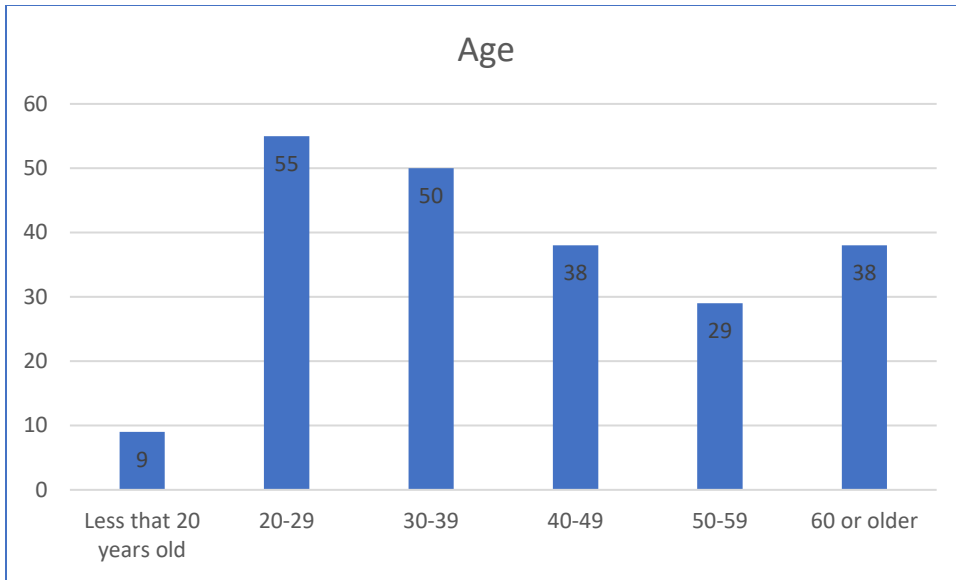


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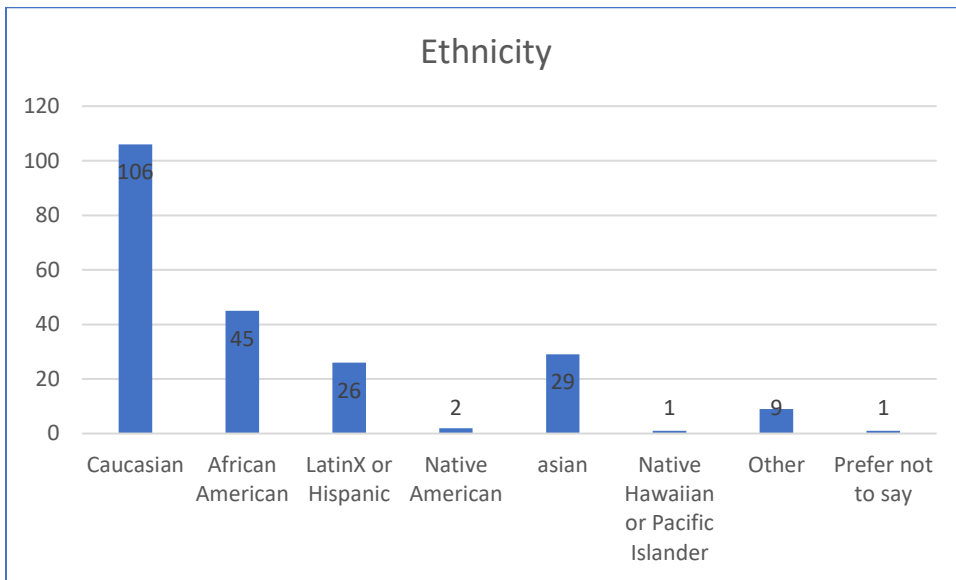


Figure 12

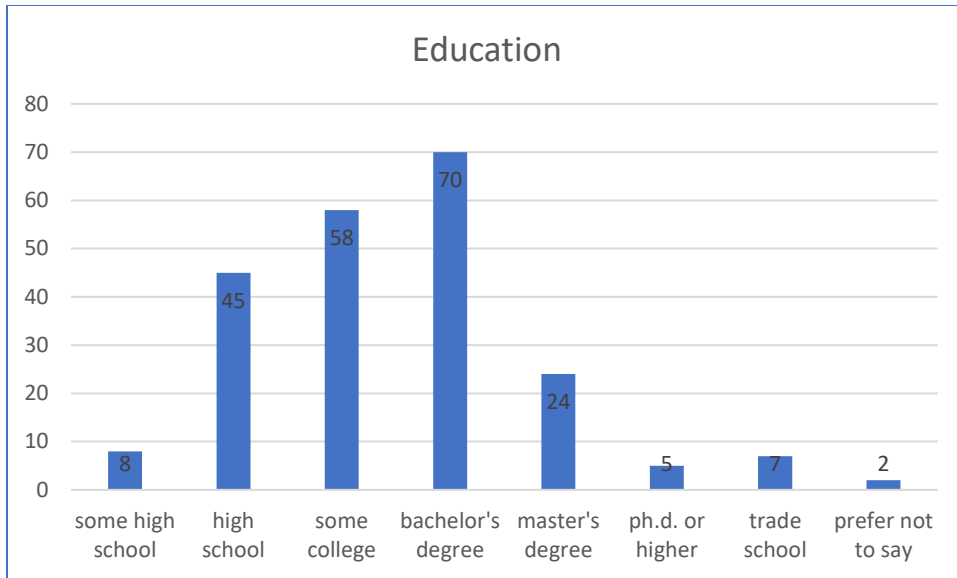
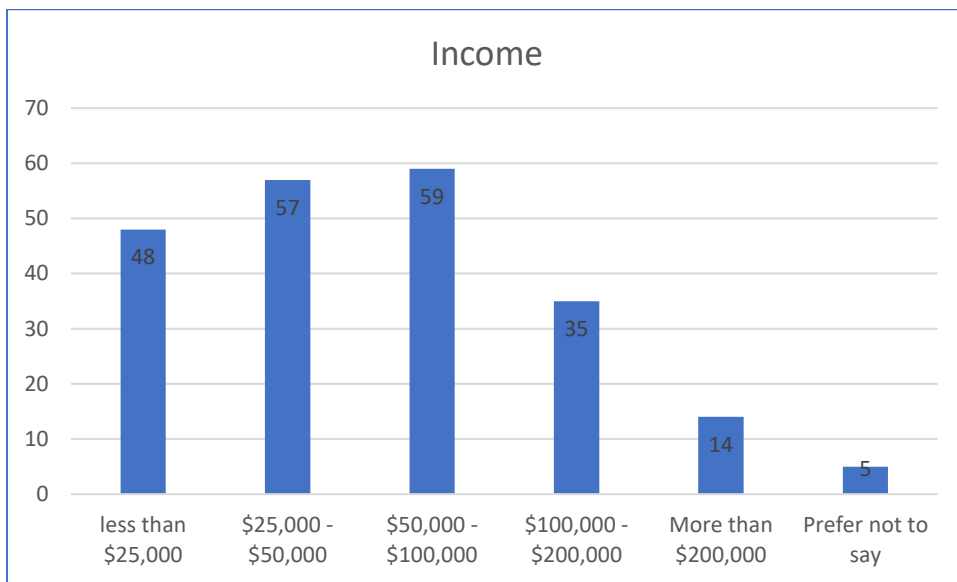


Figure 13



The Scenario Part 1 (Figures 14-22)

After we introduced the sample to the scenario, 214 (98%) said that they would be satisfied in that scenario, but why did 5 (2%) say no. When asked why, 2 of those that said no, saying that the delivery was too slow, and the other 3 made it obvious that they were not taking the survey seriously, with one of them saying “because I want to.” Going back to those that said yes, most of the respondents commented on the quality of the food, most specifically stating that it tasted like the restaurant. The other two most common reasons were that everything was perfect or that the food came quickly. If we separate out the reasons based on demographics, we see that most demographics had good food as their top reason. Everything being perfect did barely take the lead for males and Caucasians. Being quick was generally the third most common reason, thought respondents from San Francisco, males, Caucasians, those ages 50-59, those with

a bachelor's degree, and with a household income of \$50,000-\$100,000 did value comfort over speed. Overall, this shows even if everything is perfect, people will always point out the quality of the food as the most important factor that goes towards satisfaction.

Figure 14

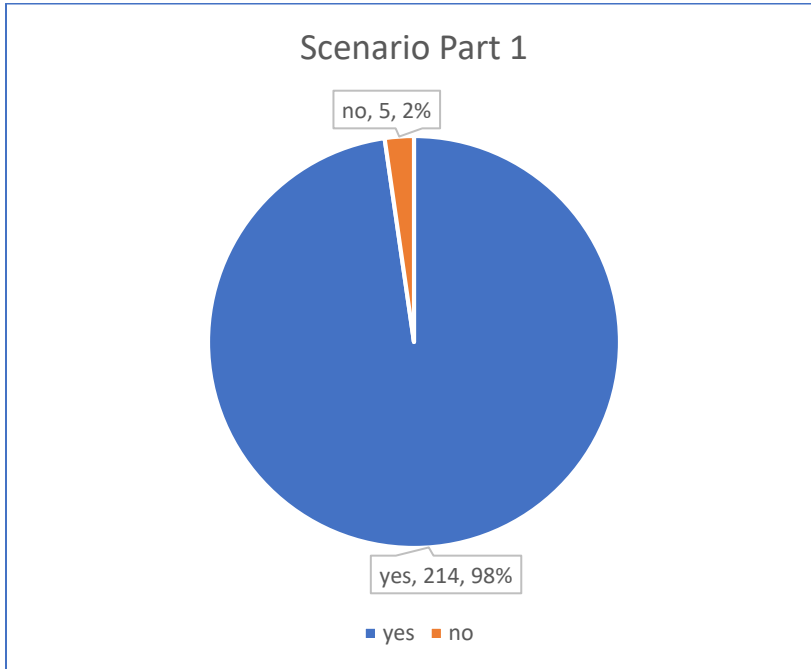


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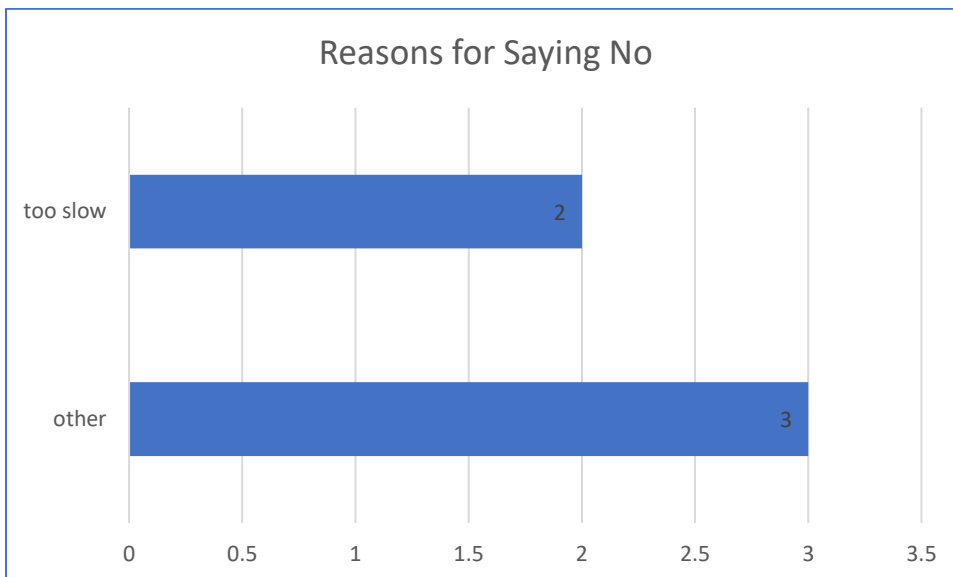


