

# AN ASSESSMENT OF CONSUMER INTERESTS IN THE SETTING OF CATERING

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## Introduction

The catering industry is a growing business in the United States. The latest statistics from the United States Department of Commerce (2015) reports 10,265 establishments and \$7,543,000 in sales in 2012. In comparison, in 1997 there were 6,478 establishments with \$3,469,000 in sales. More than ever, catering customers are looking for a truly unique experience, often making food one of the main focuses of the event. Destination-specific menus have risen in popularity (Abers, 2017), along with creative snacks and memorable food presentation such as doughnut walls (Weers, 2018). Catering companies must demonstrate a commitment to adapting to the changing desires of consumers within the catering industry.

Catering by Concordia is a catering business based out of Moorhead Minnesota, directly affiliated with Concordia College. In order to remain competitive in an ever changing industry, a needs assessment was conducted in the form of an electronic survey to determine consumers' desires for various menu items to be added to the Catering by Concordia menu.

## Materials and Methods

Procedures were approved by the Concordia College Institutional Review Board.

An electronic survey was distributed to current Concordia employees, alumni, and past customers of Catering by Concordia.

Survey questions were as follows:

- Demographics (age, gender)
- Have you been a customer of Catering by Concordia in the past?
- What events have you had catered in the past?
- What events would you be most likely to cater in the future?
- Would you most likely utilize Catering by Concordia for an on-campus or off-campus event?
- Using a five-variable scale (definitely NOT interested, probably NOT interested, might or might not be interested, probably interested, and definitely interested), rank your interest in the following menu items:
  - Sweet foods
    - Milk and cookie bar; build your own trail mix; popcorn bar; donut/pretzel/bagel wall; energy breakfast; fondue station
  - Savory foods
    - Oyster bar, seafood station, ancient grains or noodle bowls, mashed potato bar, slider station, fondue station, poutine
  - Global food themes
    - Middle Eastern, Scandinavian, Greek, Spanish, African, Asian, French, Cajun, Indian, German
    - List specific corresponding food items of interest
  - Beverage items
    - Sparkling wine, Kombucha, mimosas, sangria

Participants were given an opportunity to provide their email address to be entered into a drawing to win a dessert package from Catering by Concordia, and were asked to indicate if they would like to receive more information from Catering by Concordia.



