

# Diners' Optimal Stimulation Level and Behavioral Intention

Jooyeon Ha  
Hospitality & Tourism Management  
Purdue University

and

SooCheong (Shawn) Jang  
Hospitality & Tourism Management  
Purdue University

This study examined the diners' variety seeking intention in the restaurant choice situation based on the theory of optimal stimulation level. Specifically, the study investigated the influences of frequency/recency of dining-out, satisfaction, and desired values on variety seeking intention. Also, this study considered allocentric characteristics as a moderator to identify how the factors differently affect variety seeking intention depending on the personal characteristics. The results showed that desired hedonic/utilitarian values significantly influenced variety seeking intention, suggesting that diners' desired values are more critical factor leading to variety seeking intention than prior dining experiences. In addition, the result for the moderating effect of personal characteristics verified that satisfaction and desired hedonic/utilitarian values differently affect variety seeking intention cross two different personality groups, high and low allocentric characteristics.

**Keywords:** Optimal stimulation level, Variety seeking, Allocentric characteristics, Restaurant choice

## INTRODUCTION

In the consumption situations, people have many alternatives to make a decision. Thus, their purchasing behavior varies depending on the specific products/services or consumption situations, which reflects that consumers not always purchase their best-liked products or services. Especially, foods are usually chosen repetitively over time and often the situational and personal factors prompt that each individual's favorite items are not chosen all the time (Lähteenmäki and Van Trijp, 1995), thus, variety seeking could be frequently happened in the restaurant choice situations.

In understanding variety seeking intention, the theory of optimal stimulation level (OSL) suggests that each individual has different optimal stimulation level and tends to maintain the preferred stimulation level (McAlister and Pessemier, 1982; Raju, 1980; Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1992). When the stimulation level is below the optimal level in the consumption situation, consumers are more likely to seek novelty or variety to increase the stimulation level to an appropriate level. Based on the OSL theory, this study intended to identify factors influencing variety seeking intention in the restaurant choice situation and understand the consumers' nature seeking variety.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to identify diner's fundamental reason seeking variety in the choice of a restaurant. Specifically, this study considered prior experiences such as frequency/ recency of dining-out and satisfaction as stimulations associated with optimal stimulation level. Also, consumer value is one factor for the decision

making in the choice situation, thus, this study considered desired consumer values, hedonic and utilitarian value, as another factor influencing variety seeking intention. On the other hand, each individual's different optimal stimulation level is strongly related with personal characteristics, so this study attempted to understand variety seeking intention in terms of personality types. Especially, personal characteristics was considered as a moderator to examine how frequency, recency, satisfaction, and desired values differently affect variety seeking intention depending on the individuals' personal characteristics.

Previous studies examining consumer behavior in the service marketing field have focused on customer retention such as customer loyalty or switching behavior. Those studies are based on the notion that consumers would repeatedly purchase the same products/services or not, so the company should maintain existing customers and make them keep purchasing their products/services. However, consumer's behavior is more random rather than typical, so the consumption behavior can be changed depending on many situational factors and each individual's mind. Also, most of people purchase products or services from several different brands, thus it could be hard to categorize customers into true-loyal or non-loyal in the actual consumption situation. Accordingly, this study could contribute to the existing literatures by identifying customers' fundamental reasons seeking variety in their consumption situations, especially in the restaurant choice.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theory of optimal stimulation level and variety seeking**

Variety seeking is the tendency of seeking diversity in their choices of services or goods (Kahn, 1995), which has been considered as a key factor to understand consumer behavior in the consumer research (Inman, 2001; Seetharaman and Che, 2009). McAlister and Pessemier (1982) provided an interdisciplinary review of variety seeking behavior in the consumption situation. In explaining variety seeking behavior, they suggested varied derived behavior and direct variety seeking behavior. Derived varied behavior refers to varied behavior engendered by forces that have nothing to do with a preference for change in the choice situations (McAlister and Pessemier, 1982). This type of behavior occurs because of multiple needs, multiple users or multiple situations rather than consumers' internally engendered motivations. Whereas, direct variety seeking behavior, called 'true variety seeking', is resulting from each individuals' motivations occurred because of the desire for change or novelty or because of satiation with product/service attributes.