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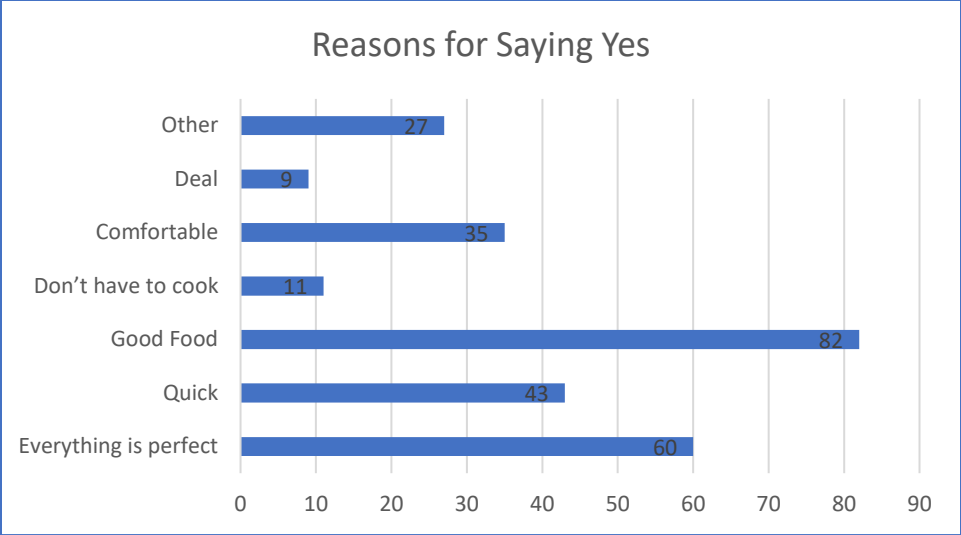


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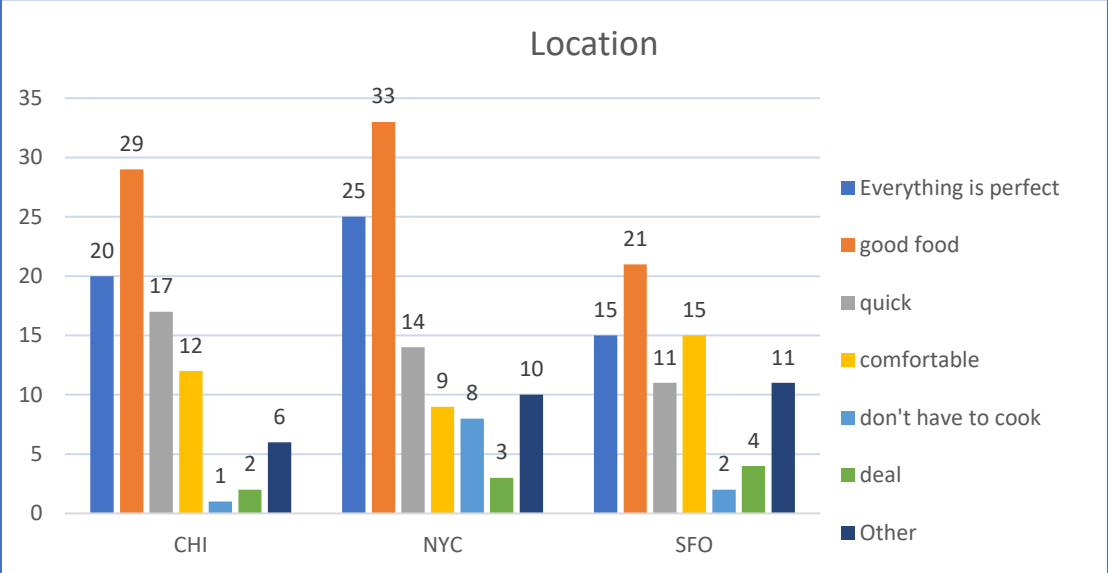


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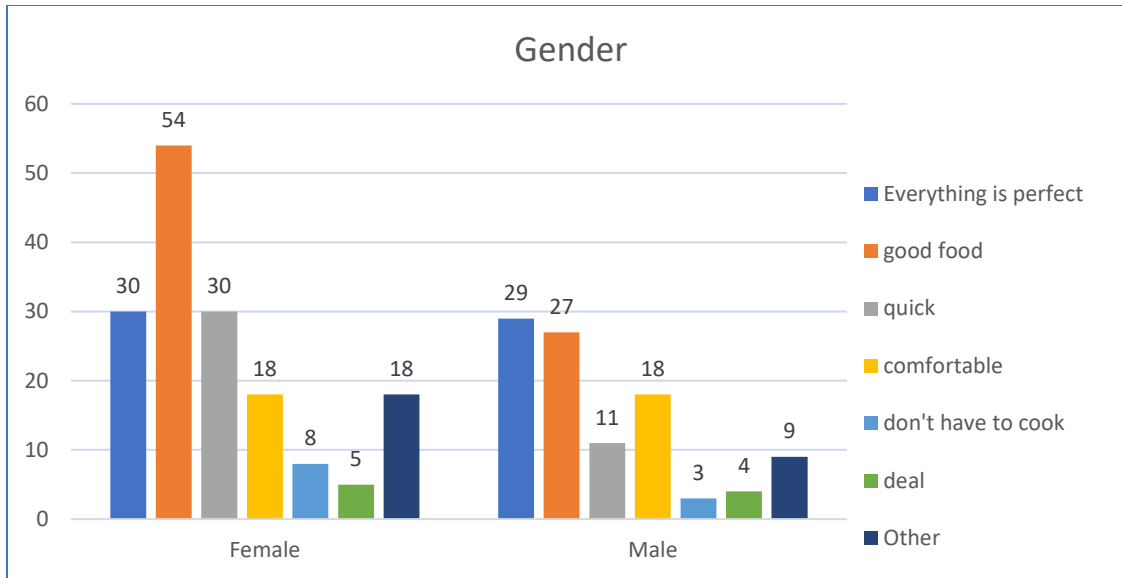


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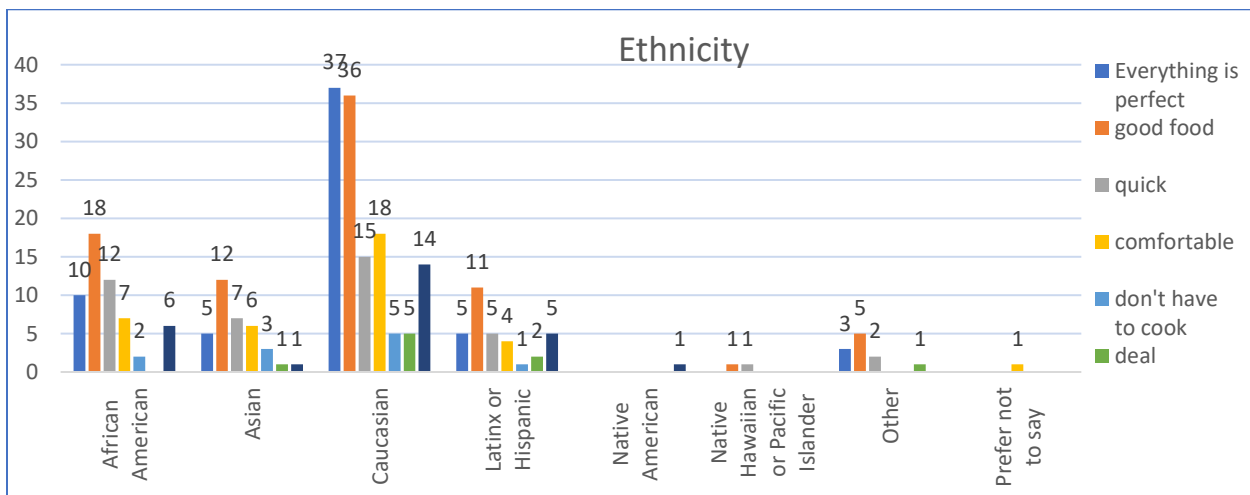


