

# Factors that Influence Career Choice of Hospitality Students in Moi University, Kenya

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## Abstract

Career choice is a complex decision for students since it determines the kind of profession that they intend to pursue in life. As students try to make career choice, they face problems of matching their career choices with their abilities and academic performance. The purpose of this study was to examine factors that influence career choice among students undertaking hospitality management such as personal, environmental and opportunity. The target population was 302 students. The sample size was 120 students. Stratified and systematic random sampling techniques were used in the study whereas the students were grouped in strata of year of study. Data was collected using questionnaires which were analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in the form of bar graphs and frequency tables. The findings showed that majority of students are influenced by opportunity and environmental factors and not influenced by personal factors. However the findings also showed that students opted, selected and preferred hospitality careers despite many other alternatives that were open to them. The findings may benefit the Hotel and Hospitality department of Moi University in understanding the choice factors used by their students in joining the career. The study recommends intensive advertisements by institutions offering hospitality and also career education to enable students make informed decisions.

## 1. Introduction

For every incoming university student, choosing the best course can be a difficult decision as well as thinking about their future career. Some students know exactly what course to pursue while others do not know which one will get them there. In fact, due to the large number of courses available to students, most of them find themselves switching majors. The importance of choosing a degree as well as courses available is a vital and crucial part for every student as it is the building block of future success. Students need to be knowledgeable about the path they will be taking to help them prepare for their career path. However, career choice has become a complex science with the advent of information technology, the emergence of post industrial revolution and job competition. It was a common practice in the old days to find feudalism converting it into a family affair where the son of a blacksmith was destined to become a blacksmith and a feudal was born a leader. Industrialization and post industrialization has made it possible for a common person to be rich as long as they have due skills and knowledge (Wattles, 2009). Today, one has not only to make due career planning but also exhaustive career research before making a career choice so as to adjust with the evolving socio-economic conditions (Wattles, 2009).

According to Kerka (2000), career choice is influenced by multiple factors including personality, interests, self concept, cultural identity, globalization, socialization, role model, social support and available resources such as information and financial. Bandura et al., (2001) state that each individual undertaking the process is influenced by several factors including the context in which they live in, their personal aptitudes, social contacts and educational attainment. Hewitt (2010) posit that factors influencing career choice can either be intrinsic, extrinsic or both. Hewitt further states that most people are influenced by careers that their parents favour, others follow careers that their educational choices have opened for them, some choose to follow their passion regardless of how much or little it will make them while others choose the careers that give high income. Students perception of being suitable for particular jobs also has been found to be influenced by a number of factors including ethnic background, year in school, level of achievement, choice of science subjects, attitudes and differences in job characteristics (McQuaid and Bond, 2003). Perrone et al., (2001) found that role model supportiveness and quality of relationship contribute to career choice of students.

### *1.1 Research questions*

- 1) Do personal factors influence choice of hospitality career?
- 2) What environmental factors influence choice of hospitality career?
- 3) How do opportunity factors influence choice of hospitality career?

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Concept of Career Choice*

Many studies on college student decision-making use economic and sociologic theoretical frameworks to examine factors of college choice (Hearn, 1984; Jackson, 1982; Tierney, 1983; Somers, Haines & Keene; 2006). These frameworks were used to develop three theoretical, conceptual approaches to modelling college choice: (a) economic models (b) status-attainment models and (c) combined models. Economic models focus on the econometric assumptions that prospective college students think rationally and make careful cost-benefit analyses when choosing a college (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). Status-attainment models assume a utilitarian decision-making process that students go through in choosing a college, specifying a variety of social and individual factors leading to occupational and educational aspirations (Jackson, 1982) while combined models incorporate the rational assumptions in the economic models and components of the status attainment models. Most combined models divide student decision-making process into three phases; aspirations development and alternative evaluation, options consideration and evaluation of the remaining options and final decision (Jackson, 1982).

