

Effects of COVID 19 pandemic on restaurant and hotel customers' sentiments towards dining out, traveling to a destination and staying at hotels

Dogan Gursoy¹, Christina G. Chi¹ and Oscar Hengxuan Chi¹

¹ Washington State University, Carson College of Business, School of Hospitality Business Management, Pullman, WA, USA

E-mail: dgursoy@wsu.edu

Received: December 15, 2020

Accepted for publication: December 23, 2020

Published: January 1, 2021

Abstract

This study provides a summary of American restaurant and hotel customers' sentiments towards dining in at sit-down restaurant and staying at hotels based on a monthly study that tracks restaurant and hotel customers' sentiments since May 2020. Data for this specific study were collected between December 1 and December 10, 2020. Findings suggest that consumers express a significantly lower likelihood to patronize sit-down restaurants, travel to a destination and stay at a hotel in the near future compared to those who responded the survey during the previous month. Findings also suggest that a large portion of consumers are willing to pay more at sit-down restaurants and hotels that implement increased safety precautions. Findings also suggest that a large portion of consumers are likely to accept the use of various technologies, such as service robots, contactless payment (i.e., apple pay or contactless bankcards), digital menus that can be viewed on personal mobile devices via QR codes, keyless entry, etc., in service delivery at sit down restaurants and hotels in order to minimize human-to-human contact.

Keywords: COVID 19; hospitality; hotel; restaurant; sentiment; travel; tourism; tourist; consumer; destination

1. Introduction

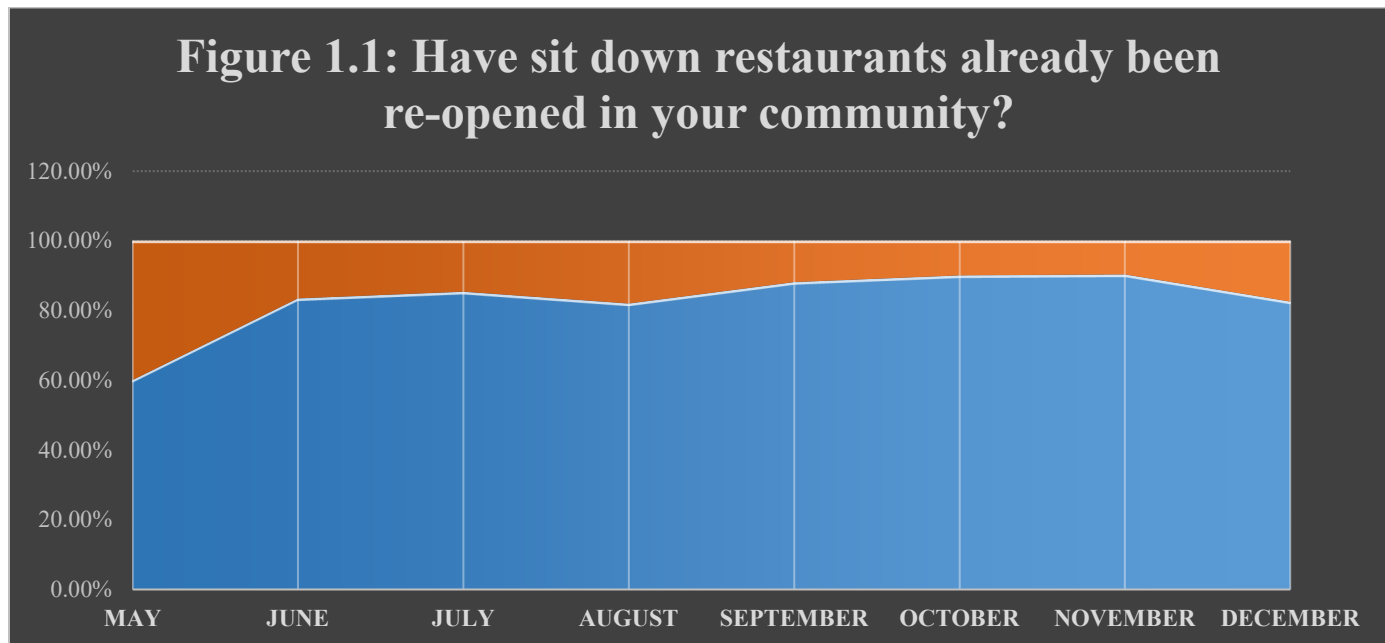
Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the US economy was shut down almost overnight (Gursoy & Chi, 2020). The pandemic has confronted the restaurant and hotel industry with an unprecedented challenge. Almost all restaurants were asked to limit their operations to only take-outs. Restrictions placed on travel and stay-at-home orders issued by the governors of many states resulted in sharp decreases in hotel occupancies and revenues (UNWTO, 2020). While most of the hotels and restaurants have already reopened business, they are operating at a significantly reduced capacity (Bartik et al., 2020). In most states, restrictions have been eased significantly, for example, allow dine-in restaurants to reopen at a reduced capacity with strict social distancing guidelines. Now the big question remains: what are the customers' sentiments about patronizing a restaurant or a hotel in the time of coronavirus? Are they ready to return?

This study presents the findings of a monthly study that investigates American consumers' sentiments towards re-patronizing hotels and sit-down restaurants in the time of coronavirus, based on the data collected from 809 American consumers between December 1 and December 10, 2020.

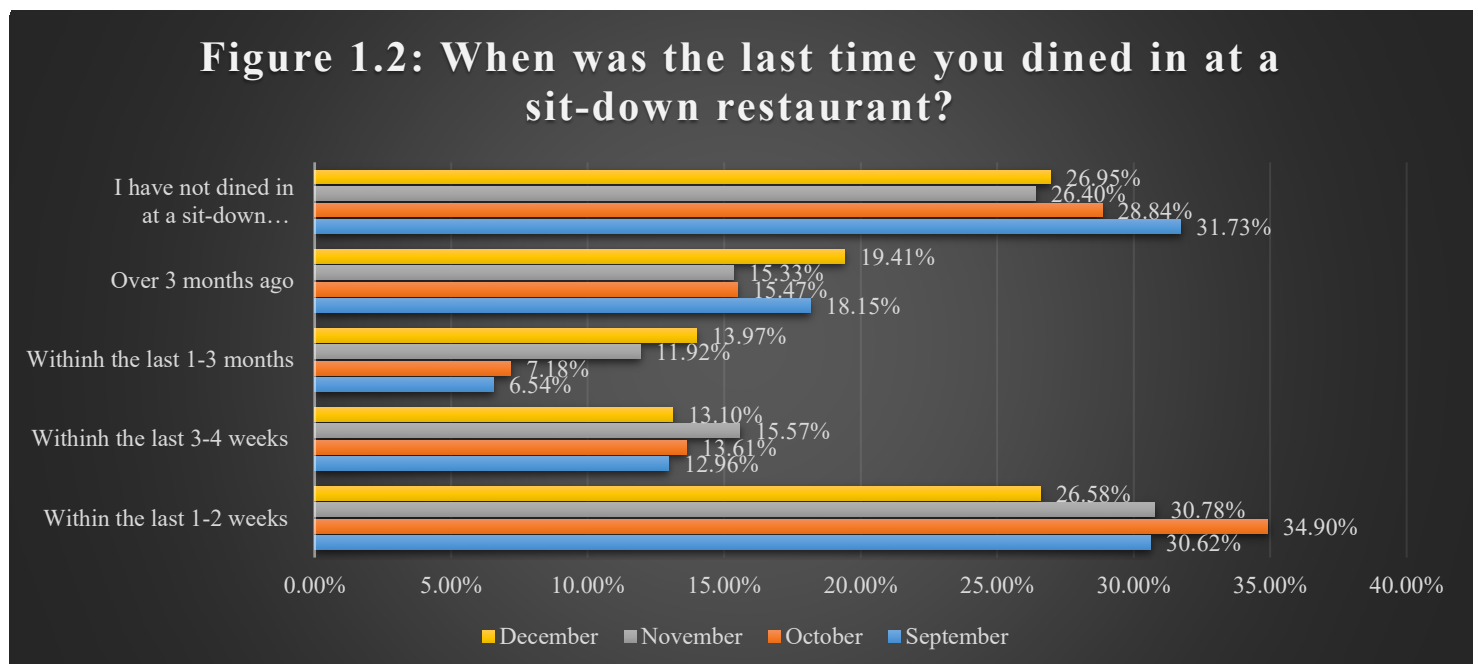
2. Customers' Sentiments towards Dine-in Restaurants

1.1: Have sit down restaurants already been re-opened in your community?