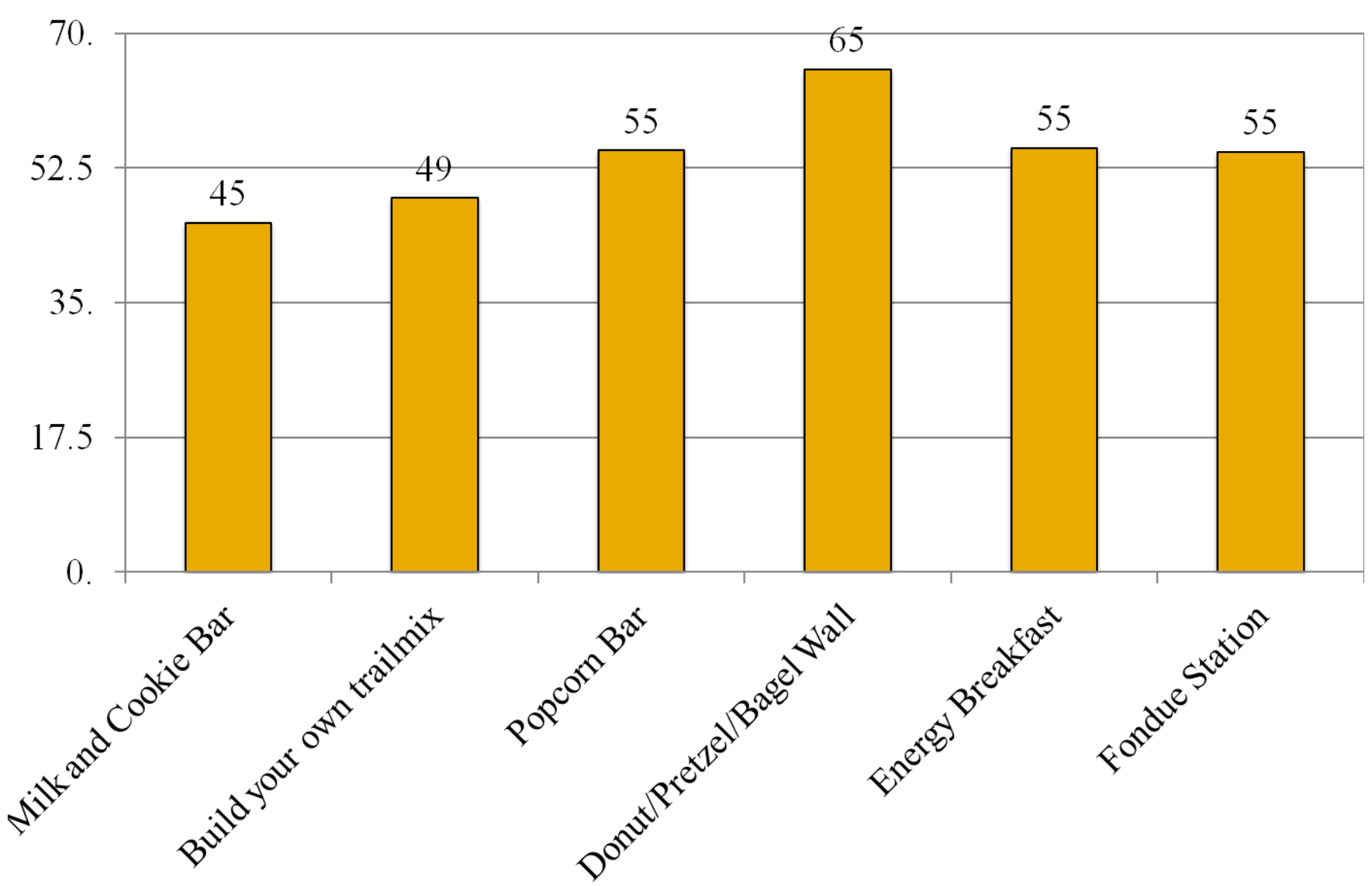
## Results

- 736 surveys were collected and analyzed
- Majority (77.7%) of participants identified as female
- Age ranged from 21 to 88 years

### Sweet Food Items

- Majority of participants expressed interest in the donut/pretzel/bagel wall, popcorn bar, energy breakfast, and fondue station (**Figure 1**)