The distinction between direct variety seeking and derived varied behavior depends on whether the switching behavior is intrinsically or extrinsically motivated (McAlister and Pessemier, 1982; Kahn, 1995). Variety seeking is intrinsically motive, and which is explained by the theory of optimal stimulation level (OSL) (Menon and Kahn, 1995; Van Trijp et al., 1996). The OSL concept postulates that each person needs a certain level of stimulation (OSL), which varies across people. Thus, when the stimulation level is below the optimal level, the individual is bored and the desire for increased stimulation rise. This leads to exploratory behaviors such as novelty seeking or variety seeking, which is one way to increase the stimulation level. In the consumer context, repeated choice of a product reduces its stimulation potential for the buyer because the choice is no longer novel or complex to the consumer (Berlyne, 1960). This leads to a perception of boredom or satiation, and the consumer may attempt to increase stimulation by switching to something different or novel in the choice of products/services.

## **The influences of frequency and recency on variety seeking**

Consumers' repeat purchase and usage of the same products or services lead to boredom, which in turn stimulate variety seeking behavior in their consumption situations. In the regard of the optimal stimulation level theory, repeated purchasing behavior produces a reduced stimulation level for the consumer because the behavior is not novel anymore (Berlyne, 1960), and finally the consumer might attempt to increase stimulation by seeking something different in their consumption situation. McAlister (1982) also suggested that the more frequently consumers purchase or use products or services, the more quickly they will be satiated, which finally induces variety seeking behavior. In the same line, if customers frequently visited a specific restaurant, they might be more likely to seek variety in choosing the restaurants for the next time. Based on these notions, the following hypothesis is suggested:

*Hypothesis 1: The frequency of dining-out will positively influence variety seeking intention.*

As postulated by McAlister (1982), the short time period between the previous purchase and the next purchase will lead to variety seeking behavior. That is, the more recently purchase the products or services, the more customers seek variety because the attribute inventories decline less between consumption occasions and. Accordingly, people who recently purchased a certain product or service would seek something different from the previously purchased one rather than stick to them. This notion also can be applied to the dining-out situation. For example, a customer who dined out at a certain restaurant yesterday are more likely to visit another restaurant to avoid boredom today than a customer who dined out at that restaurant about 3 months ago. Therefore, recency of dining out at a certain restaurant also can be considered as one factor influence optimal stimulation level, which will lead to variety seeking intention. In these respects, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*Hypothesis 2: The recency of dining-out will positively influence variety seeking intention.*

## **The influence of customer satisfaction on variety seeking**

The mood in the consumption situation has been considered one factor influencing variety seeking behavior (Kahn and Isen, 1993; Chuang et al., 2008). Previous studies examining the influence of mood on variety seeking behavior identified that people with positive mood are more likely to maintain those positive emotions, so they are unwilling to take a risk by sticking to the same purchasing behavior rather than trying something new (Chuang et al., 2008; Isen and Patrick, 1983). Thus, customers with positive mood in the consumption situation would seldom seek variety in their next purchasing behavior to maintain the positive mood by purchasing the same products or services. In the service environment, customer satisfaction can be considered as a positive mood derived by the overall experience about service consumption. Especially, pleasantness and happiness about the consumption experience are used to measure satisfaction, which reflects that customer's positive emotion is one proxy of customer satisfaction.