As presented in Figure 1.1, 82.57 percent of respondents indicated that restaurants have already been re-opened in their communities.

**1.2: Last time they dined in at a sit-down restaurant**

As presented in Figure 1.2, most respondents indicated that they dined in at a sit-down restaurant at least one since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

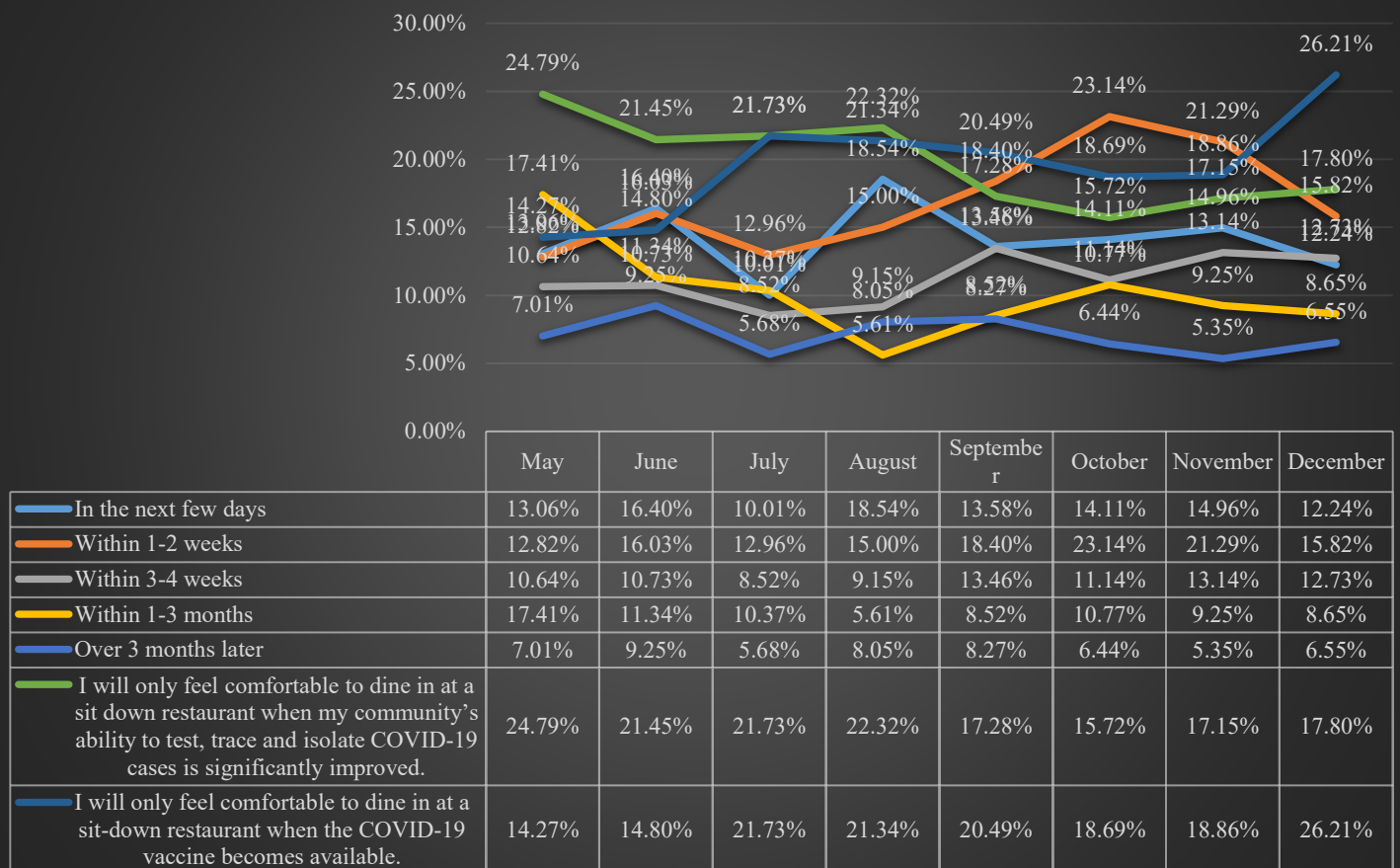


- Around 40 percent of respondents indicated that they dined in at a sit-down restaurant once or more during the previous month.
- Around 19 percent of respondents indicated that they dined in at a sit-down restaurant over 3 months ago.
- Around 27 percent of the respondents have not dined in at a sit-down restaurant since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3: Intentions to dine in at a sit-down restaurant

As presented in Figure 1.3, even though the percentage of customers who indicated that they are willing to dine in at a sit-down restaurant continues to increase, findings still suggest that a large portion of individuals are not willing to dine in at a sit-down restaurant. While 40.79 percent indicated that they are planning on dining in at a sit-down restaurant within the next 30 days, a large portion of the customers would delay dining out until they feel more comfortable. Around 9 percent (8.65%) said that they would wait for around 1-3 months and 6.55 percent indicated that they would wait even longer (over 3 months).

Figure 1.3: Intentions to dine in at a sit-down restaurant



Around 18 percent of respondents indicated that they will only feel comfortable to dine in at a sit-down restaurant when their communities' ability to test, trace and isolate COVID-19 cases is significantly improved. Percentage of individuals who are not willing to dine in at a sit-down restaurant until their communities are able to test, trace and isolate COVID-19 is increased by 3.79 percent compared to the previous month. Another 26.21 percent indicated that they will only feel comfortable to dine in at a sit-down restaurant when the COVID-19 vaccine becomes available. Percentage of consumers who indicated that they would only feel comfortable to dine in at a sit-down restaurant when the COVID-19 vaccine becomes available is increased by 38.97 percent compared to the previous month.

Consumers who responded to the survey this month indicated a significantly lower (17.41 percent lower) likelihood to patronize sit-down restaurants within the next 30 days compared to those who responded the survey during the previous month. These findings indicate that number of consumers who is willing to dine out at a sit-down restaurant is decreasing due to increasing infection rates.

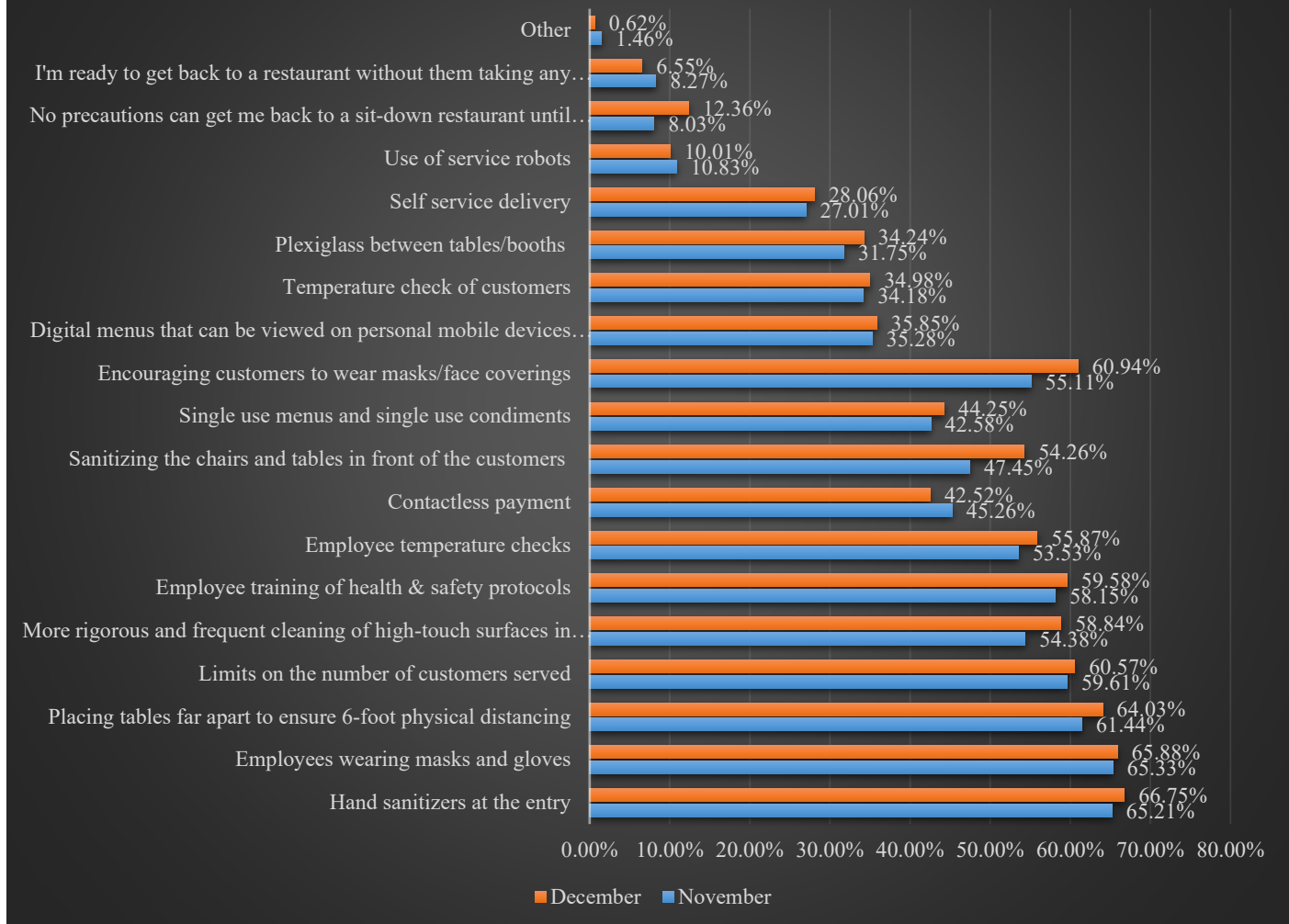
1.4: What safety precautions do you expect a restaurant to take during COVID-19?