Figure 20

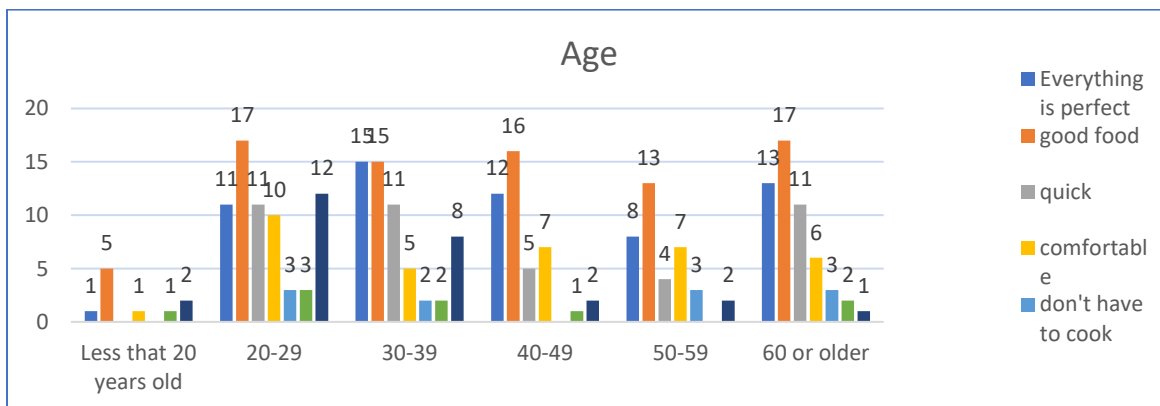


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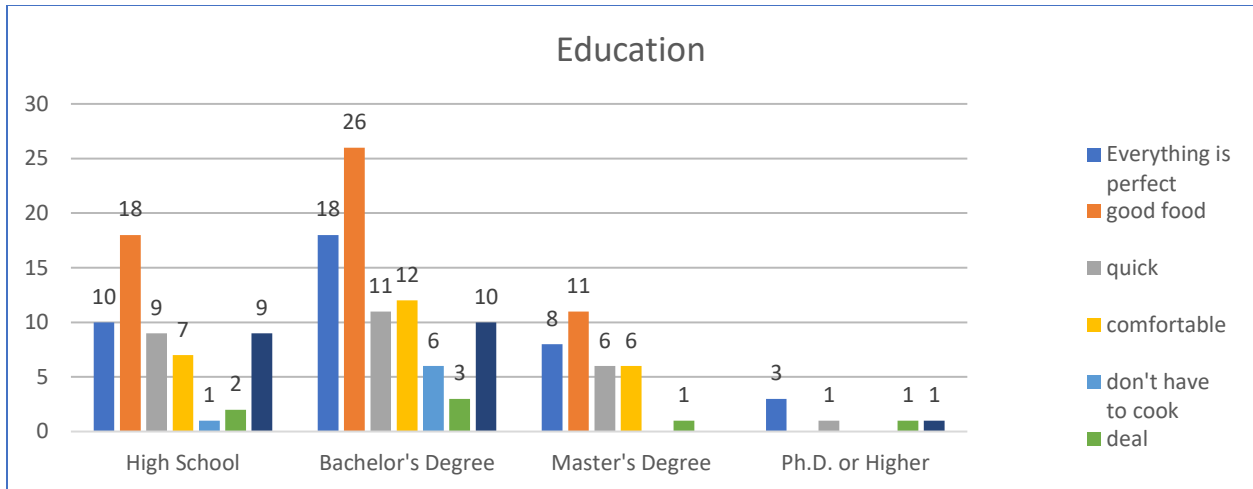
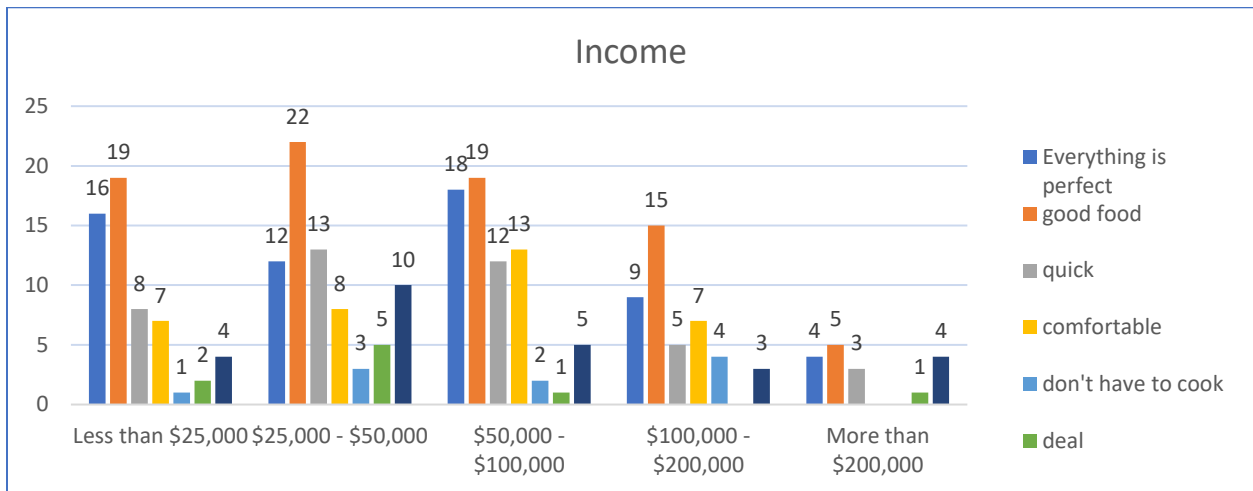


Figure 22



The Scenario Part 2 (Figures 23-37)

After the use of a ghost kitchen was revealed, we found that of the 214, 74 (35%) said they would not be satisfied and 140 (65%) said they would still be satisfied. Looking at people that still said yes, we find that the most common answer is good food, with most people saying that “if the food was still good, then I don’t care where it came from.” Despite finding out that the food came from somewhere unexpected, people still focus on the food quality. Since the food was still good, then they did not have a reason to worry. When breaking this down by demographics, every single demographic overwhelmingly said good food for their reason, with not caring being a far second.

Figure 23

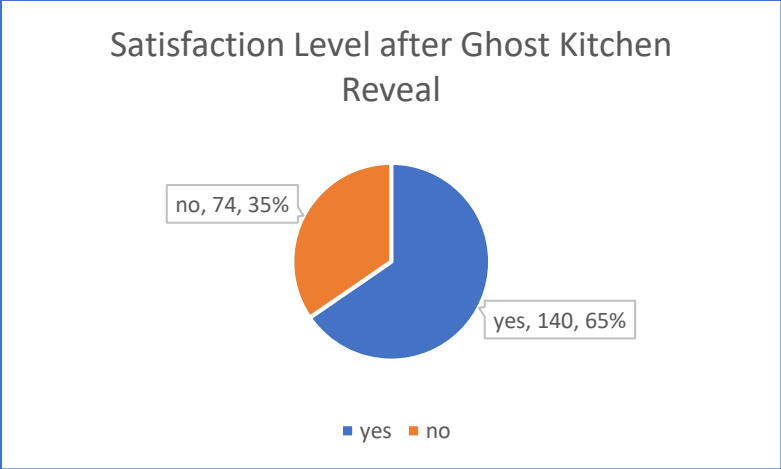


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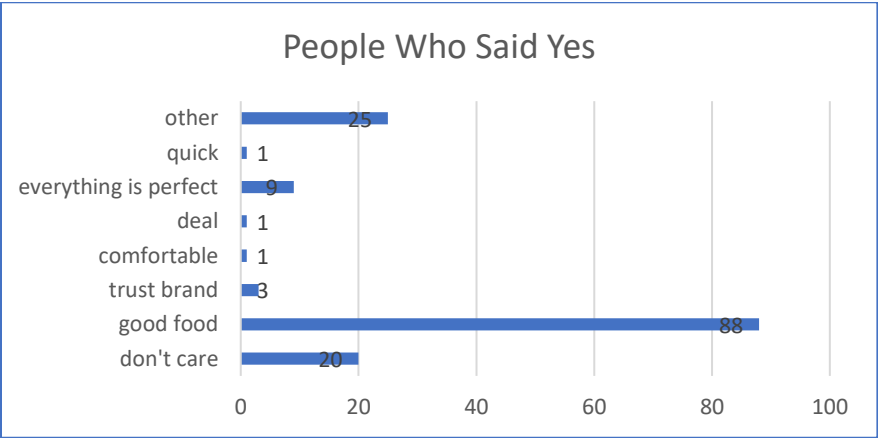


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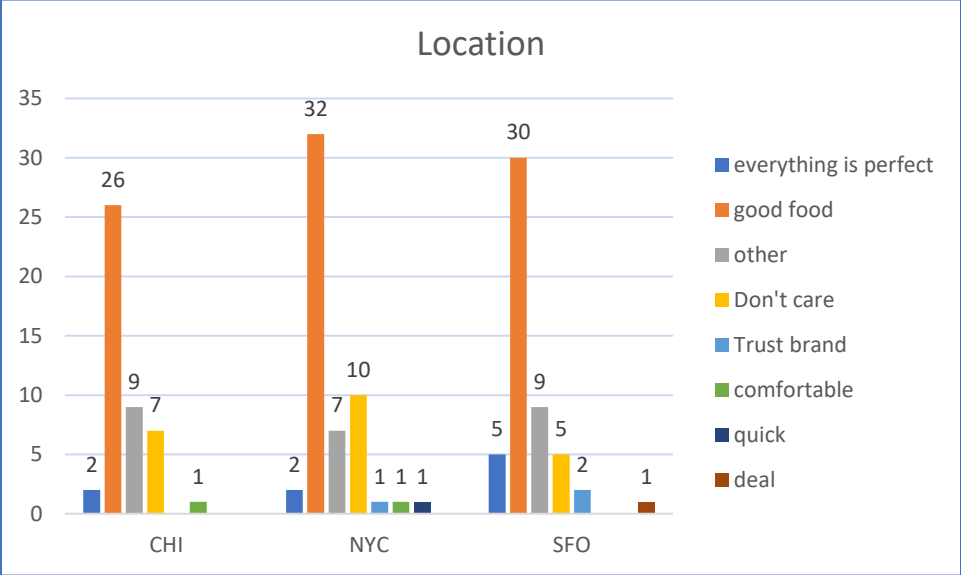


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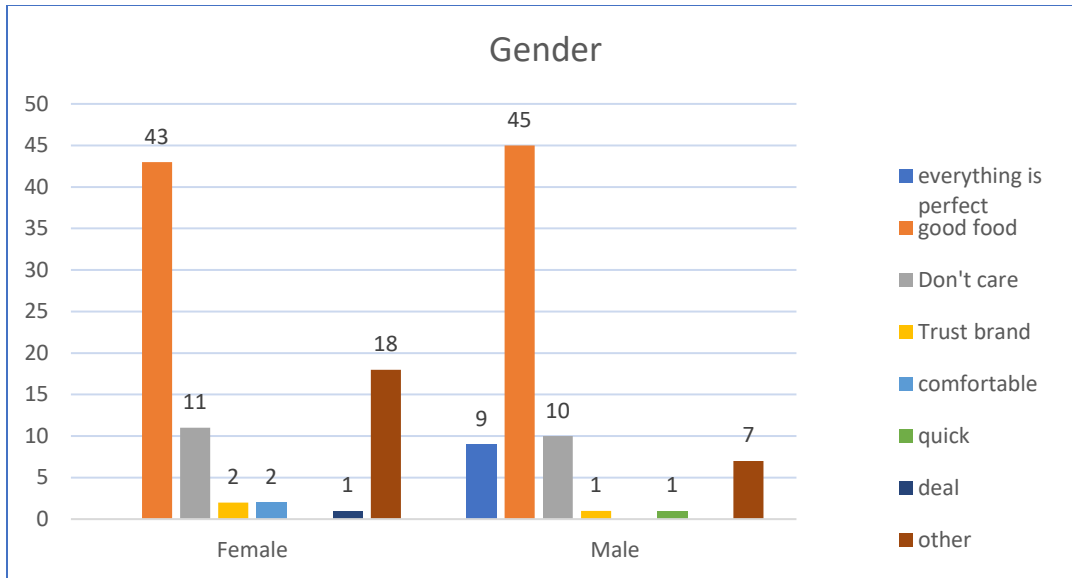