On the other hand, pleasantness is the best when people are at the optimal stimulation level (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1992). In other words, when people are in the pleasant mood, they are in the state that reaches the optimal stimulation level. Therefore, people who are in the pleasant mood due to the satisfactory consumption experience want to maintain

their optimal stimulation level by sticking to the same purchase behavior rather than switching their behavior. This notion is in the same line with the previous studies identifying that people with a positive mood are less likely to seek variety (Kahn and Isen, 1993; Chuang et al., 2008). In these respects, this study suggests that customers who were satisfied with the overall dining experience and had positive emotions such as pleasantness or happiness would be less likely to seek something new compared with those with unsatisfactory about the dining experience. Based on these notions, the following hypothesis is suggested:

*Hypothesis 3: Customer satisfaction will negatively influence variety seeking intention.*

### **Desired values and variety seeking**

Consumer value has been considered one determinant of consumer choice behavior (Sheth et al., 1991). When dining out, customers also pursue the values from their dining experiences, such as hedonic and utilitarian values. Hedonic value in dining out at the restaurant reflects fun and pleasant aspects customers pursue through their dining experiences (Park, 2004). Prior studies regarding the food choice suggests that variety seeking is strongly associated with the hedonic part of food such as sensory attributes (Lähteenmäki and Van Trijp, 1995; Inman, 2001). In the similar line, dining-out also includes several hedonic aspects such as food choice, dining environment, and even services. Accordingly, hedonic concept is also significant determinant in restaurant choices, which is associated with variety seeking behavior. Researchers indicate people are more likely to board or satiated with the repeat purchase of more hedonic focused products, which leads to more variety seeking behavior to lessen the boredom (Van Trijp et al., 1996). That is, hedonic concept in the choice situation is inherently associated with variety seeking, based on which, the following hypothesis is suggested:

*Hypothesis 4: Desired hedonic value will positively influence variety seeking intention.*

On the other hand, customers pursue utilitarian value through their consumption experiences. Especially, utilitarian value in dining out reflects economical and functional aspects acquired by the dining experiences (Park, 2004). Accordingly, people who pursue more utilitarian aspects when dining out will be more likely to find the restaurants they can receive the benefits such as saving money or time. That is, the more customers pursue utilitarian value, the more they are likely to seek various options in the restaurant choice situations to satisfy their desired value. Even though utilitarian value is not associated with the boredom or satiation induced by the repeat purchase, the desire itself toward value could lead to variety seeking. Therefore, people who more strongly pursue even utilitarian value also seek variety seeking intention. In these respects, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*Hypothesis 5: Desired utilitarian value will positively influence variety seeking intention.*

### **Personal characteristics and variety seeking**

Previous studies proposed that variety drive affecting purchase exploration is influenced by individual difference characteristics. According to several researchers, personality is defined as the consistent response to environmental stimuli (Allport, 1937; Hall and Lindzey, 1957). Thus, the fact that many personality traits have exhibited a relationship to variety seeking suggests that some individuals are consistently more likely than others to engage in variety seeking behavior (Hoyer and Ridgway 1984). The theoretical concept to

explain the relationship between personal characteristics and variety seeking behavior is the optimal stimulation level, which is a key factor to determine the degree of each individual's variety seeking behavior in various consumption situations (Raju, 1980). According to the concept of OSL, each individual has a different optimal stimulation level, so the external stimulation different influences each person. In these respects, researchers have considered personal characteristics as one determinant of consumers' exploratory behaviors including variety seeking behavior (Dodd et al., 1996; Raju, 1980).

### ***Personality related with variety seeking: Plog's Allocentricity & Psychocentricity***

In the regard of personal characteristics explaining variety seeking, this study reviewed Plog's allocentric/psychocentric characteristics (Plog, 1991, 2001), which has been widely used to examine the relationship between personality types and tourists' motivation and destination choice in the tourism research (e.g., Griffith and Albanese, 1996; Madrigal, 1995). Allocentricity and psychocentricity are opposite personal characteristics, which are on the bipolar continuum. At one extreme are 'psychocentrics', who are self inhibited, nervous, non-adventurous, and prefer the familiar ones. At the other end are 'allocentrics', who are more outgoing, self confident, and like to explore and seek something new and different from their ordinary life (Plog, 1991). This kind of personality type could be also applied to explain variety seeking behavior because variety seeking is also in the similar line with the exploratory consumer behaviors (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1992). Accordingly, this study considered allocentricity/psychocentricity as customers' personal characteristics to understand their variety seeking intention in terms of personality types.