Customers were asked to indicate all safety precautions they expect to take place at dine-in restaurants during COVID-19 pandemic. As presented in Figure 1.4, around 93 percent of customers expect restaurants to take some safety precautions. Visible sanitizing efforts (such as hand sanitizers at the entry, more rigorous and frequent cleaning of high-touch surfaces in common areas, sanitizing the chairs and tables in front of the customers), employees wearing masks and gloves, implementing social distancing, limiting the number of customers served, employee temperature checks, and employee training of health and safety protocols are the most important safety precautions customers expect from a restaurant.

While masks wearing for both employees and customers are fairly high on the list, there was a significant increase in the percentage of customers who expect other customers to wear a mask. Contactless payment, and single use menus and single use condiments are also highly desired. It is also interesting to see that while customers expect employees to undergo temperature check, they expect less for themselves to do so. There was a significant increase in the expectation that all customers should wear a facemask, tables and chairs should be sanitized in front of customers, more rigorous and frequent cleaning of high-touch surfaces in common areas, plexiglas between tables, and hand sanitizers should be provided.

Data indicated a significant shift in customers' safety precautions expectations from businesses and other customers. While a significantly larger percentage of customers expect other customers to take more safety precautions, a significantly larger percentage of customers expect restaurants to ensure the safety of their customers by providing hand sanitizers, making employees to wear face masks and gloves, limiting the number of customers served and ensuring 6-foot physical distancing at restaurants

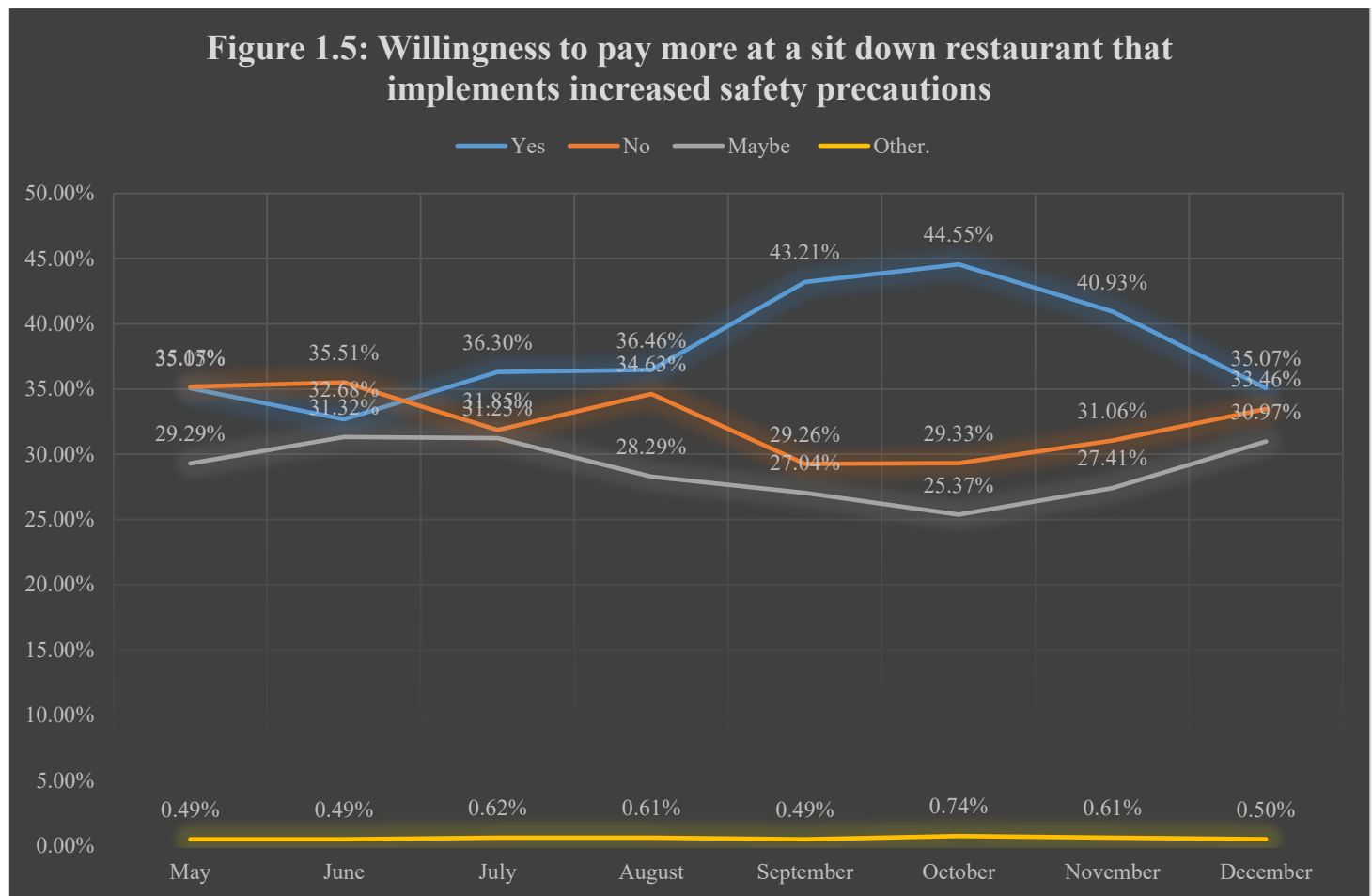
Figure 1.4: What safety precautions do you expect a restaurant to take in the COVID-19 environment?



Note: Respondents were asked to indicate all safety precautions they expect to take at dine-in restaurants during COVID-19.

1.5: Willingness to pay more at a sit-down restaurant that implements increased safety precautions

Customers were asked to indicate if they are willing to pay more at sit down restaurants that implement increased safety precautions. As presented in Figure 1.5, 35.07 percent indicated that they are willing to pay more at sit down restaurants that implement increased safety precautions. However, another 33.46 percent indicated that they are not willing to pay more.