Another research approach to choice and decision-making in higher education considered three different levels of students' choice: global, national and curriculum level. In Australia, for example, James et al., (1999) found that field of study preferences, course and institutional reputations, course entry scores, easy access to home and institutional characteristics significantly influenced applicants' choice of institution. In addition, the teaching reputation of universities has been more important for college students in England than their research profiles (Price et al., 2003). Foskett (2006) found that students consider more carefully economic factors in times of distress and financial difficulty. These factors include job opportunities to supplement their incomes, accommodation costs and family home proximity. Course of study decisions tend to be closely related to institutional choice decisions. James et al., (1999) identified a range of factors influencing course preference including: graduate employment rates from the course among employers, graduate satisfaction from the course, graduate employment rates from the course, the quality of teaching in the course, approaches to teaching, learning and assessment from the course including opportunities for flexible study.

Different perspectives to understanding the complex college selection decision have emerged. One approach focuses on how aspiring students develop a college choice set, decide where to apply considering admission criteria and make their enrolment decisions (Hearn, 1984). Geography also imposes constraints on college choice. Most students attend public, in-state institutions which imply that college options are circumscribed by state of residence (Niu & Tienda, 2008). Another approach emphasizes institutional characteristics such as cost, size, distance, quality of programs and availability of financial aid. The factors most commonly associated with a comprehensive college choice model include student background characteristics (Jackson, 1982), aspirations (Chapman, 1984; Jackson, 1982), educational achievement (Hanson & Litten, 1982), social environment (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), financial variables (St. John, 1990; 1991), net cost (St. John & Starkey, 1995), institutional climate (Chapman, 1984) and institutional characteristics (Hanson & Litten, 1982; Hossler et al., 1999). The significant factors used to choose colleges among students might not be the same such as tuition and financial aid, scholarships available, job opportunities during and after graduation and the reputation or recognition of a college among other factors. Hearne (2009) claimed that parents are deeply involved and influential to their high-achieving children's college choices. In addition, dialogue with college friends, alumni and admitted-student programs as well as specialists or advisors are extremely influential to students decision process.

### *2.2 Opportunity and Career Choice*

Careers and education do not always synchronize the abilities to opportunities. Timing and location as opportunities are very important in fulfilling aspirations. Students show all the ambition, talent and skill needed for a particular career but if the student has not capitalized on the right locale at the right point in time, their hopes for that productive career are reduced. Students only develop acceptable concepts of career patterns or life strategies, if occupational opportunities are present after high school. Opportunities must present themselves in order to make the most of students' abilities.

Opportunities in career choice would include academic settings, technical schools, entry-level job openings, job shadowing, vocational guidance, job placement and industry contacts. Super (1957) posited that surprisingly enough intelligence had little to do with getting entry-level positions; rather, maturity as in physical size and manner, is valued more by employers. Deml and Reich (2001) discussed the factors that enrich students' potential for career success. In fact, constant career exploration could be adopted as a lifelong strategy throughout one's life. However, change itself in the workplace has affected careers and career development. Mergers, acquisitions, reengineering, and downsizing have influenced employment patterns and altered the career directions of many.

### *2.3 Personal factors and career choice*

Splaver (1977) posited that it is important for students to have a good understanding of themselves and their personality if they are to make intelligent career plans. What they would like to be and what they are determine factors in their course choice. Personality factors to be considered include their mental abilities, special abilities and interests. Splaver (1977) considered factors of mental abilities to be "verbal comprehension, word fluency ability, spatial ability, numerical ability, reasoning ability, and memory." Splaver urged students to become familiar with their personality in order to guide their major choice. Harris and Jones (1997) stated that a developed career plan included evaluation of personality through self-assessment, and communication with others, another trait that depended heavily on personality.

Once a career has been narrowed down, personality plays a role in obtaining and keeping employment in the field of choice. Attitudes used in interviews, along with compatible methods of working within teams along side co-workers have depended upon the right personality. Once a career has been secured, ambition and sincerity, along with promotions may determine an employee's future. Therefore, it is helpful for students to consider the attitudes they hold about themselves when choosing a major (Kroll et al., 1970). Attitudes about personality have been organized into consistent modes of thinking, feeling and reacting to evaluation of our environment. Personality traits are valuable when choosing a career. The environment, such as our formal education has played a major role in the formation of personality constructs.