### ***The moderating effect of personal characteristics***

The personal characteristics is one factor influencing consumer's purchase behaviors, based on which, researchers examined how personality types influence consumption behaviors such as variety seeking in the past studies (e.g., Van Trijp et al., 1996; Dodd et al., 1996) and suggested that personal characteristics highly related with exploratory behaviors are more likely to seek variety in their consumption situations. Accordingly, even though past experiences and desired values influence variety seeking intention as proposed above, the influences of those factors might be different depending on individual's personal characteristics. That is, each individual's personal characteristics play a role changing the relationships between prior experiences or value and variety seeking intention. Based on this notion, this study suggested following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 6: Personal characteristics will moderate the relationship between frequency and variety seeking intention.*

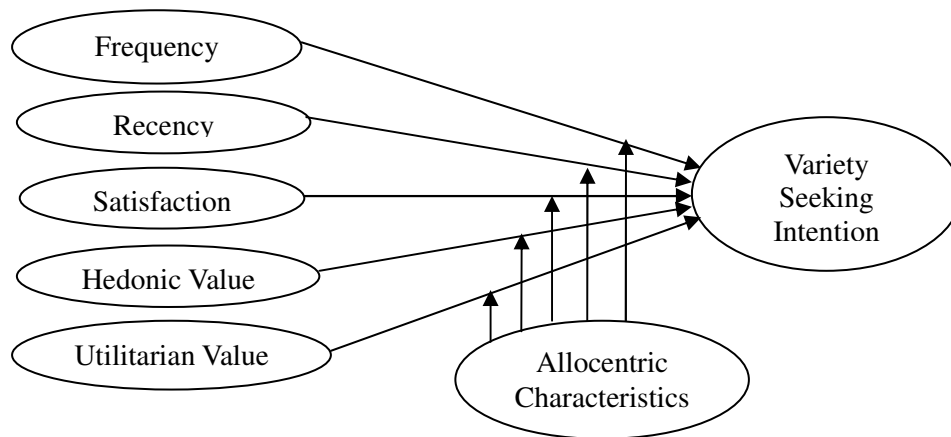
*Hypothesis 7: Personal characteristics will moderate the relationship between recency and variety seeking intention.*

*Hypothesis 8: Personal characteristics will moderate the relationship between customer satisfaction and variety seeking intention.*

*Hypothesis 9: Personal characteristics will moderate the relationship between desired hedonic value and variety seeking intention.*

*Hypothesis 10: Personal characteristics will moderate the relationship between desired utilitarian value and variety seeking intention.*

To better understand the whole picture of this study, a conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**

## METHODOLOGY

### Research instrument

A self-administered questionnaire was developed for this study. The participants were asked to respond to the questions based on their prior experience at one casual dining restaurant within recent three months. The section one included the questions regarding the frequency and recency of dining out at a certain restaurant. The frequency was measured by asking “how often did you visit this restaurant within recent three months?” based on 7-point scale. The recency of dining-out refers to how recently visited a specific restaurant, which was measured using the interval scale including within a few days, within 1 week, within 2 weeks, within 3 weeks, within 1 month, within 2 months, and within 3 months.

The second section was designed to identify the satisfaction of the prior dining experience and respondents’ desired value when eating-out at the casual restaurant. For the measurement items for customer satisfaction, items were borrowed from previous studies (Carpenter et al., 2006), but slightly modified to fit the restaurant situation. The items were “Overall I was satisfied with the dining experience at this restaurant”, “I was happy with the dining experience at this restaurant”, etc. To measure desired values, the items were adopted from Park’s study (2004) and slightly modified. The items for desired hedonic value involved “The mood and interior design of restaurants are important when eating out”, and “Eating-out should be fun and pleasant”. The items for desired utilitarian value included “A good place to eat-out is one that is pragmatic and economical”, “The dining experience should be good value for money I paid”, and “When eating-out, food price should be reasonable”.