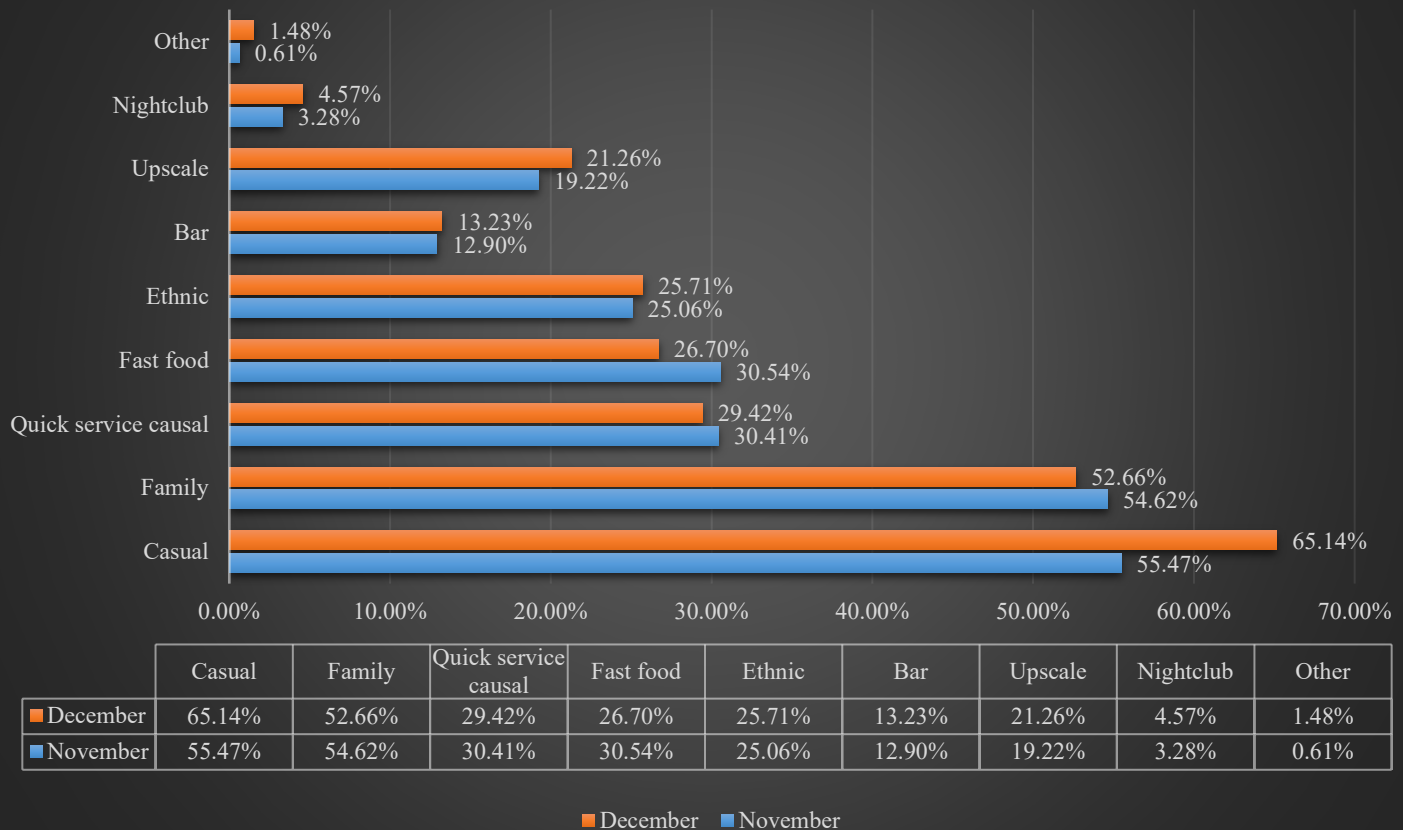


The percentage of customers who are willing to pay more at sit down restaurants that implement increased safety precautions decreased significantly (by 14.32 percent) this month while the percentage of customers who are not willing to pay more at sit down restaurants that implement increased safety precautions is increased by 7.73 percent compared to those who responded the survey during the previous month.

1.6: What type of restaurant would you like to enjoy when you are ready to dine out?

Customers were asked to indicate the top two restaurant-types they would like to dine in when they have the opportunity to dine out at a sit-down restaurant. As presented in Figure 1.6, restaurants that offer casual dining (65.14%) experiences were the first choice, followed by family style restaurants (52.66%) and fast-food restaurants (29.42%). A lower percentage of customers indicated an intention to visit ethnic restaurants, upscale restaurants, bars and nightclubs. The demand for family, quick service casual and fast-food restaurants decreased while the demand for casual, ethnic and upscale restaurants increased compared to the demand levels reported previous month.

Figure 1.6: What type of restaurant would you like to enjoy when you are ready to dine out?

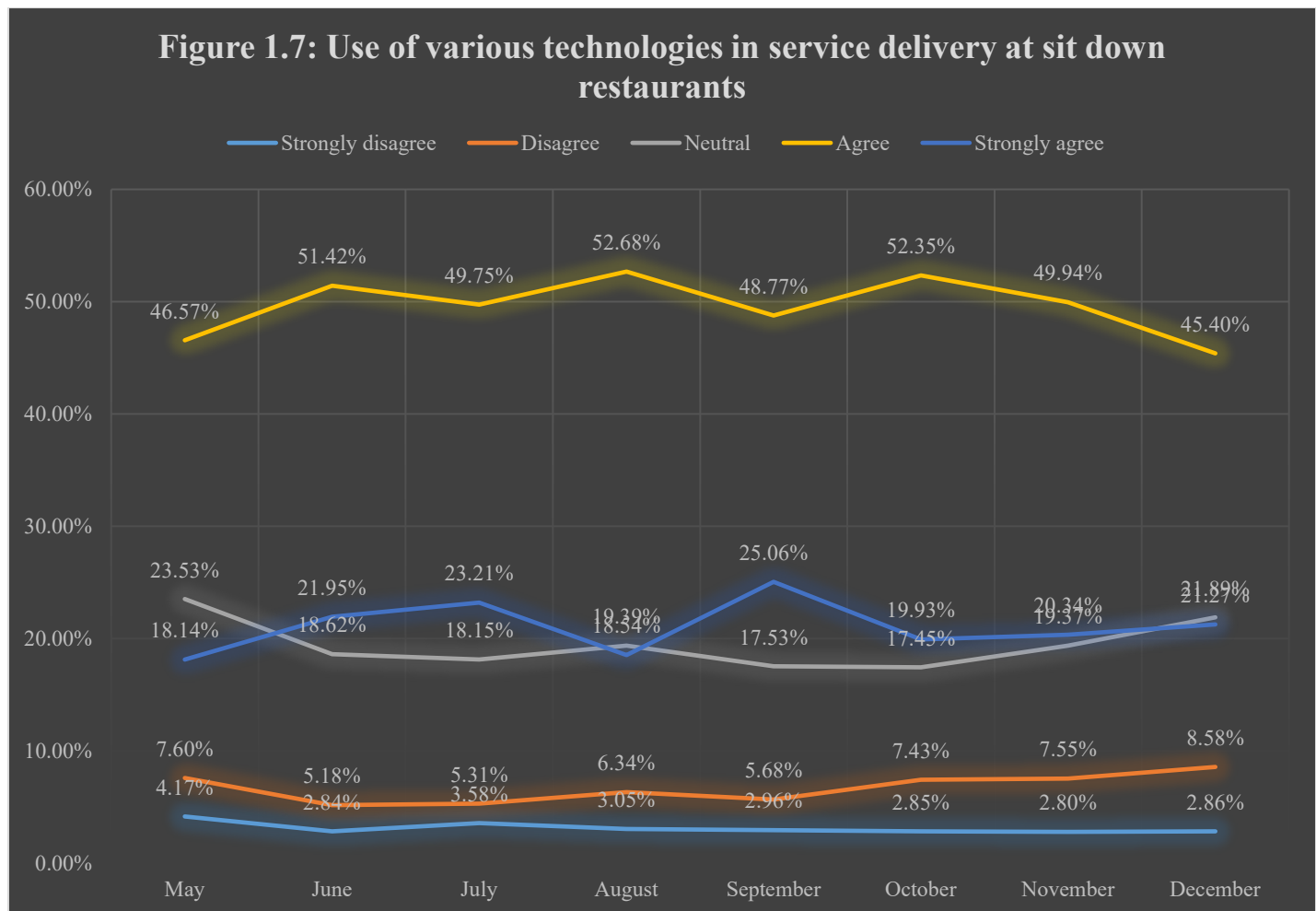


Note: Respondents were asked to indicate their top 2 choices.

1.7: Use of various technologies in service delivery at sit down restaurants

Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement/disagreement with the statement that the use of various technologies in service delivery at sit down restaurants will be necessary in the during COVID-19 environment in order to minimize human-to-human contact (Examples: service robots, contactless payment such as Apply pay or contactless bank cards, digital menus that can be viewed on personal mobile devices via QR codes, etc.). As presented in Figure 1.7, a large portion of the respondents agreed (45.40%) or strongly agreed (21.27%) with the statement.

The percentage of customers who agreed/strongly agreed with the statement that the use of various technologies in service delivery at sit down restaurants will be necessary in the COVID-19 environment in order to minimize human-to-human contact is decreased by 5.14 percent compared to those who responded the survey previous month.