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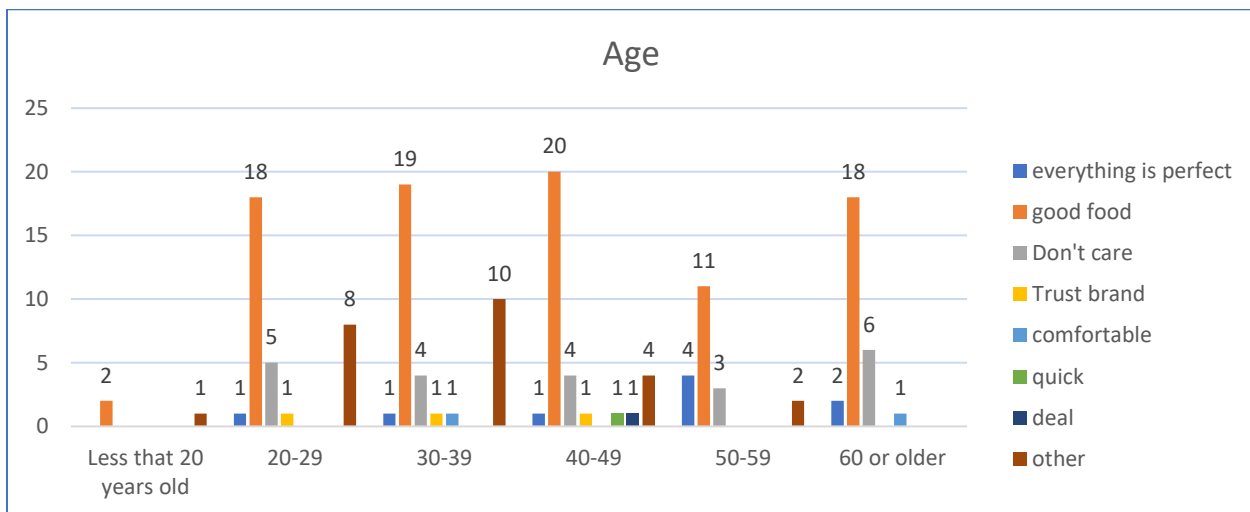


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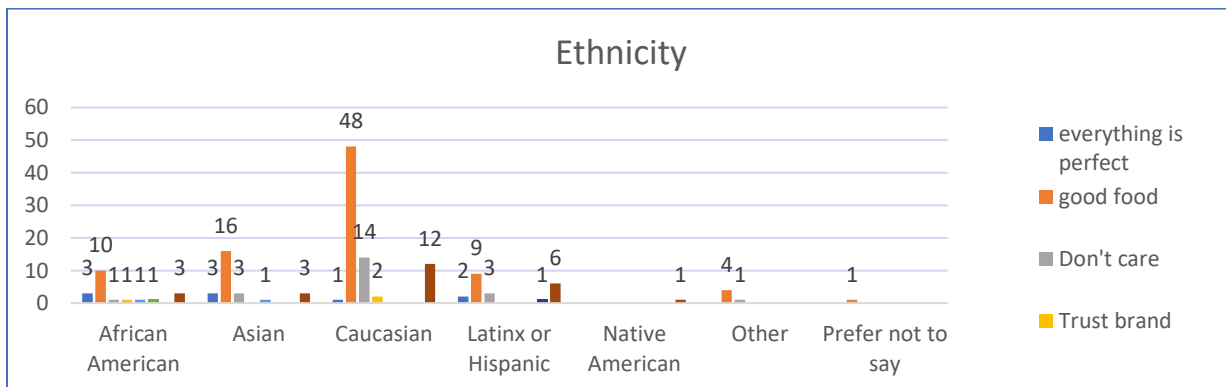


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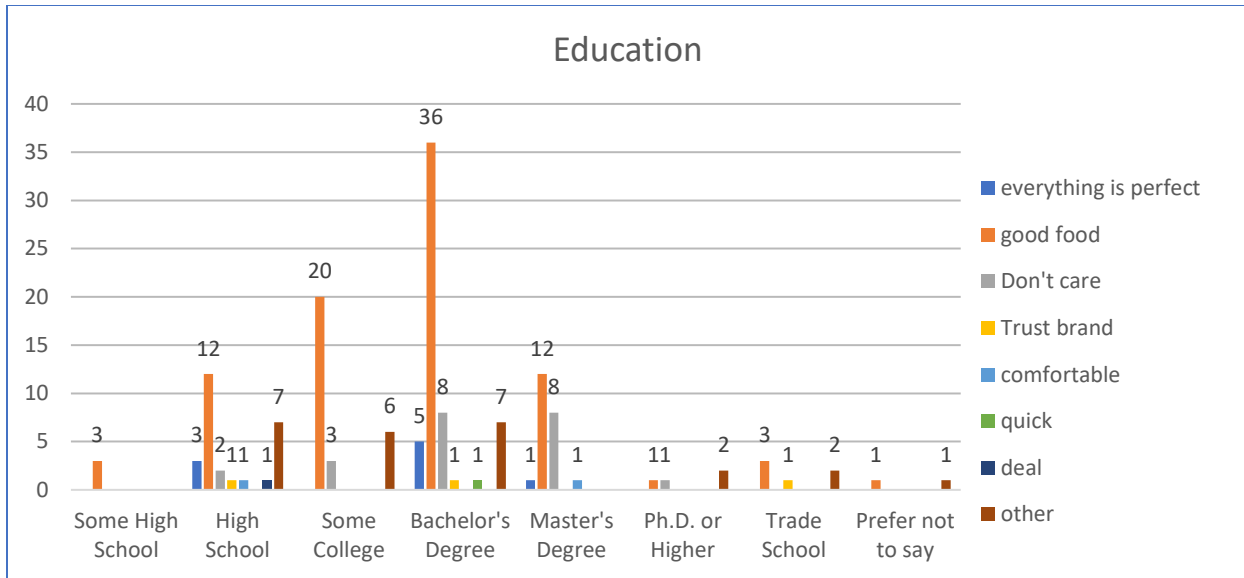
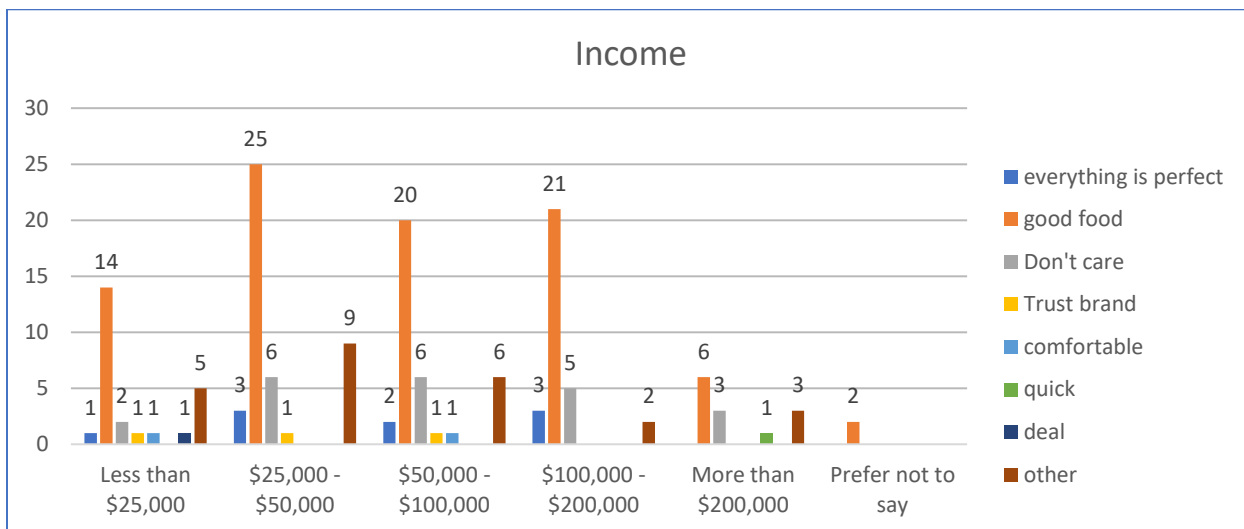


Figure 30



Looking at those that said no, we see that the food not coming from their favorite restaurant being the most common reason, though not knowing where it is from and the feeling of being lied to both coming in second. It appears that when ordering delivery, some people visualize the process of the food coming from kitchen to their doorstep, and that visualization included the food coming from the restaurant that they would go to if they ate in person. However, once the ghost kitchen was introduced, that visualization was taken away from them and thus they were no longer happy as they did not know where exactly the food was from, and they had been lied to. Breaking it down by demographics, we see most times that the food not coming from the restaurant being the most common reason, though males, 20-29- and 50-59 year old's, Caucasians, those with a bachelor's degree and an income of less than \$25,000 all favored being lied to, while ages 20-29 also mainly stated that the food was no longer safe to eat.

Figure 31

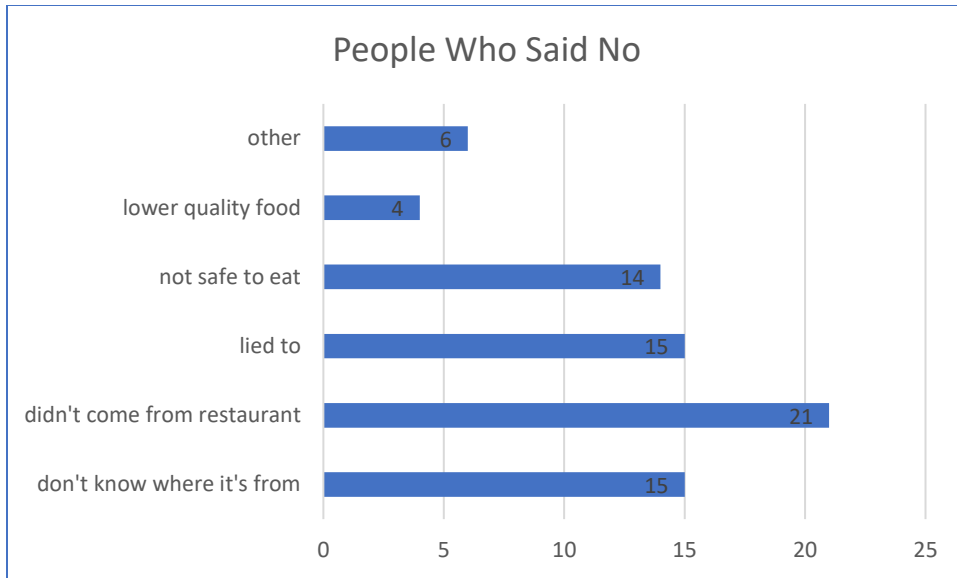


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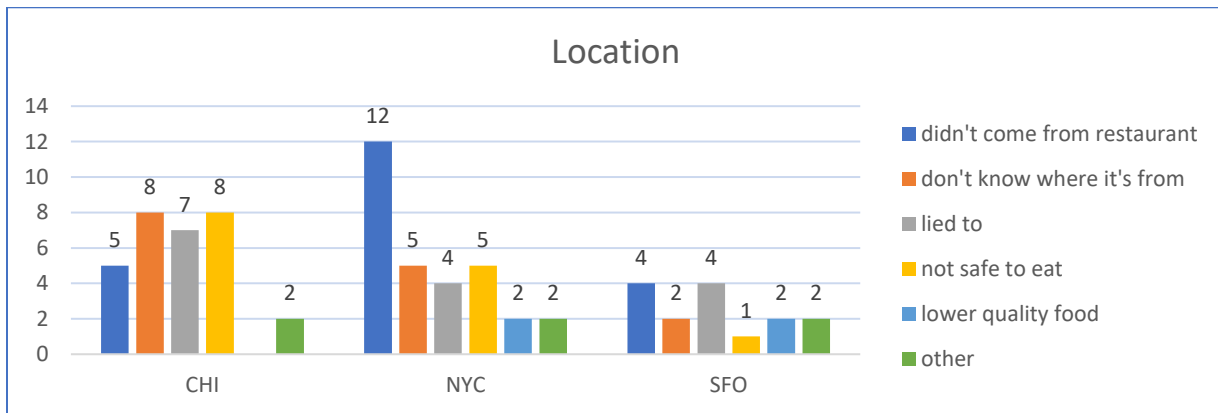