In the section three, the respondents were asked to measure personal characteristics and variety seeking intention. To measure personal characteristics, the items were borrowed from Plog’s study (1991). The items were “I am a moderate risk taker”, and “I am an adventurer”. Lastly, the respondents were asked to indicate the variety seeking intention in choosing the restaurant next time based on their past dining experience at a specific casual restaurant. The items for variety seeking intention included “I just want to visit another restaurant for new food items,” “I just want to try something else, just for a change”, and “I would like to have another dining experience at other restaurants, which are adopted from the previous study (Van Trijp et al., 1996), but the wordings are modified for asking respondent’s intention. All items for satisfaction, hedonic/utilitarian value, personal characteristics, and

variety seeking intention were measured on a 7-point Likert type scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

### **Data collection and statistical analyses**

For the data collection, a web-based survey was conducted. The survey questionnaires were distributed to 4,000 students at a mid-western university in the U.S. via e-mail. The participants were asked to respond to the questions based on the most recent dining experience at a casual dining restaurant within three months. Among 4000 participants, 309 usable responses were collected, producing a response rate of 7.7%. In order to examine the hypothesized relationships among constructs, structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed using Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS). Also, multiple group analysis was conducted to test the moderating effect of personal characteristics.

## **RESULTS**

### **Sample profile**

The sample profile showed that 45 percent were male and 55 percent were female. The mean age was 26 years old. Caucasian Americans accounted for 66 percent of the sample and Asians were 25 percent. 29.4 percent of respondents' annual household incomes were between \$20,000 and \$59,999.

### **Measurement model**

To assess the overall model fit of the measurement model, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. The Cronbach's alpha of all four constructs used in this study exceeded the minimum requirement for reliability of .70, indicating that multiple measurement items were highly reliable for measuring each construct (Hair et al., 1998). Composite reliabilities for all four constructs were above the cutoff value of .70, ranging from .715 to .949, which indicates that the instrument was reliable to measure the latent variables. In addition, the standardized factor loadings for all items exceeded 0.5, and were significant at the alpha level of .01 (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988), verifying convergent validity.

### **Results of structural model**

The results of structural model and the model fit are summarized in Table 1. As a result, frequency, recency, and satisfaction did not significantly influence variety seeking intention, in which Hypotheses 1 through 3 were not supported. On the other hand, the relationship between desired hedonic value and variety seeking intention (Hypothesis 4) was supported by the corresponding estimate of .254 ( $p < .01$ ), which means that the more customers pursue hedonic aspects such as fun and pleasant from the dining experience, the more they seek variety in their restaurant choice situations. Also, the standardized path coefficient of the relationship between desired utilitarian value and variety seeking intention was .133 ( $p < .05$ ), which supported Hypothesis 5. This result indicates that customers who consider functional and economical aspects of dining-out more importantly tend to seek variety to find the appropriate restaurant in which they could save more money in the convenient dining environment. When comparing the magnitude of the path coefficients of the relationship between desired hedonic value and variety seeking intention and the

relationship between desired utilitarian value and variety seeking intention, hedonic value has more stringer impact on variety seeking intention than utilitarian value does. This result suggests that variety seeking more occurs when customers strongly pursue fun and pleasant experience during dining-out.

**Table 1**  
**Summary of Structural Results**

Hypothesized Path	Standardized Path Coefficients	Results
Hypothesis 1: Frequency → VSI	-.063	Not supported
Hypothesis 2: Recency → VSI	-.059	Not supported
Hypothesis 3: Satisfaction → VSI	-.060	Not supported
Hypothesis 4: Hedonic Value → VSI	.254***	Supported
Hypothesis 5: Utilitarian Value → VSI	.133**	Supported

Note:  $\chi^2=329.689$ ,  $\chi^2/df=2.918$ , GFI=.889, TLI=.903, CFI=.920, RMSEA=.079  
\*\*\*p<.01, \*\*p<.05, \*p<.1, VSI: Variety Seeking Intention