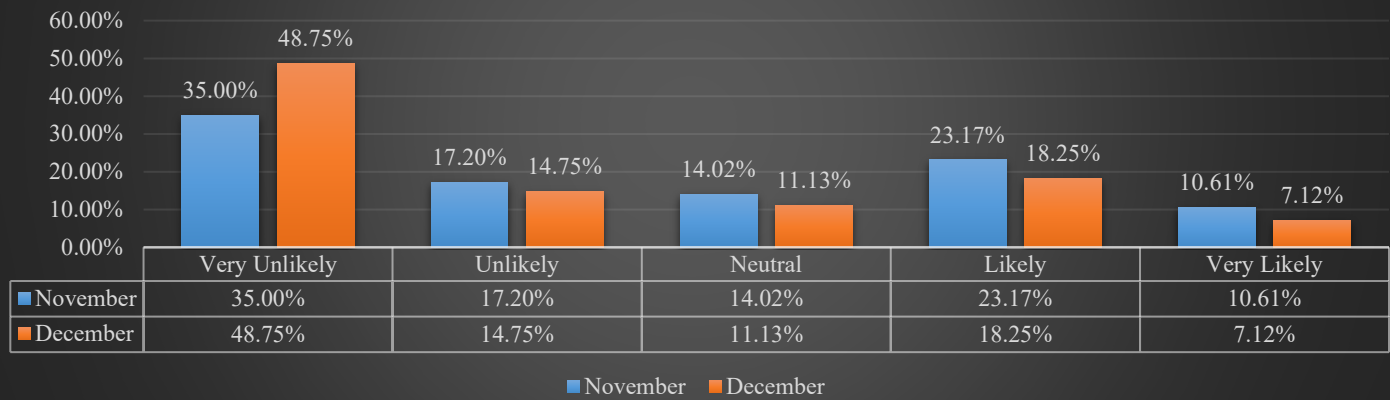
Part 2: Customers' sentiments towards traveling to a destination and staying at a hotel

2.1: How likely are you to travel to a destination and stay at a hotel late this month or next month?

As presented in Figure 2.1, a large portion of customers are not willing to travel to a destination and stay at a hotel any time soon. 63.50 percent indicated that even they are able to travel, it is very unlikely (48.75%) or unlikely (14.75%) for them to travel to a destination and stay at a hotel late this month or next month. 25.37 percent indicated that it is very likely (7.12%) or likely (18.25%) for them to travel to a destination and stay at a hotel late this month or next month.

Percentage of consumers who are willing to travel to a destination and stay at a hotel late this month or next month is 24.90 percent lower than customers' likelihood of traveling and staying at a hotel reported last month

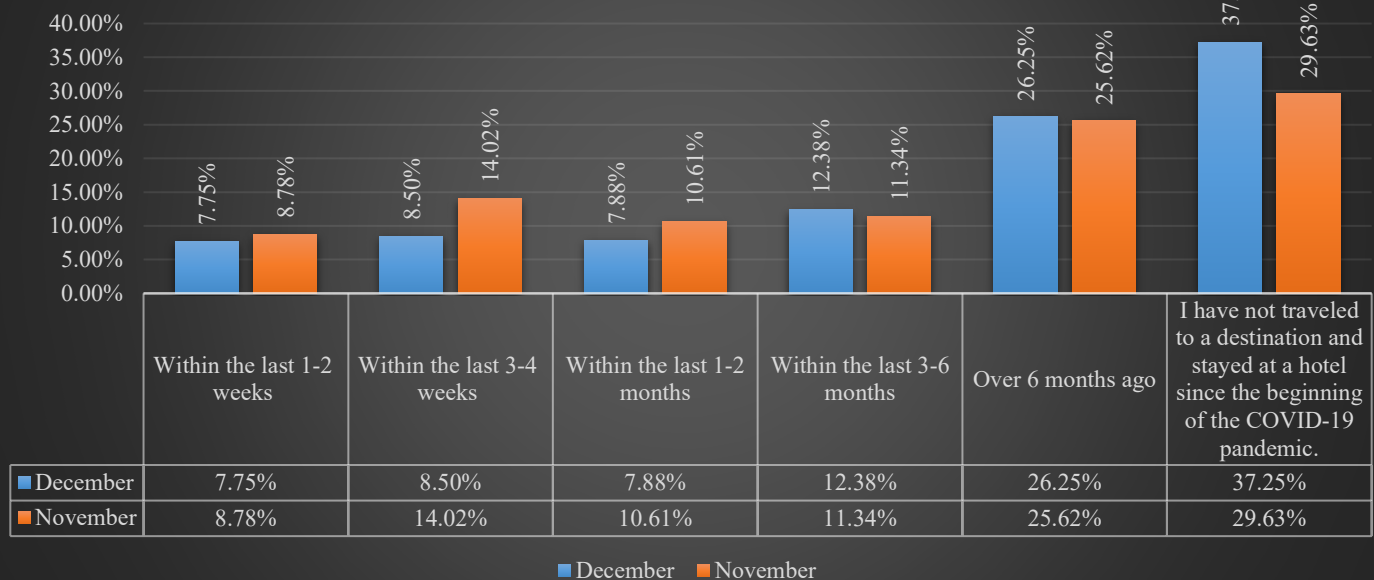
Figure 2.1: How likely are you to travel to a destination and stay at a hotel late this month or next month?



2.2: When was the last time you traveled to a destination and stayed at a hotel?

As presented in Figure 2.2, 24.13 percent of respondents traveled to a destination and stayed at a hotel within the last 2 months while only 12.38 percent indicated that they traveled to a destination and stayed at a hotel within the last 3-6 months. Around three quarters of the respondents (37.25%) indicated that they have not traveled to a destination and stayed at a hotel since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2.2: When was the last time you traveled to a destination and stayed at a hotel?



2.3: When are you willing to travel to a destination and stay at a hotel?

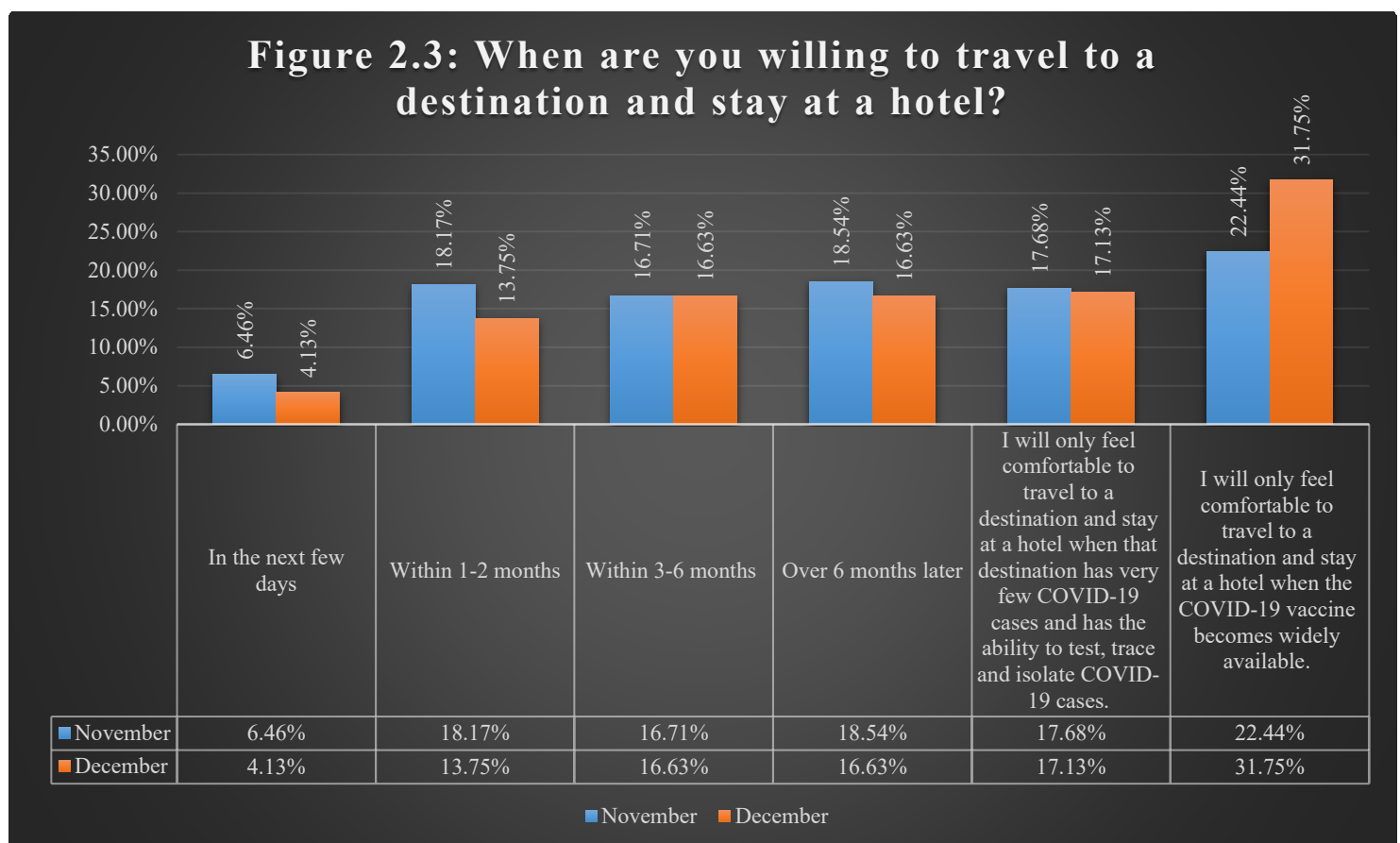
As presented in Figure 2.3, most customers are not willing to jump right into long-haul traveling and stay at a hotel. Only 4.13 percent indicated that they would do so immediately.