The process choice is affected by experience and purpose. One's experience is limited by the ability to perceive only what the individual is prepared to perceive. Purpose also limits ability to perceive. Thus experience and purpose have translated to self and situation, or personality and environment (Kroll et al., 1970). Personal determinants include the entire cluster of biological and psychological attributes, as well as behavioral and physical features with genetic origins. The genetic determinants include sex, physical structures, neurological and endocrine systems and, to some extent, intellectual and nonintellectual abilities and aptitudes. Physical appearance such as height, weight, body proportions, structure of the face, etc. exert influences on others' reactions toward us and in turn on self-evaluations. Rate of maturity is also a determinant (Kroll et al., 1970).

### *2.4 Environmental factors and career choice*

Career choice is the balancing of recognizing and meeting needs of the individual while at the same time responding to the outer forces and realities of life. Career decision factors involve two sets of input: the self and the world of work. Individuals in a career constantly balance aspirations and how they have fitted into the reality of the workplace. Man's occupation determines the kind of person he becomes since, through his working hours, his cognitions about himself, his wants and goals, and his interpersonal response traits are moulded (Kroll et al., 1970). Kroll went on to say that much of the informal and formal knowledge provided through the society and the environment has focused on the acquisition, retention, and utilization of information pertaining to the world. Both the self and the world emerge as important factors in the constructs that have attained, in that they have become the important features in the acquisition, retention, and translation of information about one's self (Kroll et al., 1970).

Environment plays a significant role in the career position the student attains in many ways. The environment that is spoken about here is a factor that is used to nurture decisions in career choice. Gender, for example plays a significant role in this environment. Greenberger (2002) stated that boys are still being steered toward the traditional 'male' jobs, which are higher paying while girls are still expected to cluster into the traditional fields of cosmetology, childcare, and other similar jobs. Skills present in males and females alike have been indicative of their vocational interests. Laleger (1942) ascertained the skill levels of girls as they applied to interests that the girls had. It is difficult to break the code of motivation that students may possess. The fact that Laleger's study was done in 1942 shows that gender bias, and the study of it, is nothing new, and may continue to be an always-present part of the career choice process. One means of prompting students to participate in the career choice planning is a mandate to require students to submit a description of their plans for some postsecondary education or training to school officials; or at least explain their future career paths in detail wherein graduates

spell out those goals, which could include college, trade school, the military, or other options, even if they have not met the requirement to graduate (Cavanagh, 2002). The intent of the career explanation was to have students with low expectations talk with counselors about options for advancing their careers in the future.

However, Counselors can draw career preferences to the forefront, in reflecting student preferences, clarifying career preferences, summarizing and encouraging student career preferences. Counselors should not be engaged with the evaluation for example, telling the student what they are or are not capable of doing or persuade the student to adopt a different point of view. Career counselors are ineffective if they try to dictate, judge, or decide the student's values. And finally, counselors should not make predictions that go beyond the capability of their training (Weiler, 1977).

For students to provide themselves with answers to career choice questions, decision-making has become a tool to form career choices. (Kroll 1970) indicates that the decision making process concerning one's career is not so much a function of the information amassed to the individual, but more the process of maturity and planning. Students can help themselves to decide myth from reality, communication, and learning to operate autonomously, are fundamental building blocks used in effective career planning. In order to succeed in obtaining their goals, students must know what they want. Too many of them have been taught to suppress what they want and instead concentrate on meeting other people's expectations (Weiler, 1977).

Kroll (1970) describes five noticeable steps described: the prelective state, suggestions, intellectualization, hypothesis, and then reasoning. Along the same lines Poyla (1970) described four basic areas in the decision making process: understanding the problem, seeing how various items of the problem are linked in order to formulate a plan, carrying out the plan and reviewing and discussing the completed solution. Tiedman and O'Hara stated their process in phases that dealt with anticipation, crystallization, decision, clarification, implementation or adjustment. Decision making in career choices is a constant, continuing process even though some decisions are required now that can be changed later only at great emotional, time, or financial costs to the decider (Kroll 1970). Personal values and desires have seldom been realized without the active and conscious efforts on the part of the student. The student must be motivated to orchestrate the outcome. If the student wants to work in the career choice process, the student must know and understand the realities of that process. Only when the student has developed awareness, can they begin to avoid dealing with the myths within the process as a whole. It is at that point the student develops a practical plan of action to get what they want from the decisions of their career choice. Most students have built career plans on the myths of what they think should be rather on the reality of what is, so stated (Weiler 1977).