### The moderating effect of personal characteristics

Table 2 presents the relationships among constructs in the high and low allocentric groups. The respondents were divided into high and low allocentric groups based on the mean of responses to the questions for allocentric characteristics. The mean was 4.99, so respondents above 4.99 belong to high allocentric group and those below 4.99 belong to low allocentric group. Since the mean was relatively high (4.99 based on 7-point scale), most of respondents belong to high allocentric group had high allocentric characteristics, whereas respondents belongs to low allocentric group composed of people with both relatively low allocentric characteristics and the personality closing to high psychocentric characteristics.

To investigate significant differences in relationships among constructs across two personality groups, each relationship was separately estimated by investigating the Chi-square difference between the constrained model and the unconstrained model. As a result, frequency did not differently influence variety seeking intention across two groups ( $\Delta \chi^2$  ( $\Delta df=1$ ) = .40, p= .527). In the same line, the relationship between recency and variety seeking was not significantly different across two groups as well ( $\Delta \chi^2$  ( $\Delta df=1$ ) = .80, p= .371). Accordingly, hypotheses 6 and 7 were not supported. This result indicates that both frequency and recency of dining-out are not significant factors inducing variety seeking intention regardless of the personal characteristics.

The difference in the relationship between satisfaction and variety seeking intention across two personality types was examined. The Chi-square difference ( $\Delta \chi^2$  ( $\Delta df=1$ ) = 3.2, p= .073) was significant at a 0.1 level, supporting Hypothesis 8. This result means that the influence of satisfaction on behavioral intentions is significantly different across high and low allocentric groups. Specifically, people with high allocentric characteristics were more likely to seek variety as satisfaction level was low, whereas people with relatively low allocentric characteristics did not consider satisfaction as a variety seeking driver.

In the regard of the relationship between desired hedonic value and variety seeking intention across two groups, the Chi-square difference ( $\Delta \chi^2$  ( $\Delta df=1$ ) = 3.6, p= .057) was significant at a 0.1 level. This result indicates that desired hedonic value differently influences variety seeking intention across high and low allocentric groups, supporting Hypothesis 9. People with high allocentric characteristics were more likely to seek variety in



the restaurant choice situations when the purpose of dining-out is more focused on hedonic aspects. However, desired hedonic value did not significantly influence variety seeking in the low allocentric groups.

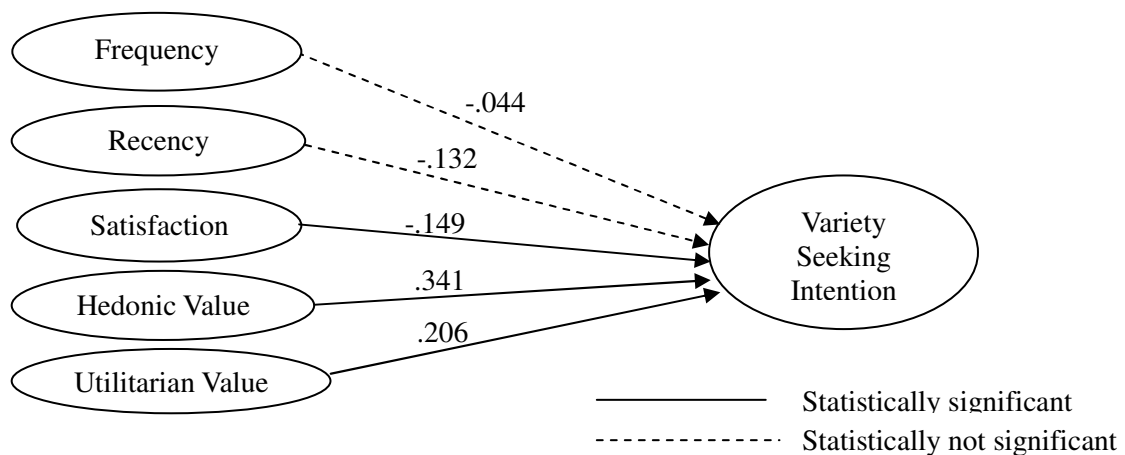
In the examination of the difference in the relationship between desired utilitarian value and variety seeking intention across personality types, the Chi-square difference ( $\Delta \chi^2$  ( $\Delta df=1$ ) = 3.0,  $p = .083$ ) was significant at a 0.1 level, which supported Hypothesis 10. In the high allocentric group, the more customers pursue economical or functional aspects when dining-out, the more they are likely to seek variety in the restaurant choice, whereas desired utilitarian value did not have a significant effect on variety seeking intention in the low allocentric group.