A large portion of customers would delay traveling to a destination and staying at a hotel until they feel more comfortable. 13.75 percent said that they would wait for around 1-2 months and 33.26 percent indicated that they would wait even longer (> 3 months).

Around 17 percent (17.13%) indicated that they will only feel comfortable to travel to a destination and stay at a hotel when the destination's ability to test, trace and isolate COVID-19 cases is significantly improved, which is decreased by 3.11 percent compared to the last month.

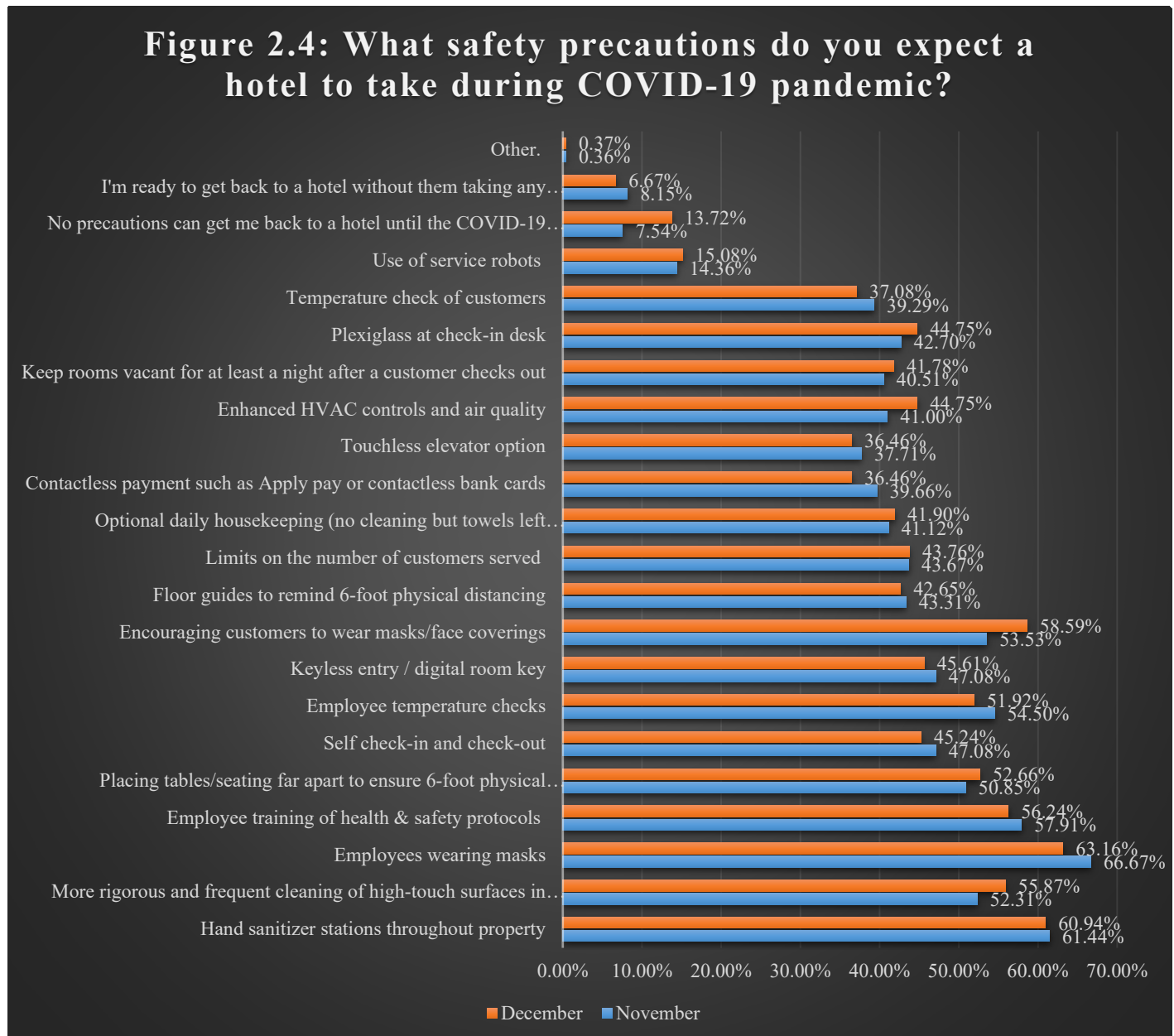
Around 32 percent (31.75%) indicated that they will only feel comfortable to travel to a destination and stay at a hotel when the COVID-19 vaccine becomes available, which is increased by 41.49 percent compared to the last month.

Consumers who responded to the survey this month indicated a significantly lower likelihood to travel to a destination compared to the last month



2.4: What safety precautions do you expect a hotel to take during COVID-19 pandemic?

Customers were asked to indicate all safety precautions they expect a hotel to take during COVID-19 pandemic. Around 93 percent of customers indicated that they expect hotels to take some safety precautions. As presented in Figure 2.4, only a small percentage (6.67%) stated that they were ready to get back to staying at hotels without them taking any additional safety precautions.



Note: Respondents were asked to indicate all of the safety precautions they expect a hotel to take during COVID-19.

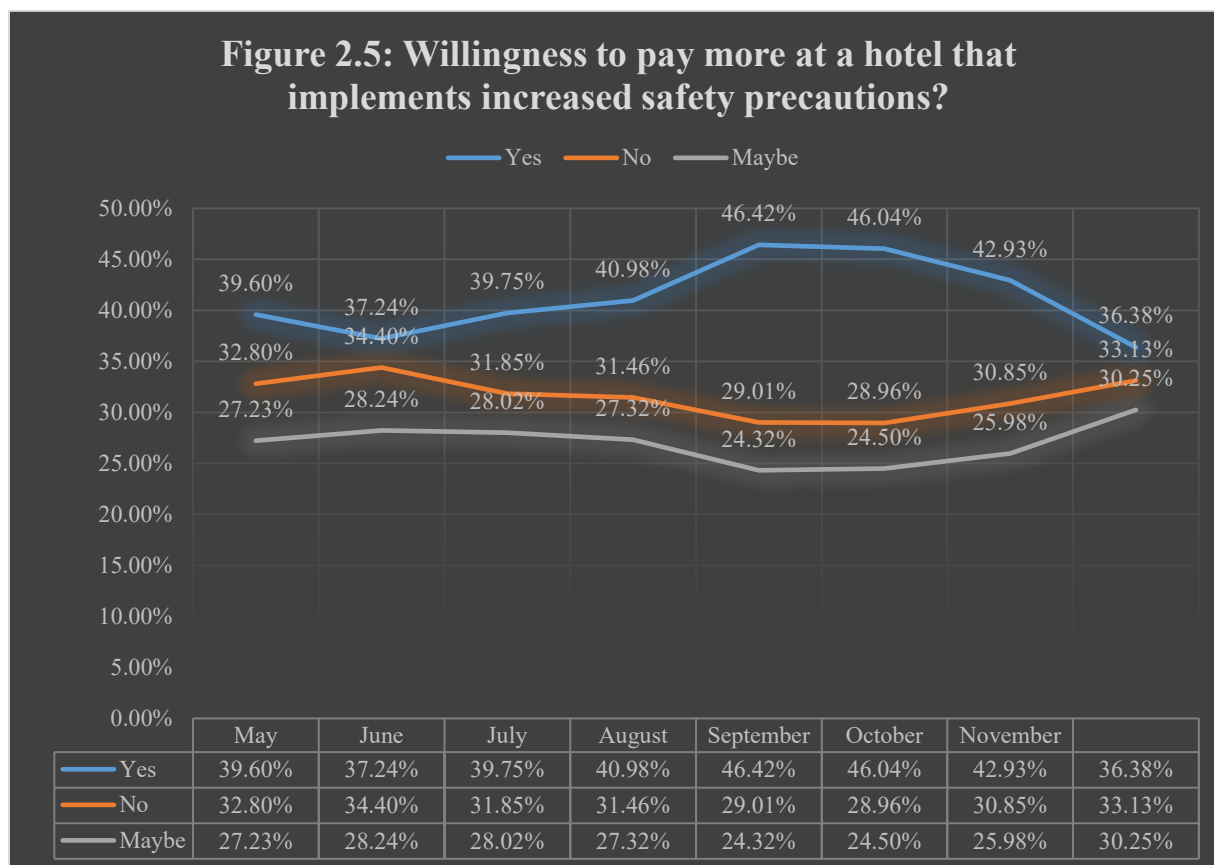
Visible sanitizing efforts (such as hand sanitizer stations throughout the property, more rigorous and frequent cleaning of high-touch surfaces in common areas), employees wearing masks, encouraging customers to wear

masks employee temperature check, and employee training of health & safety protocols are the most important safety precautions they expect from a hotel.