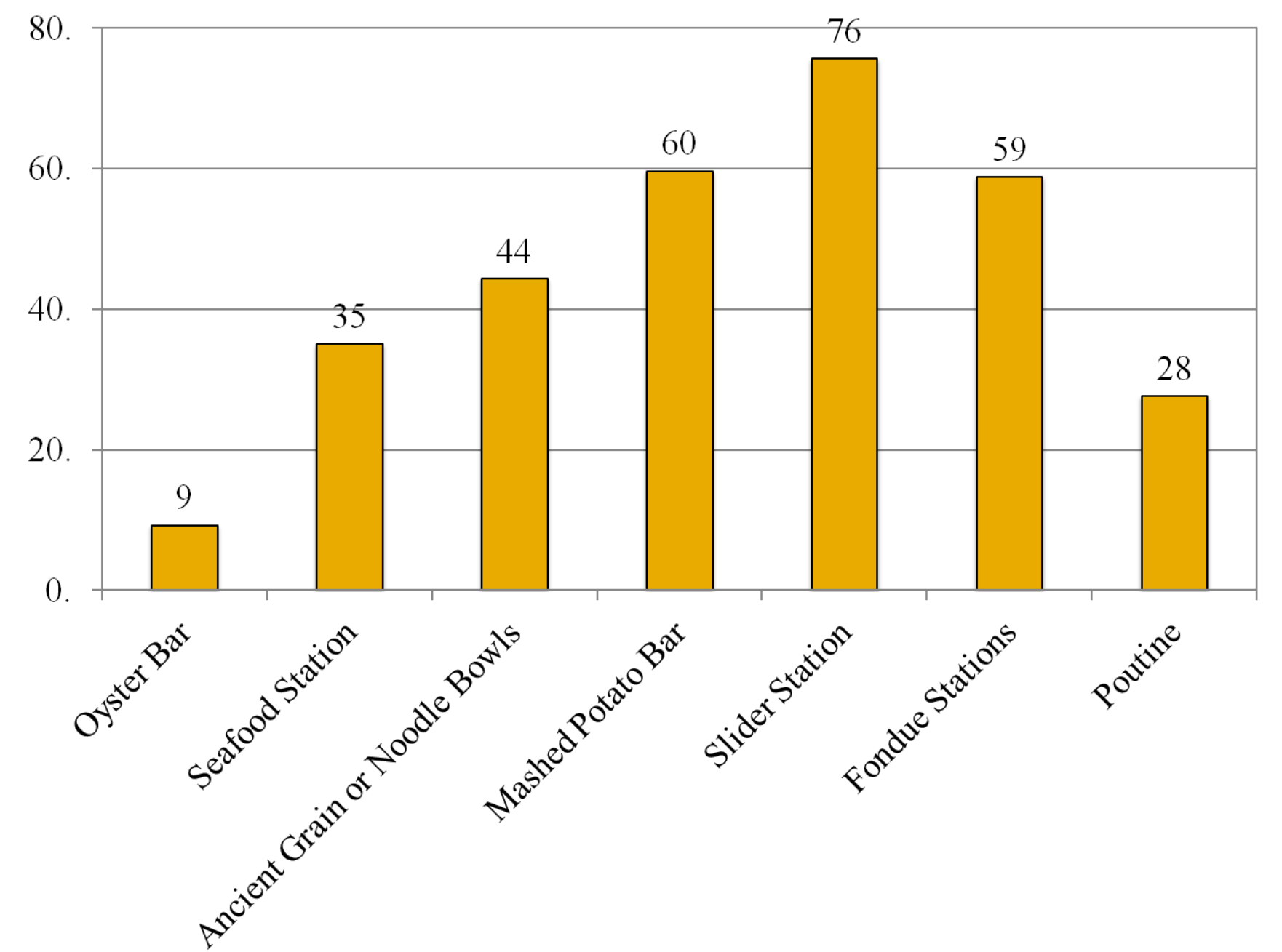
**Figure 1.** "Probably Interested" or "Definitely Interested" in Sweet Food Items



### Savory Food Items

- Over 70% of respondents indicated they were probably interested or definitely interested in the slider station, while close to 60% expressed interest in the mashed potato bar and fondue station
- When asked about interest in an oyster bar, over 80% reported they were probably NOT interested or definitely NOT interested (**Figure 2**)

**Figure 2.** "Probably Interested" or "Definitely Interested" in Savory Food Items



## Results

When asked what types of events they would most likely be interested to have catered in the future, responses were as follows:

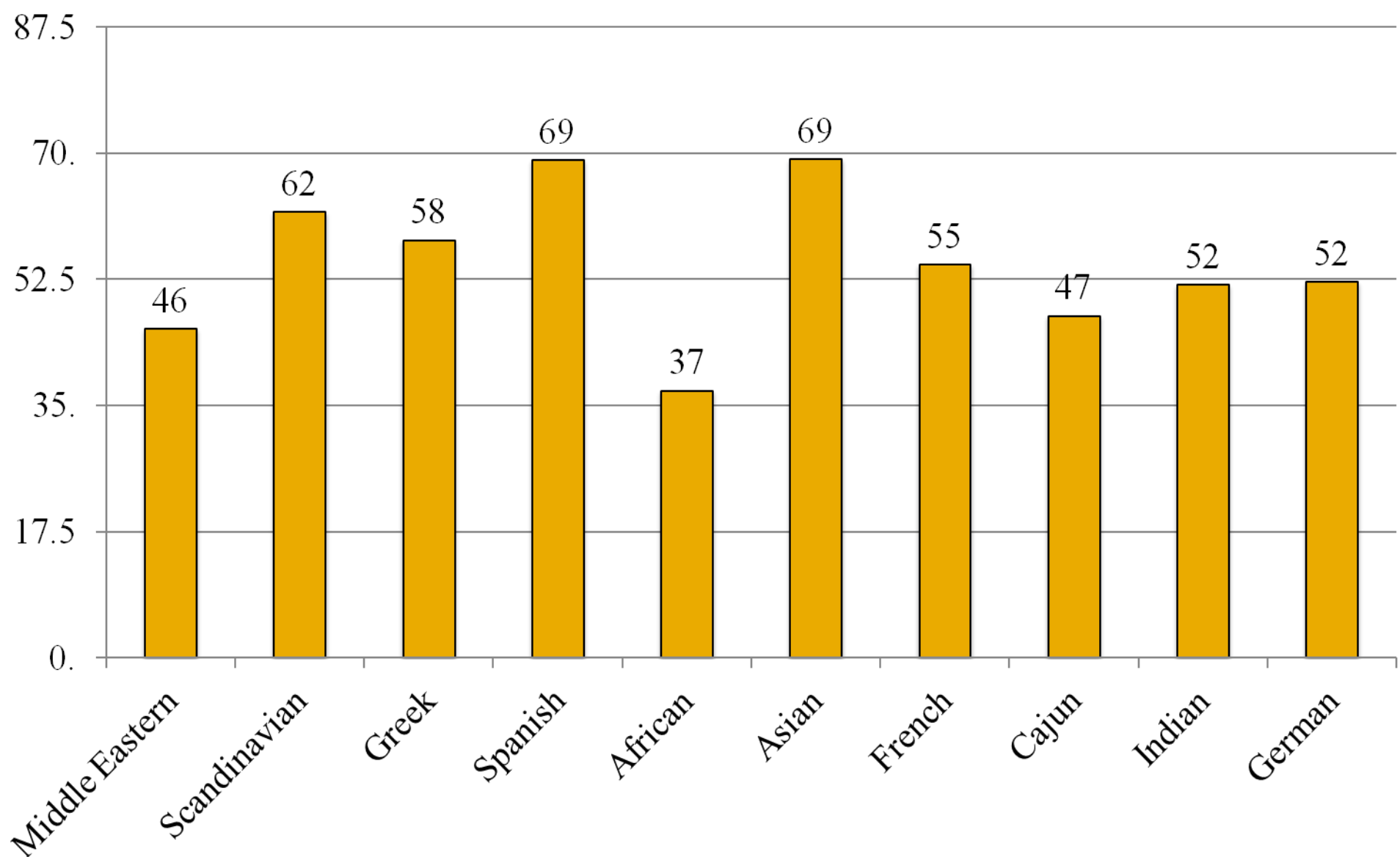
- Business event (n = 320)
- Pick up/take home orders (n = 292)
- Buffet (n = 290)
- Refreshment break (n = 246)
- Plated service (n = 216)
- Cocktail reception (n = 194)
- Picnic (n = 114)
- Beer and wine service (n = 71)

### Global Food Theme Items

- Asian and Spanish global food themes received the most interest, followed closely by Scandinavian

- Participants' suggestions for specific food items included:
  - Asian: egg rolls, lo mien, sushi, and stir fry
  - Spanish: paella, tapas, and Iberian cured meats
  - Scandinavian: lefse and Swedish meatballs
  - Greek: gyros, olives, Greek salad, and baklava (**Figure 3**)