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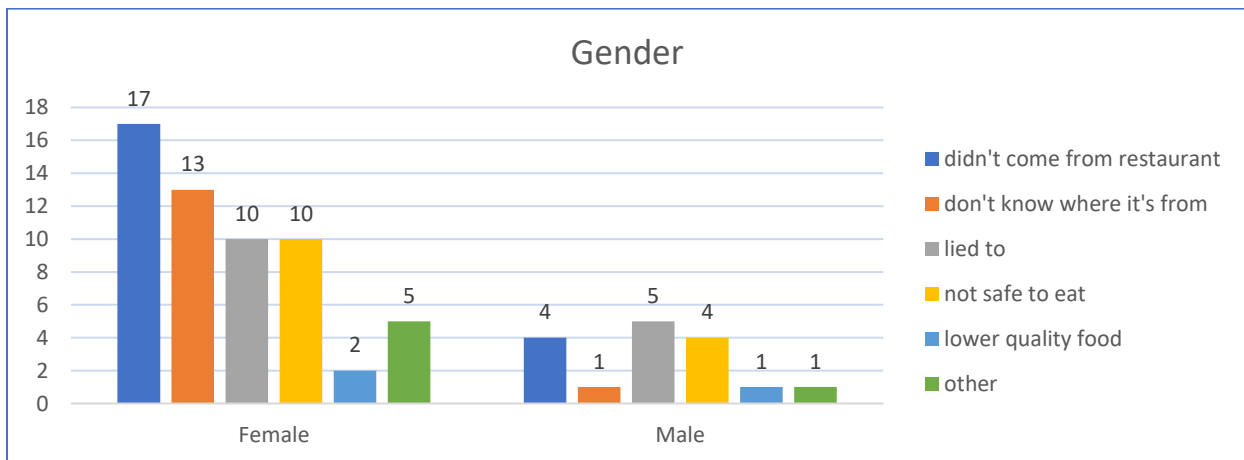


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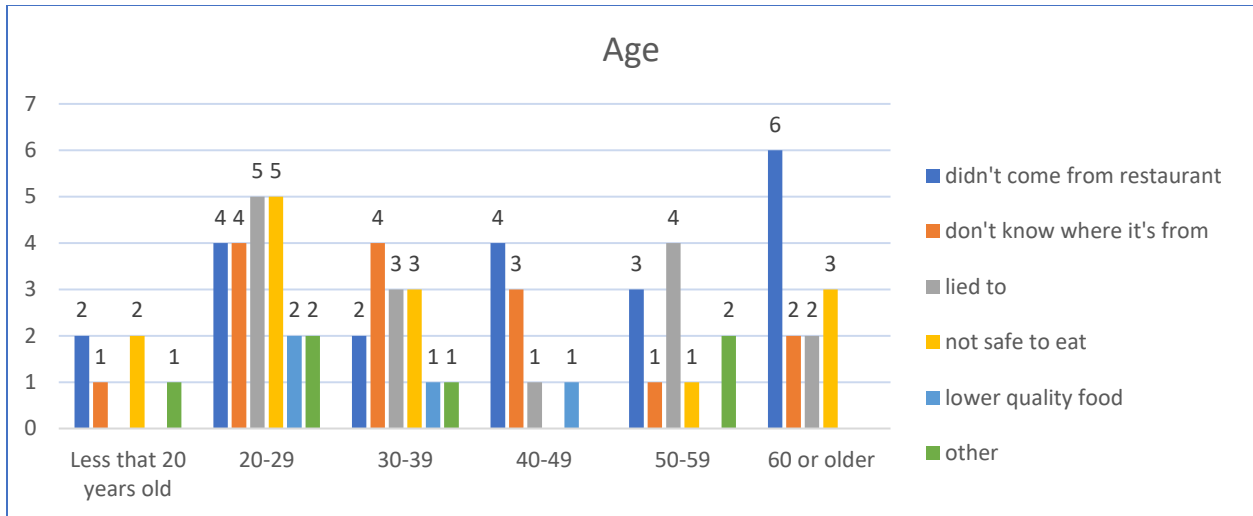


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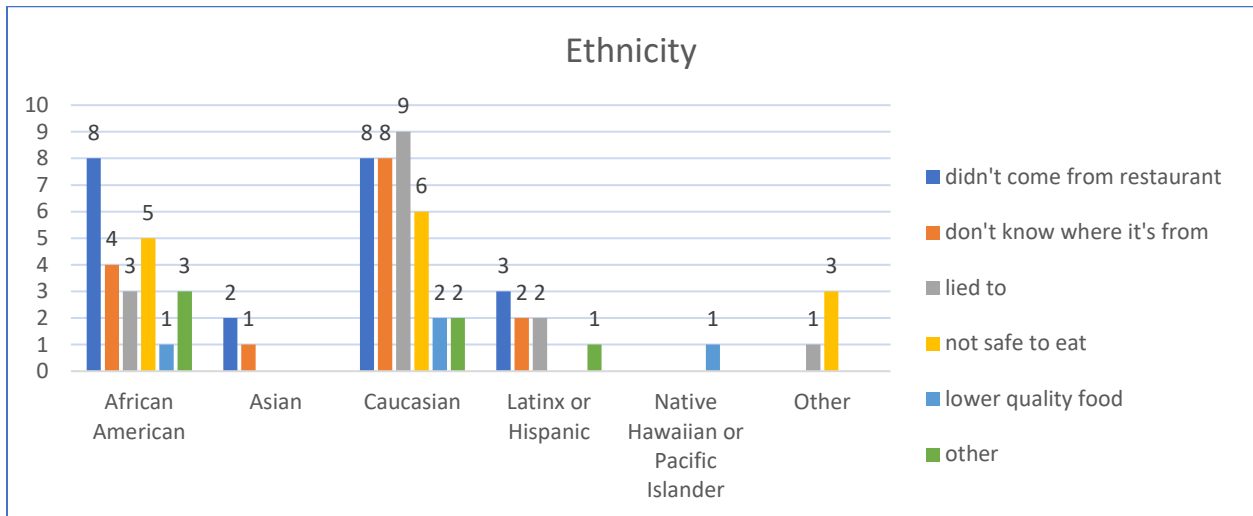


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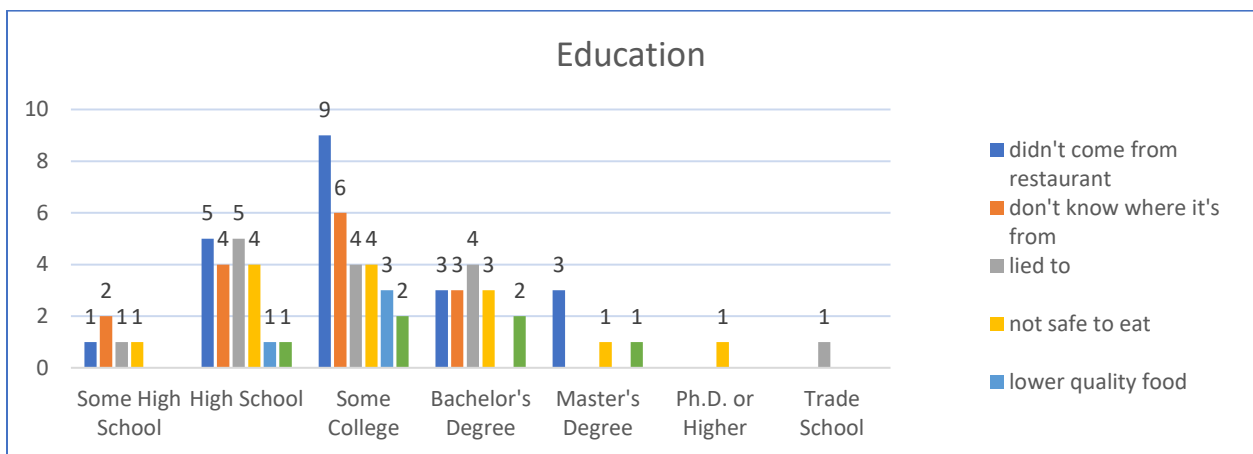
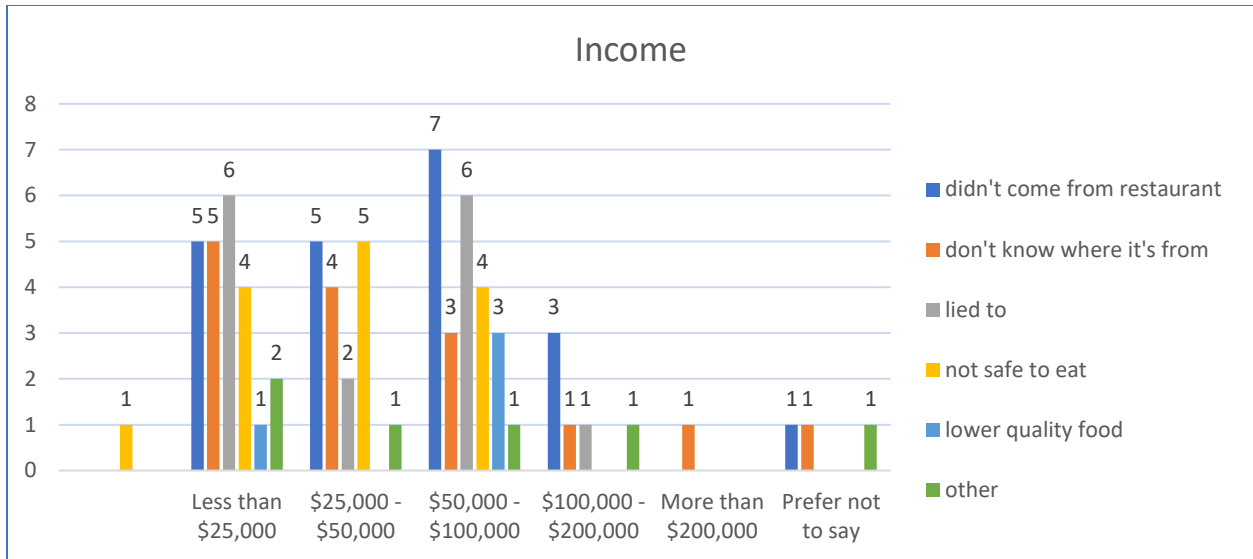


Figure 37



The Follow-up (Figures 38-54)

When asked if they would order from a restaurant that uses ghost kitchens in the future, 74 (35%) said no and 140 (65%) said yes. Yes, this is the exact same as the last question, however, not all the same people answered the same way, 9 respondents from each side switched to the other side. What we find interesting is that the 9 that switched from yes to no, switched for the same reasons respondents originally said no and the 9 that switched from no to yes switched for the reason respondents originally said yes.