As presented in Figure 2.4, physical distancing efforts are highly valued. Masks wearing for both employees and customers are also highly expected. Various technology solutions that minimize human contact are highly desired, such as self check-in/check-out and keyless entry. It is also interesting to see that while customers expect employees to undergo temperature check, they expect less for themselves to do so.

2.5: Willingness to pay more at a hotel that implements increased safety precautions

Consumers were asked to indicate if they are willing to pay more at hotels that that implement increased safety precautions. As presented in Figure 2.5, about 36 percent (36.38%) indicated that they are willing to pay more while 33.13 percent expects hotels to implement increased safety precautions without additional cost to customers.



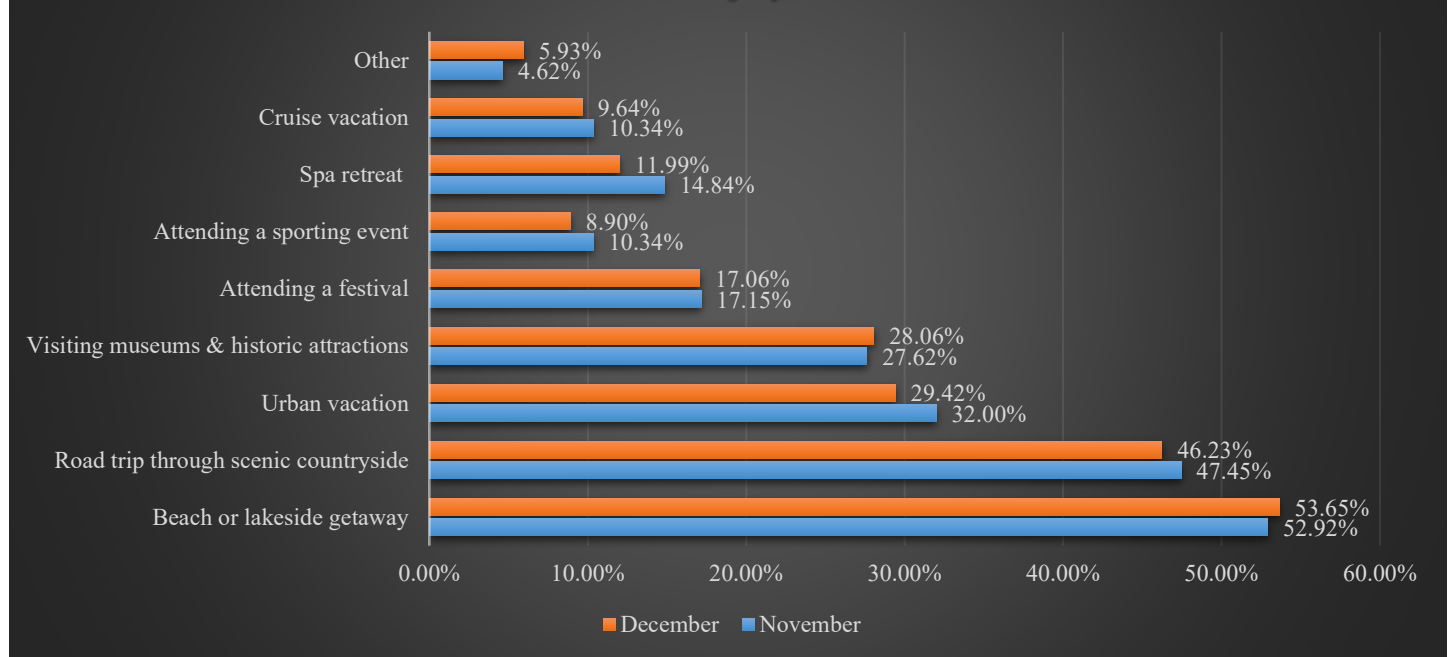
The percentage of customers who are willing to pay more at hotels that implement increased safety precautions has been decreasing over the past several months while the percentage of customers who are not willing to pay more at hotels that implement increased safety precautions has been increasing.

2.6: When you feel comfortable to travel, what type of travel experience would you like to enjoy first?

Consumers were asked to indicate the top two travel experiences they would like to enjoy first once they feel comfortable to travel. As presented in Figure 2.6, beach or lakeside getaways (53.65%) was the first travel

experience consumers would like to enjoy, followed by road trips through scenic countryside (46.23%), urban vacations (29.42%), and visiting museums and historical sites (28.06%). Attending a festival (17.06%), spa retreat (11.99%), attending a sporting event (8.90%), and cruise vacation (9.64) were the least desired experiences.

Figure 2.6: What type of travel experience would you like to enjoy first?



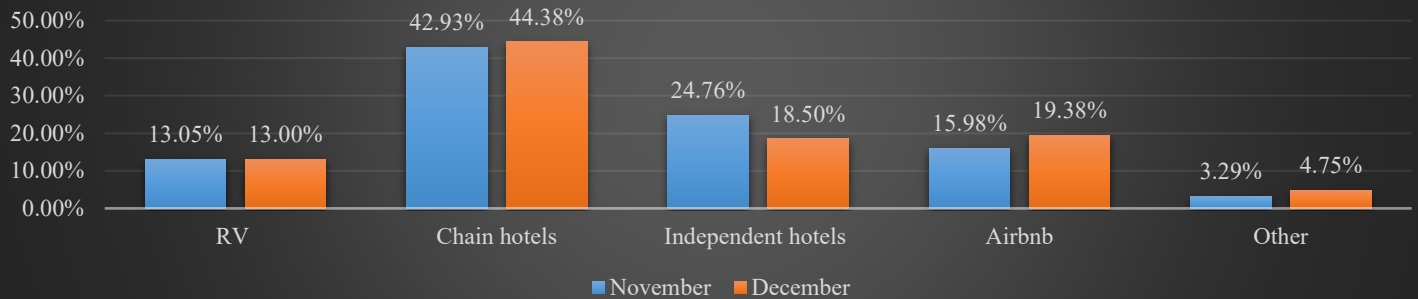
Note: Respondents were asked to indicate the top two travel experiences they would like to enjoy first once the shutdown is over.

2.7: In the Covid-19 environment, which type of lodging do you feel most comfortable to use when you travel to a destination?

Respondents were asked to indicate the type of lodging they would consider staying at during the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional hotel industry is found to be clearly winning here. Chain hotels (44.38%) are the most preferred type of lodging when they travel to a destination, followed by staying at an Airbnb (19.38%), independent hotels (18.50%) and RVs (13.00%).

While consumers' preference for chain hotels and Airbnb increased significantly, preference for independent hotels decreased, and the demand for RVs stayed almost the same compared to those who responded the survey previous month.