### **3. Methodology**

The research employed a descriptive survey design. The target population comprised 302 students undertaking bachelors' degree in hotel and hospitality management at Moi University. The sample size was 120 students who were stratified into strata's of year of study that is first, second, third and fourth years. Systematic sampling based on the class registers was used to select the actual participants for the study. Data was collected using structured questionnaires consisting questions on a 3 point likert scale. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze and describe data which was presented using frequency tables and bar graphs.

### **4. Results and Discussions**

#### *4.1 Personal Information of Respondents*

Majority (60%) of the students undertaking hospitality course are female which could imply that the career was more attractive to female than male. Marital status of the students showed that a majority of 76.67% were single. 93.34% of the students were between the age brackets of 18-28 years which clearly shows that most of them are young people aspiring to be in the hospitality industry. Of the students interviewed, those in their third year accounted for 35%, second year represented 33.33%, fourth year were 23.33% while the least, 8.33% were in their first year.

#### *4.2 Opportunity Factors*

Most of the students disagreed that academic setting, course entry level, job placements, industry conducts and job shadowing influenced their choice of hospitality career. However most of them agreed that they were influenced by the technical schools they attended and job openings to undertake hospitality career. Table 1 presents a summary of the findings.

Opportunity factors are very influential in students choice of a career. Technical schools influence student due to facilities within the technical school, training methods, location, previous history of the technical school and students graduating from that technical school. This factor influenced most of the students take a hospitality career. Job openings in the hospitality industry are an opportunity factor which students try to take advantage of.

Notable is the fact that there are so many hospitality establishments which require a lot of labour and do not fuss about qualifications but can also accept job training. Apart from employment in the industry, the industry is not so capital intensive especially for small business. Course entry levels for all careers are similar hence did not influence their career choice. However, entry to hospitality courses do not require high grades as the job needs more technical than theoretical skills. Most of the students did not use industry conducts before choosing the career thus they could have been driven by their passion for the career.

#### *4.3 Personal Factors*

As shown on figure 1, majority of the respondents disagreed that personal factors especially family tradition, gender, grades attained in secondary school and income of those in the industry influenced their choice of hospitality career. However, only interest under personal factors influenced their choice of career. Figure 1 shows the summary of the findings.

Personal interest highly influenced 53.33% of the students to take a career in hospitality which could imply that they developed interest while in high school that propelled them to pursue a career in hospitality. Lifestyle of those already employed in the hospitality industry seemed to have influenced some students to take a career. This is quite contrary to the perception that the working hours of hospitality establishments are anti-social as they work 24-7 with no breaks even on important public and religious holidays. Grades attained do not influence students to take a career in hospitality since 56.67% of the respondents disagreed with that. This could be because almost careers have a similar entry level. 80% of the respondents disagreed that gender influenced their career choice which could mean that the career can be handled by both genders. 50% of the respondents also disagreed that incomes of those in the hospitality career influenced their career choice which could mean that the incomes of those individuals are not high enough to motivate or influence career path. Family tradition also does not influence choice of hospitality career as 88.35% of the respondents disagreed that family tradition influenced their career choice which could mean that most families don't dictate the career path in which an individual decides to follow.

#### *4.4 Environmental Factors*

50% of the respondents agreed that they were influenced by people around them while 30% disagreed. This could mean that students are influenced by those close to them for various reasons. Some students intimated that they were influenced by successful entrepreneurs who had invested in the industry and they felt that if they undertook a career, it would probably advantage them to follow suit. 36.67% agreed that they were influenced by advertisements made by the institution to choose the career while 30% disagreed on the same. The low influence by advertisements could mean that institutions do not undertake the right marketing strategies that are attractive to students. 46.67% of the students disagreed that access to the institution influenced their career choice while 63.33% disagreed that myths influenced their career choice. The findings could imply that the students could have made independent choices to join the institution irrespective of the fact that they had no access. The lack of influence by myths could imply that the hospitality career has no negative myths attached to it.

#### *4.5 Choice decisions for Career*

Majority (72%) of the students agreed that they opted to take up hospitality as a career, 68% selected hospitality as their career while only 45% preferred hospitality to other careers. However none of the students indicated that they did not choose hospitality because there was no alternative. These findings could imply that most students were driven by their passion for a hospitality career and that their choices were made when they were well aware of other career opportunities and alternatives. A summary of the findings is as shown on figure 3.