Figure 38

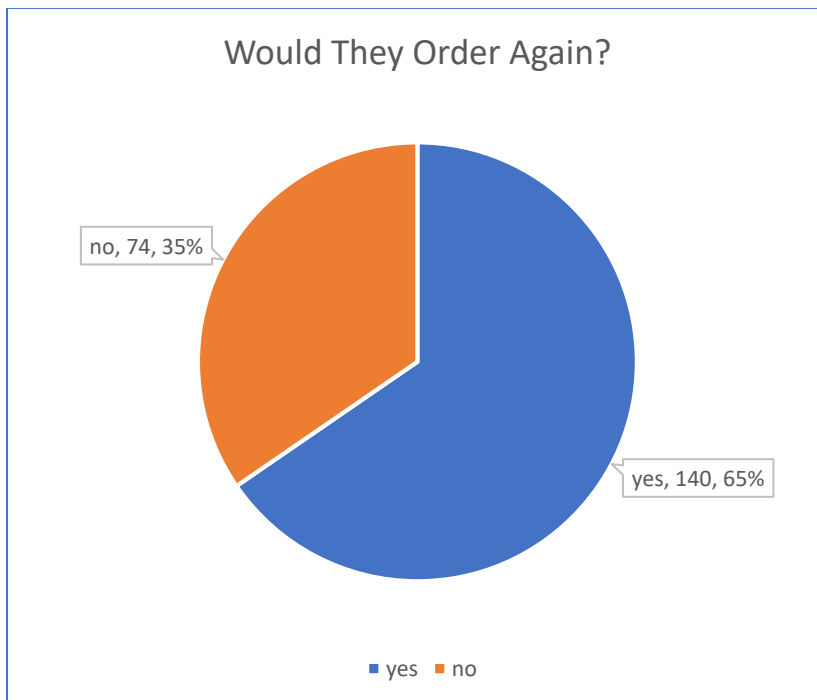


Figure 39

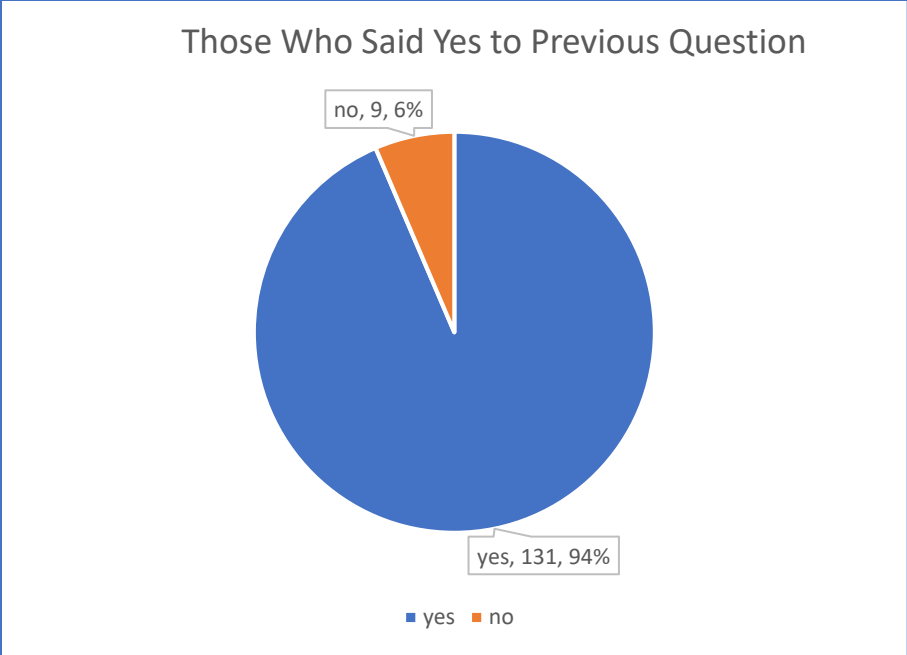
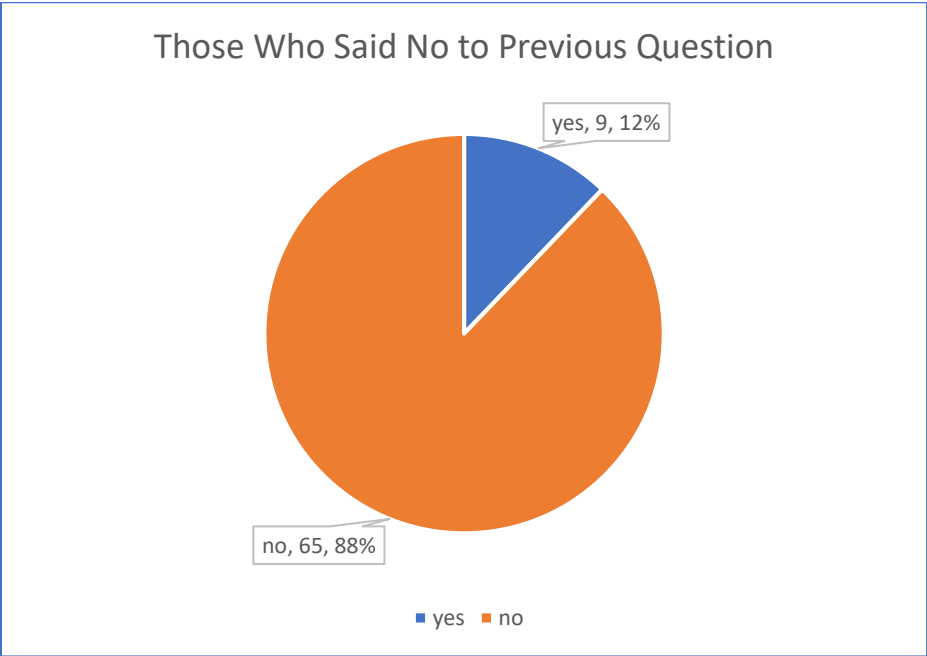


Figure 40



Looking specifically at those that said yes, we still see that good food is still the primary reason people say yes, though it is followed by some people saying that the concept of ghost kitchens works well. Breaking it down by demographics, good food is still the standout reason, except for ages 30-39 and those with an income of less than \$25,000 favoring how well the concept of ghost kitchens works over the quality of the food.