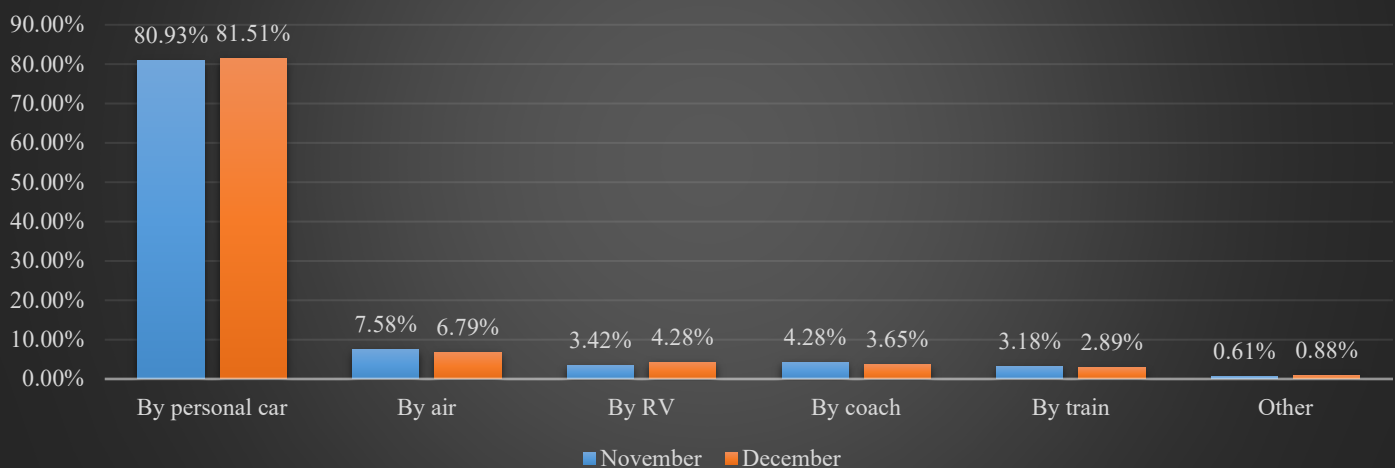
Figure 2.7: In the Covid-19 environment, which type of lodging do you feel most comfortable to use when you travel to a destination?



2.8: The mode of travel you feel most comfortable to use when you travel to a destination during the COVID-19 pandemic

Respondents were asked to indicate the mode of travel they feel most comfortable to use when traveling to a destination during the COVID-19 pandemic. As presented in Figure 2.8, traveling by personal car (81.51%) is the most preferred mode of transportation followed by air travel (6.79%). Demand for air travel is decreased by 10.42 percent compared to the previous month. Around 4 percent (4.28%) of the respondents indicated a preference for recreational vehicles (RV), 3.65 percent indicated a preference for coach and 2.89 percent for train.

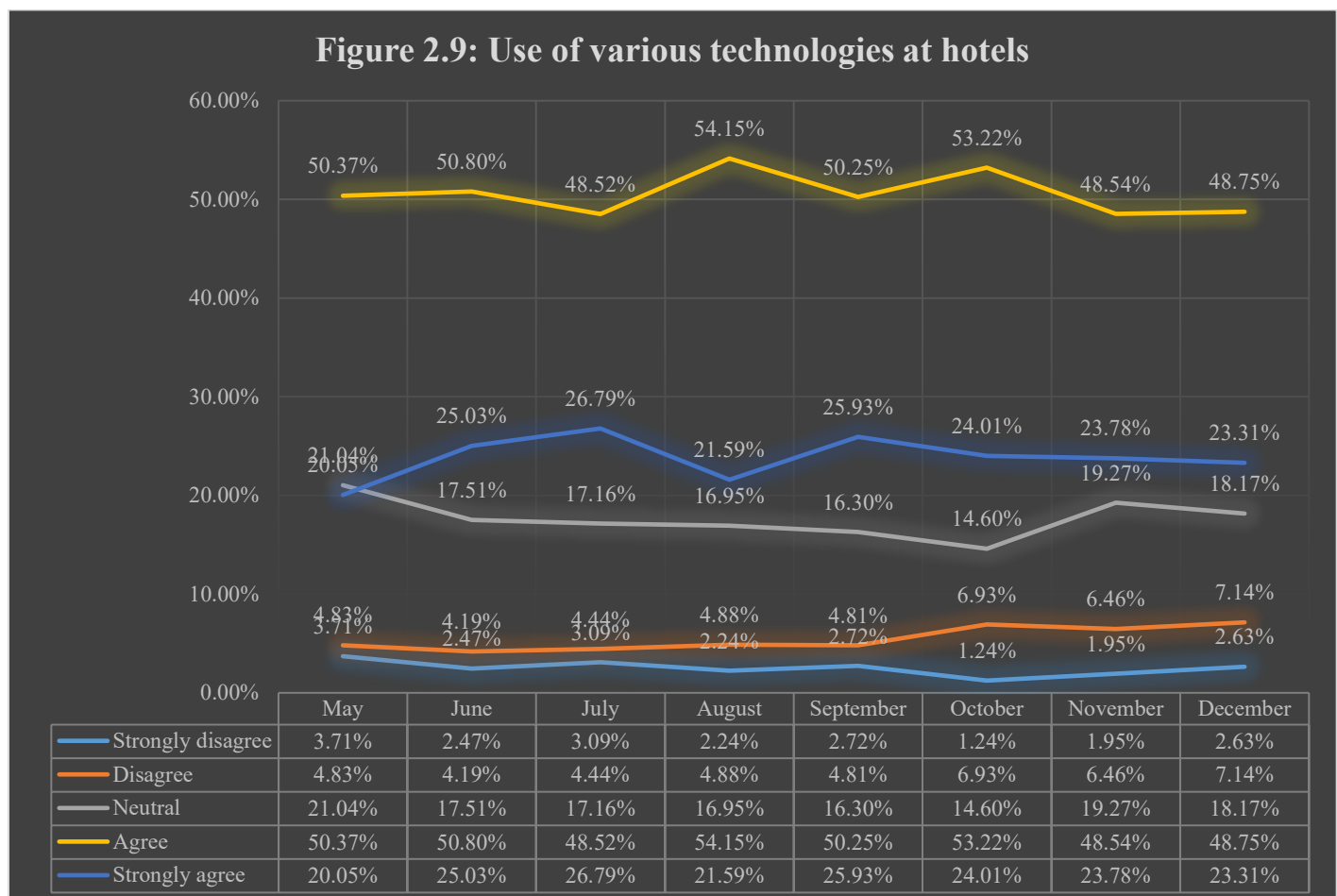
Figure 2.8: The mode of travel you feel most comfortable to use when travelling to a destination in the COVID-19 environment



2.9: Use of various technologies at hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic

Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement/disagreement with the use of various technologies at hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to minimize human-to-human contact. (Examples: service robots, contactless payment, keyless entry, touchless elevators, etc.). As presented in Figure 2.9, a large portion of respondents agreed (48.75%) or strongly agreed (23.31%) with the statement.

The percentage of customers who agreed/strongly agreed with the statement that the use of various technologies in service delivery at hotels will be necessary in the COVID-19 environment in order to minimize human-to-human contact stayed almost the same compared to those who responded the survey previous month.



3. Respondents' Socio-Demographic Profile

As presented in Table 3.1, most respondents were not in the high-risk category (71.77%). However, around 7 percent indicated that they were immune compromised. Around 5 percent were 65 years old or older and close to 2 percent indicated that they live in an assisted living facility.

Table 3.1 Are you in a high-risk category as defined by the

CDC?

I am not in a high-risk category	71.77%
Yes, I am 65 years or older	4.89%
Yes, I live in an Assisted Living Facility	1.63%
Yes, I am immune compromised	7.03%
Yes, I have an underlying health condition (such as: heart disease, lung disease or severe asthma, diabetes, obesity, kidney disease, liver disease)	14.68%

Respondents' demographic profile is presented in Table 3.2. As shown in the table below, most respondents were female and 35 years or older. A large portion of them were married. Around one-third of the respondents were located in the southern region of the United States of America.

Table 3.2 Respondents' demographic profile

Gender

Male	38.64%
Female	61.10%
Other	0.25%

Age

18-25	13.93%
26-34	29.49%
35-54	42.28%
55-64	9.91%
65 or over	4.39%

Marital Status

Single	36.14%
Married	46.68%
Divorced	5.90%
Widowed	1.88%
Live together	9.41%

Region of the USA respondents reside

Central Region	18.82%
Northeast Region	23.34%
Southern Region	36.89%
Western Region	20.95%

REFERENCES

- Gursoy, D., & Chi, C. G. (2020). Effects of COVID-19 pandemic on hospitality industry: review of the current situations and a research agenda. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 29(5), 527-529.
- Bartik, A. W. , Bertrand, M. , Cullen, Z. B. , Glaeser, E. L. , Luca, M. , & Stanton, C. T. (2020). *How are small businesses adjusting to COVID-19? Early evidence from a survey* (No. w26989). National Bureau of Economic Research.
- UNWTO . (2020). *UNWTO world tourism barometer* (Vol. 18, Issue 2, May 2020).