**Table 2**  
**Comparison of Structural Parameter Estimates between Two Groups**

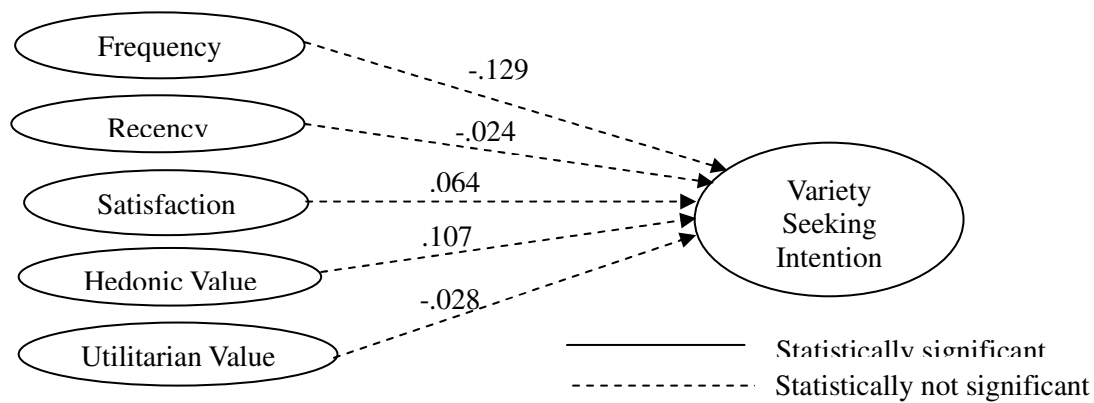
Hypothesized Path	High Allocentric	Low Allocentric	$\Delta \chi^2$
	Standardized path Coefficients	Standardized path Coefficients	
Frequency $\longrightarrow$ VSI	-.044	-.129	.40
Recency $\longrightarrow$ VSI	-.132	-.024	.80
Satisfaction $\longrightarrow$ VSI	-.149**	.064	3.20*
Hedonic Value $\longrightarrow$ VSI	.341***	.107	3.60*
Utilitarian Value $\longrightarrow$ VSI	.206**	-.028	3.00*

Note: \*\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \* $p < .1$ , VSI: Variety Seeking Intention

The path coefficients for each high and low are presented in Figure 2 and 3. When comparing the path coefficients between high and low allocentric groups, satisfaction, hedonic value, and utilitarian value significantly influenced variety seeking intention in the high allocentric group, whereas any factors were not significant for variety seeking intention in the low allocentric group. This finding shows the distinct personal characteristics of each personality group in the consumption situation. People with high allocentric characteristics are more sensitive to the stimulations, which influence their decision making. On the other hand, people with relatively low allocentric characteristics are less influenced by the stimulations. Accordingly, even though certain stimulations leading to variety seeking intention are equally given, the degree of response to those factors is different depending on the personal characteristics reflecting exploratory behaviors.