Figure 41

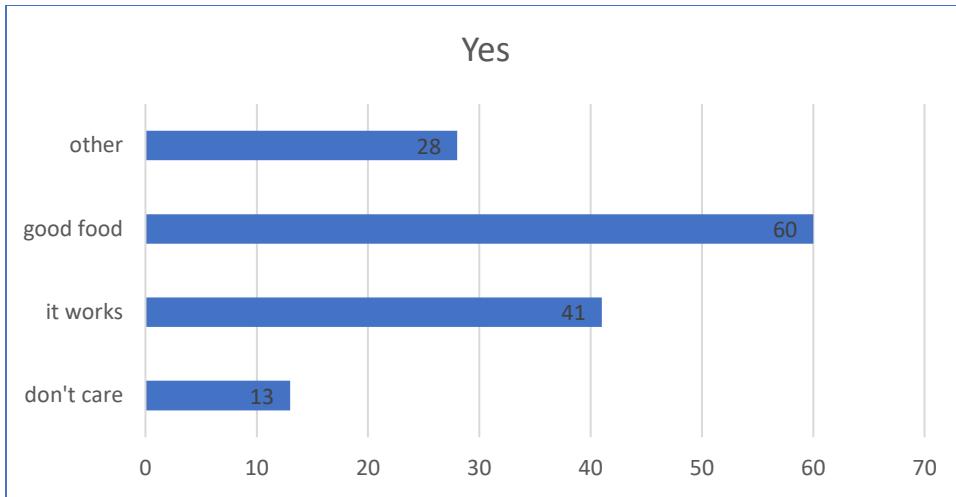


Figure 42

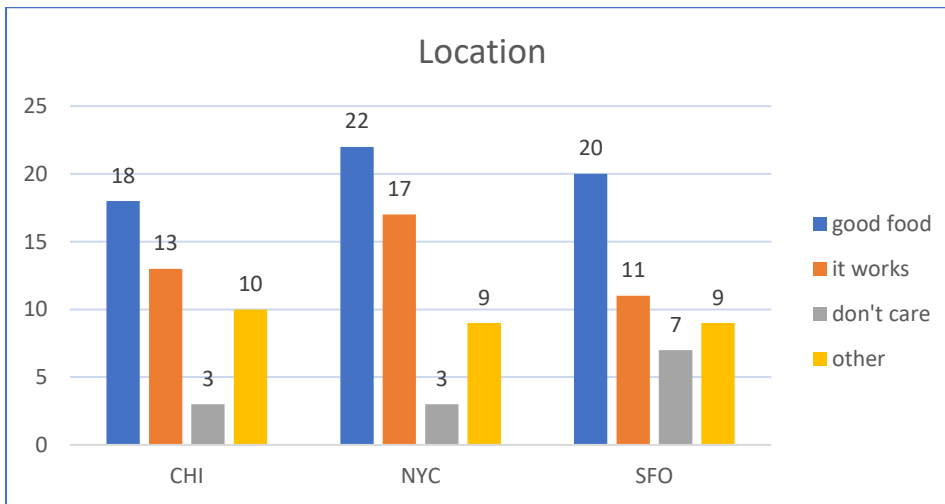


Figure 43

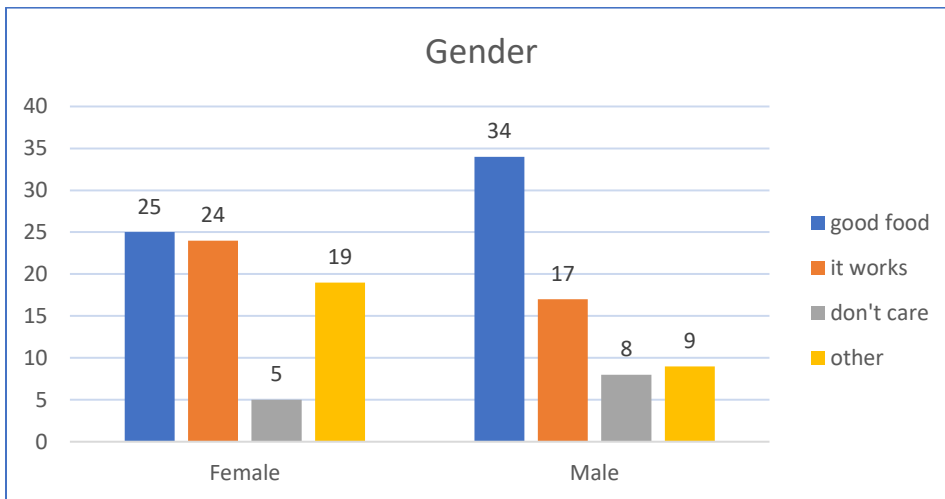


Figure 44

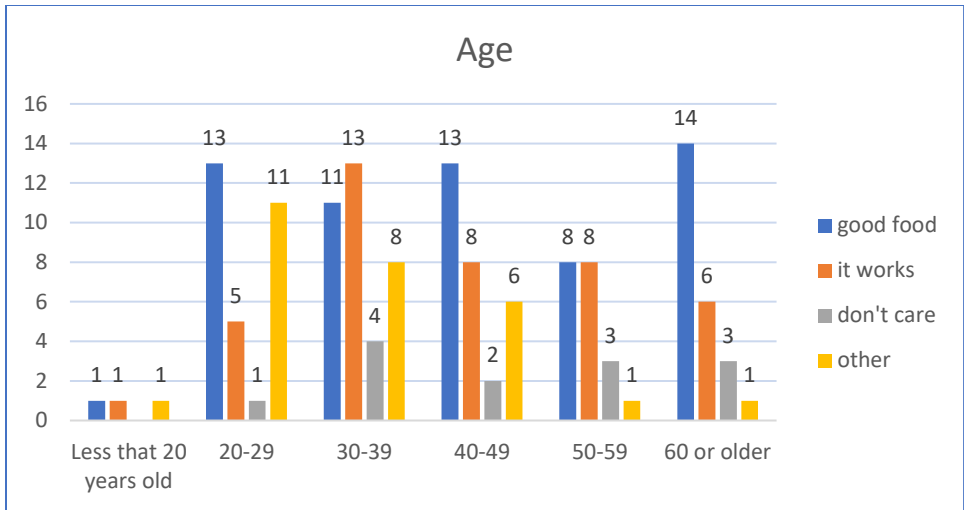


Figure 45

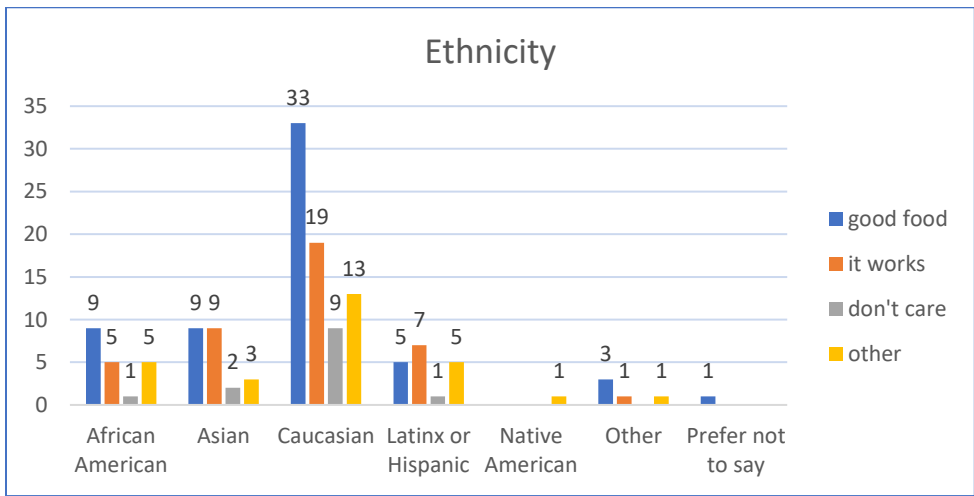


Figure 46

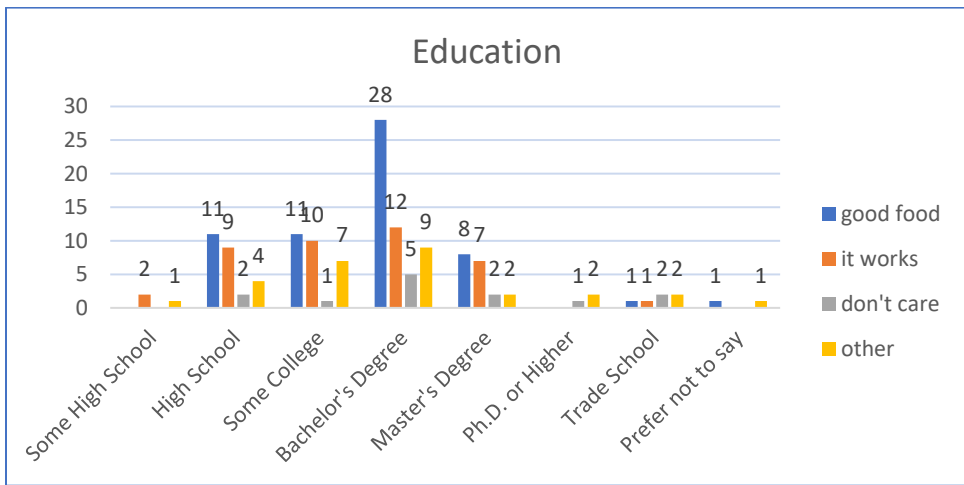
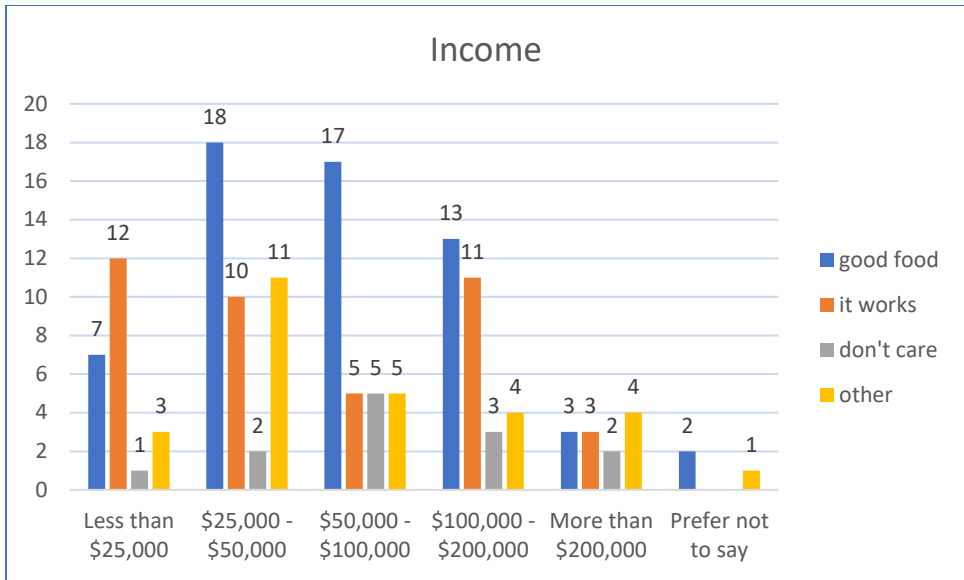


Figure 47



Switching over to those that said no, most people still do not like not knowing where the food came from, with some people not liking the concept of ghost kitchens. Looking at the demographics, the most common reason across demographics was that they do not know where the food came from. This was true for all demographics, except ages 20-29, ages 60 and older, those with a master’s degree, income of \$25,000-\$50,000 and an income of \$100,000-\$200,000, where the most common reason was not liking the idea was the most common reason. Also, those ages 50-59 have not being told as their most common reason.