### **5. Conclusion**

Opportunity factors such as technical schools and job opening are influential in the choice of a career. Personal interest and lifestyle of those who are already in the hospitality industry influenced students in the personal factors to take a hospitality career. This could be because interest developed in them while still in high schools hence wished to pursue a career in hospitality and the lifestyle of those already in the industry could be admirable to some of the students. It is also evident that environmental factors such as external influencers and advertisements made by institution influenced students to take a career in hospitality. Most notable is the fact that students opt, prefer and select hospitality as a career despite many open alternatives. The study recommends to institutions offering hospitality careers to create awareness of the career through intensive advertisements and by initiating programs that help young student increase their personal interest. In addition, individuals in industry should act as role models and also try and come up with policies that can ensure a fulfilling career.



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Table 1: Opportunity factors that influence career choice

Extent of agreement	Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
	Fq	%age	Fq	%age	Fq	%age
Academic Setting	28	23.3	40	33.3	52	43.3
Technical Schools	68	56.7	28	23.3	24	20.0
Course entry level	28	23.3	36	30.0	56	46.7
Job Openings	64	53.3	36	30.0	20	16.7
Job placements	44	36.7	16	13.3	60	50.0
Industry conducts	20	16.7	28	23.3	72	60.0
Job Shadowing	16	13.3	8	6.7	96	80.0
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>32.9</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>23.8</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>45.2</b>