**Figure 2. Structural Results for High Allocentric Group**



**Figure 3. Structural Results for Low Allocentric Group**

## DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

### Discussions

This study attempted to identify the fundamental reason that diners seek variety in their restaurant choice situations, considering prior experiences and desired dining values as factors inducing variety seeking intention. Also, the current study examined how those factors differently influence variety seeking intention depending on the individuals' personal characteristics employing Plog's allocentric/psychocentric concept. Overall, desired values of dining-out are more significant factors inducing variety seeking intention than prior dining experiences. This finding reflects that even though customers repeatedly dine out at a certain restaurant or very recently visited the restaurant and had unsatisfactory dining experiences, they might revisit the restaurant again even in a short time because those factors are not considered critical motivations to find another restaurant for changes or novelty. Instead, customers are more likely to seek variety to meet their desired values such as fun or pleasant experiences or economical perspective of dining-out.

On the other hand, personal characteristics played a moderating role in the response to factors inducing variety seeking intention. People with high allocentric characteristics more sensitively responded to the stimulations than those with low allocentric characteristics. Specifically, when satisfaction level is low and values through dining experiences are strongly pursued, people with high allocentric are more likely to seek variety in their restaurant choices, whereas those stimulations did not influence variety seeking intention for people with low allocentric group. In general, people who have relatively high allocentric characteristics tend to have higher optimal stimulation level compared to those with low allocentric characteristics, which leads to more variety and novelty in their daily lives including consumption situations (Plog, 1991, 2001). The finding of this study uncovered that the responses to stimulations inducing variety seeking are different between high and low allocentric characteristics, suggesting people with high allocentric characteristics not only seek variety itself, but also more likely to be influenced by stimulations for variety seeking.

### Implications

This study makes some contributions to the academic literature. First of all, this study considered both prior experiences and desired values to identify the reason that customers seek variety in the restaurant choice. Past studies examining variety seeking behavior considered factors obtained by prior consumption experiences influencing the level

of optimal stimulation and identified how those prior experiences such as frequency or satisfaction/emotion influence variety seeking behavior in the purchase situations. However, when considering that the consumer behavior is also influenced by personal value that consumers ultimately want to get from the buying experiences, identifying how desired value affect variety seeking is meaningful to understand the consumer's nature seeking variety in the choice situation. In the regard of the influence of desired values on variety seeking intention, the findings uncovered that desired values customers pursue when dining out lead to variety seeking intention rather than prior dining experiences do.

In addition, this study attempted to understand variety seeking intention in terms of personal characteristics. According to the theory of optimal stimulation, each individual have different optimal stimulation level, which is also associated with the personal traits (Dodd et al., 1996; Raju, 1980). That is, variety seeking tendency could be different depending on their personal characteristics. Based on this notion, this study examined how the prior experiences and desired values differently influence on variety seeking intention depending on their personal characteristics by considering personal characteristics as a moderator. The findings suggested that the response to the stimulations inducing variety seeking is different depending on personality types.

The current study also has practical implications for the restaurant industry. Regarding the personality types, people with high allocentric characteristics were more sensitive to the situational factors such as satisfaction and desired values regarding to variety seeking intention, whereas those factors did not play a significant role to induce variety seeking intention for people with low allocentric characteristics. This finding suggests the message to the specific restaurant segment in developing effective marketing strategies considering their target customers' personal characteristics. For example, the restaurants targeting people who like adventure or seek novelty, such as ethnic restaurants or themed restaurants, need to make efforts to attract the customers by providing various promotions or decrease boredom by changing menu or dining environment.

### **Limitations and future study**

In spite of some implications, this study was not free from the limitations. This study conducted web-based survey for the data collection, so the respondents had to rely on their memories of past dining experiences to respond to the survey questions. Also, the study considered only one restaurant segment, casual dining restaurant, for the research setting. If other restaurant segments are included in the study, another practical implication for the overall restaurant choice could be drawn. As prior studies suggested, variety seeking behavior can be classified into derived varied behavior and true variety seeking behavior depending on extrinsically or intrinsically motivated (e.g., Giovon, 1984; Kahn, 1995). Even though this study considered only true variety seeking which is internally motivated in the restaurant choice situation, future study could apply both derived varied behavior induced by external factors such as price promotions or new products/services and true variety seeking behavior engendered by the need for variety to identify customers' restaurant choice behavior and suggest practical messages related with the types of variety seeking behavior.

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