Figure 48

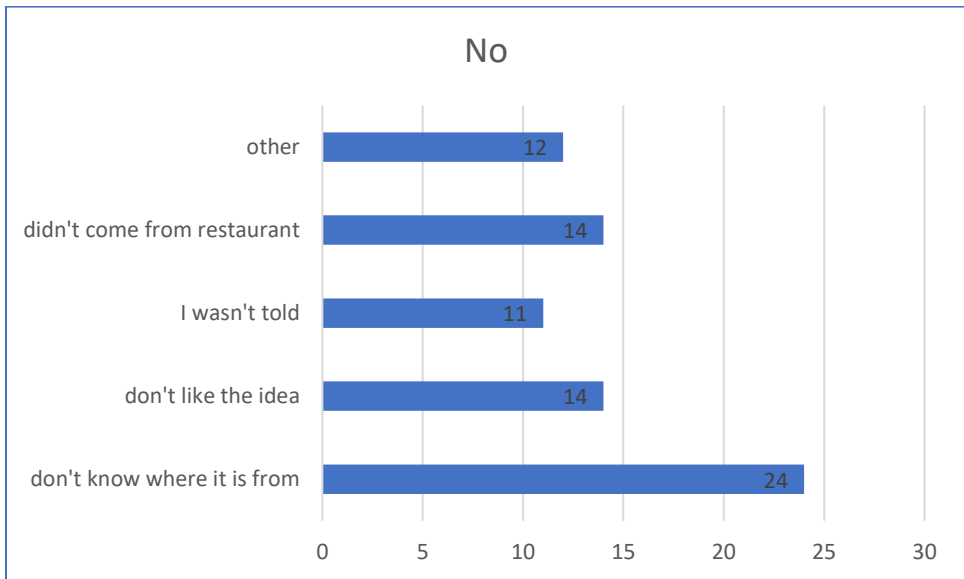


Figure 49

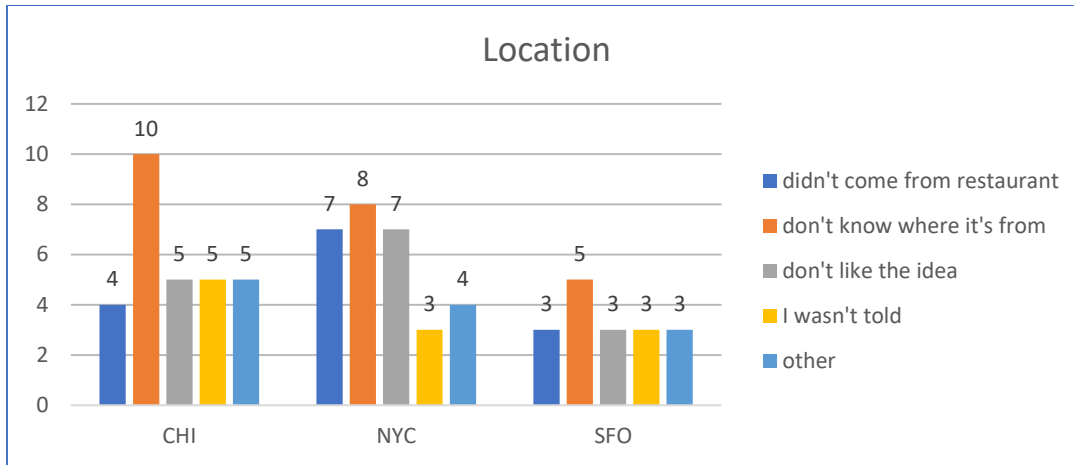


Figure 50

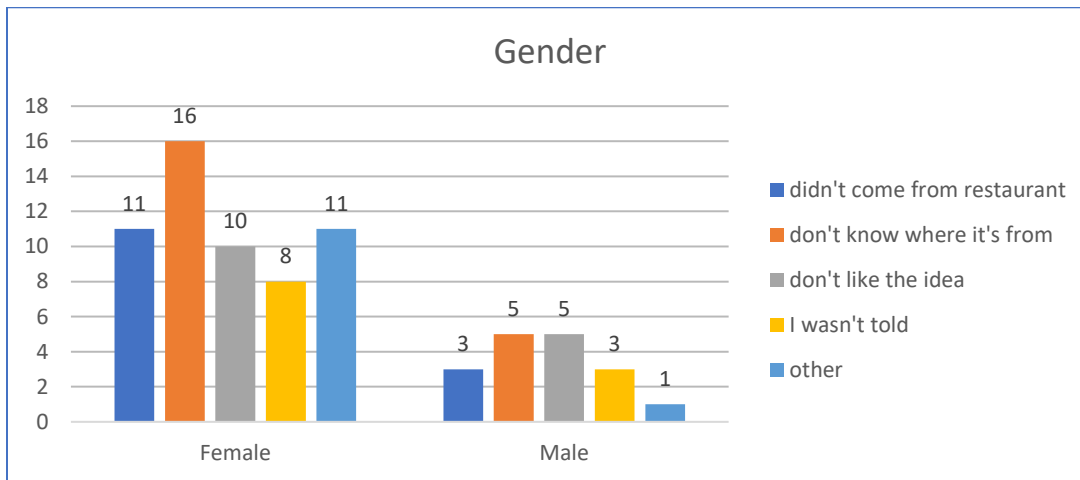


Figure 51

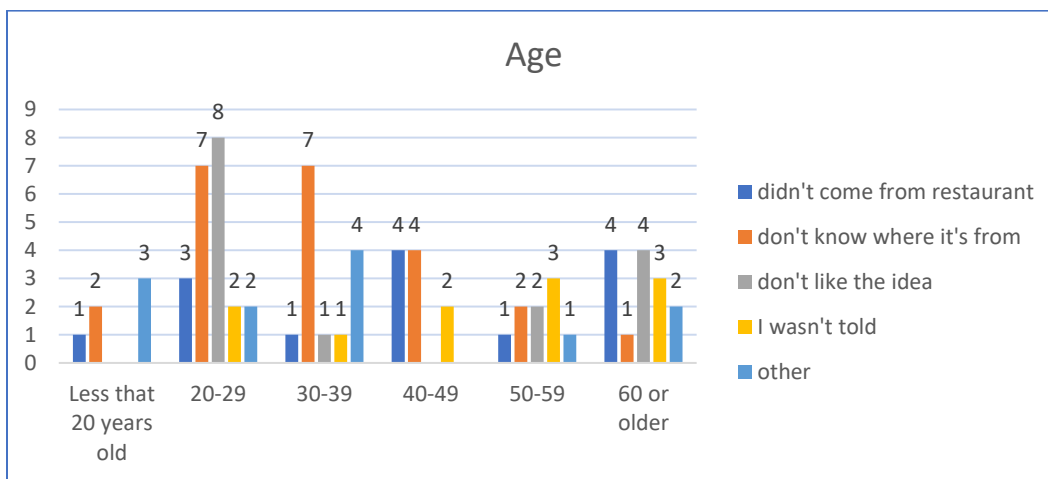


Figure 52

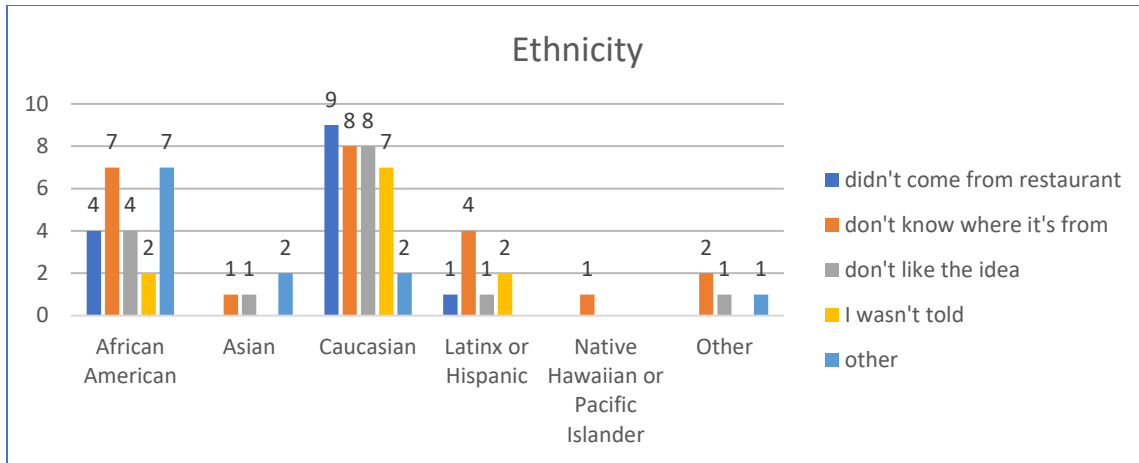


Figure 53

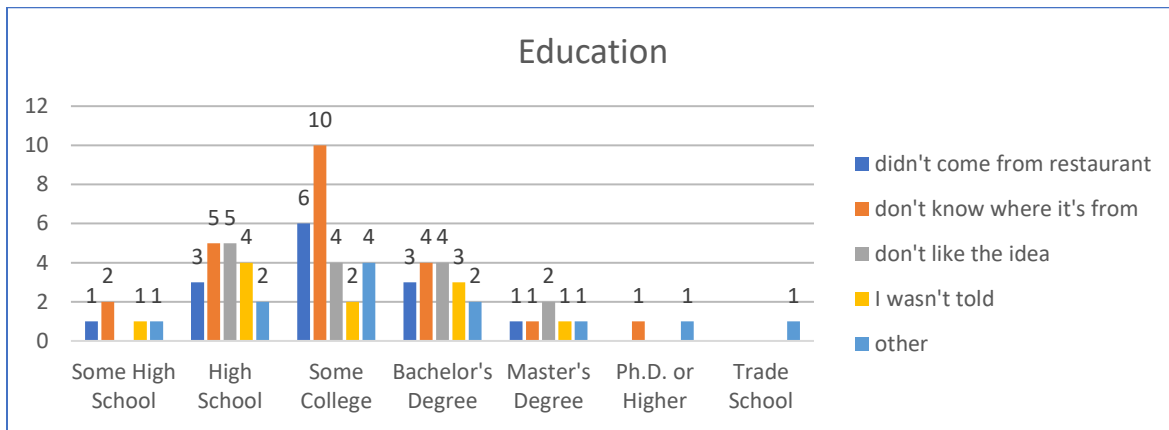
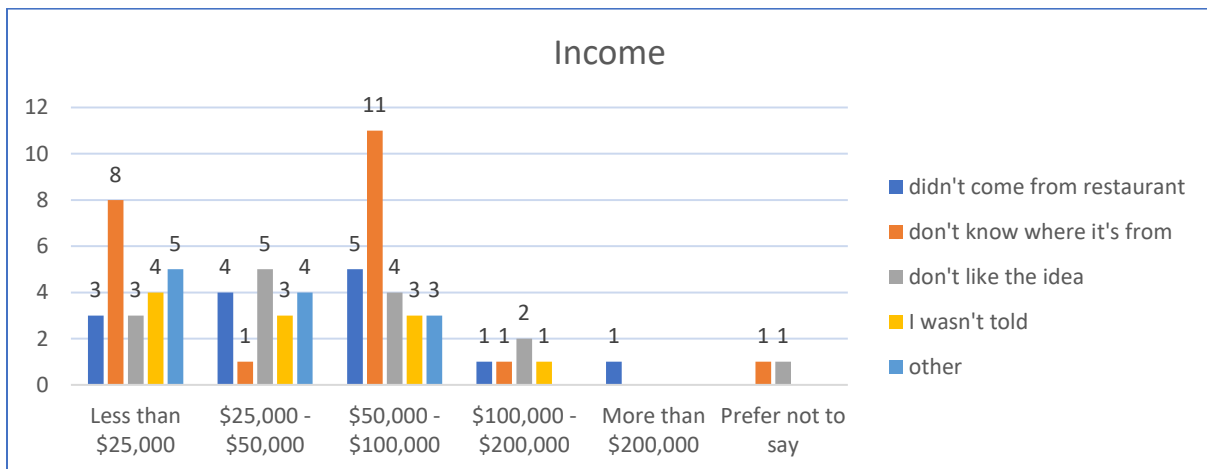


Figure 54



Conclusion

In conclusion, knowledge of ghost kitchens has a positive or neutral effect on trust or satisfaction with delivery. This is mostly true based on roughly 2/3 of the sample, with the remaining 1/3 having a negative reaction. What does this mean for restaurants? Restaurants will be able to use ghost kitchens without having any problems from most of their consumer base. However, as we saw, food quality is very important to the consumers, they just want their food, they do not care where it came from. This means that restaurants that use a ghost kitchen must ensure that the ghost kitchens prepare food that is of an equal or greater quality than the food that a consumer would get from the original restaurant. However, if restaurants want to try to appease the 1/3 of delivery orders that are not happy with ghost kitchens, they need to be transparent. They need to immediately, before the consumers order, let them know they are using a ghost kitchen, and what a ghost kitchen is exactly with as much detail as possible. In some cases, they need to tell the consumer where the ghost kitchen is located. Some consumers do not like ghost kitchens because they lost their visualization of the process of what happens when they order delivery, it is the restaurant's responsibility to fill in the missing details. In addition to that, the restaurants also need to prove that ghost kitchens are in fact just as safe, sometimes even safer than the original restaurant.

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