Source: Data analysis

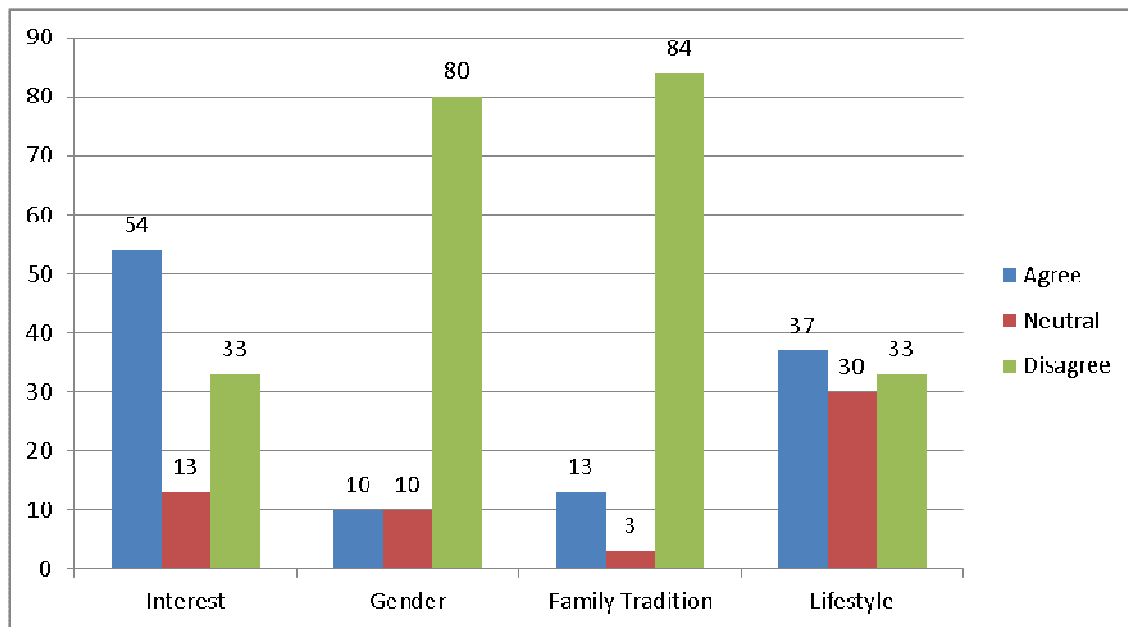


Figure 1: Personal factors that influence career choice

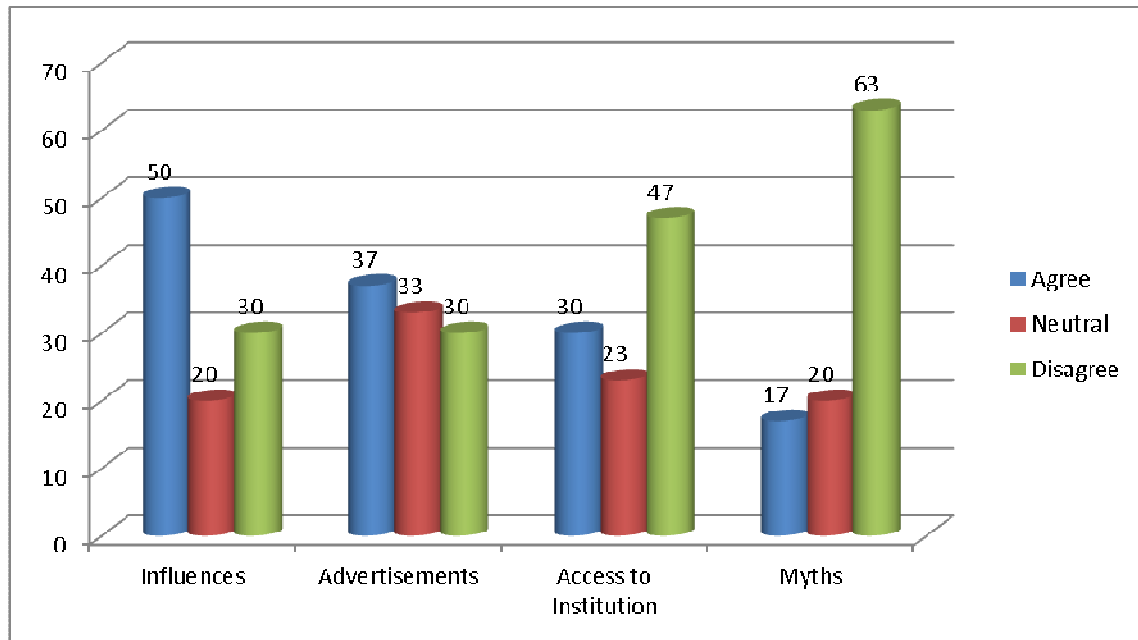


Figure 2: Environmental factors that influence career choice

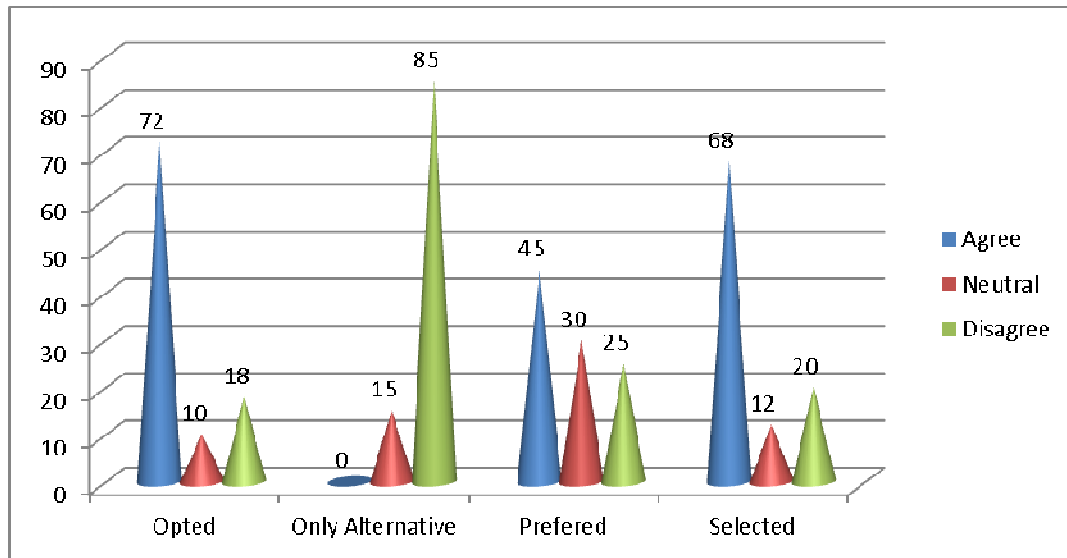


Figure 3: Choice decision factors