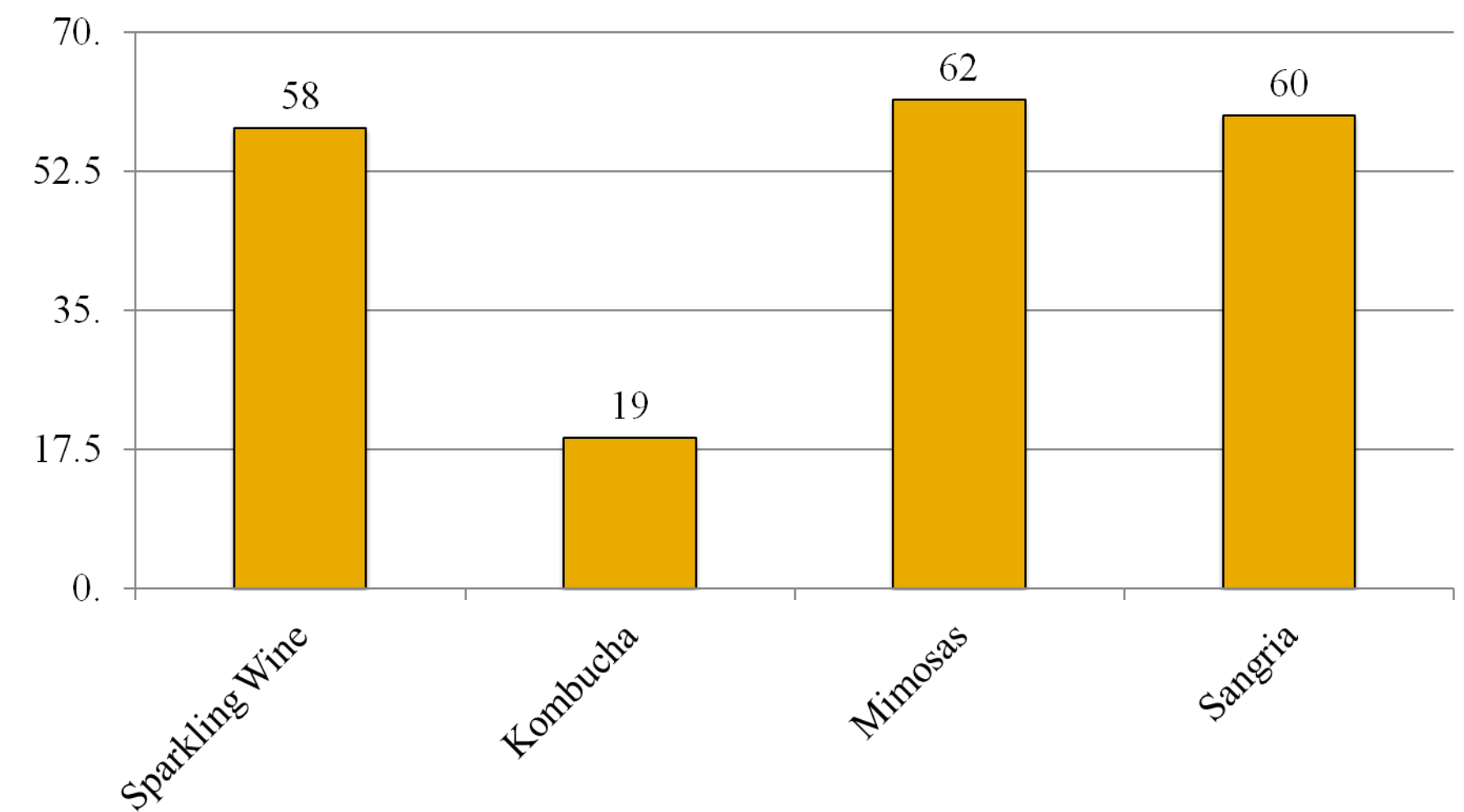
**Figure 3.** "Probably Interested" or "Definitely Interested" in Global Food Themes



### Beverage Items

- Mimosas and sangria received the highest interest ratings, followed closely by sparkling wine
- When asked about interest in Kombucha being served as a beverage item, the majority of participants responded they were probably NOT interested or definitely NOT interested (**Figure 4**)

**Figure 4.** "Probably Interested" or "Definitely Interested" in Beverage Items



## Discussion and Conclusions

- The proposed menu items with the highest percent of interest were donut/pretzel/bagel wall, slider station, Asian theme, Spanish theme, and mimosas
- Various menu items included in the needs assessment did not produce highly distinguishable results to suggest the addition of certain menu items rather than others
- Further investigation must be completed to determine the overall feasibility of incorporating each of these menu items onto the catering menu
- Feasibility factors include price of products, ease of obtaining required ingredients or equipment, whether or not the Catering by Concordia database already contains components of a particular item and/or if a menu item will need to be tested and developed

## References

Abers, D. (2017, December 28). 2018 Event catering trends: what's hot and what's not. Retrieved November 19, 2018, from <https://www.itagroup.com/insights/event-catering-trends>

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Weers, S. (2018). 2019 Wedding food trends to watch. Retrieved November 19, 2018, from <https://www.weddingwire.com/wedding-ideas/wedding-food-trends-to-watch>

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## For further information

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