



AN ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN PERCEPTION TOWARDS FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS IN TRICHY CITY

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ABSTRACT

The current study is a small effort that looked at youngsters under the age of 18's preference for fast food in the study region of trichy, Tamil Nadu. The population for the study is made up of students from the four areas of trichy City's schools. The sample for the study was chosen using a systematic process to ensure the study's relevance and accuracy. The research's goals were finalized in light of the feedback from the pilot study. The students that responded were reached while they were in school thanks to the well planned interview schedule. The information gathered was examined from several angles about children's fast food eating patterns. The study commenced with identifying the factors influencing the children's taste for fast food and studied their inter - connection across the demographic characteristics of children after identifying their demographic and consumption behaviour pattern variables. The determining factors - important factors - were also identified. Furthermore, an in-depth analysis is conducted to examine the children's fast food preference level in relation to the 16 variables evaluated for the study. The effectiveness of fast food firms' marketing methods, as well as the impact of parents' role on their children's fast food preferences, were investigated in the final section of the analysis. The findings and conclusions derived from the analysis were thoroughly explained. Fast food corporations and restaurants will benefit greatly from this study since it will allow them to develop their marketing strategies, particularly rural fast food marketing strategies, based on the study's findings. However, the study's findings may serve as a wake-up call to parents, health officials, and the government to intervene and regulate in order to protect the health of young children, as excessive fast food consumption is detrimental to their health.

Keywords: Fast Food, Perception, Nutrition, Children, Eating Habit.

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INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of this study is to look into children's preferences towards fast food. Understanding the fast food sector and its related challenges from the perspective of children might aid in viewing the current study in the proper context. As a result, the current chapter is being attempted. It includes a detailed discussion of relevant topics such as the concept of fast food and fast food restaurants, fast food nutrition facts, factors influencing children's food choices and purchasing behaviour, fast food marketing to children, the influence of television advertising on children's fast food preferences, marketing strategies of fast food companies, marketing to children regulation, and the resurgence of the fast food market in India.

ADVANTAGES OF FAST FOOD

The most obvious benefit of fast food is that it saves time. Nothing beats having a ready-to-eat dinner in today's fast-paced world. No matter how much chefs extol the virtues of fresh cuisine, at the end of a long day, when one is exhausted and hungry, a pizza or a burger can be a godsend. Aside from the time spent in the kitchen, making a dinner necessitates a trip to a nearby shop or supermarket to purchase the ingredients for the dish. Washing and slicing the vegetables requires additional effort and time. All of these makes choosing fast food over preparing a meal for one who is busy. Costs for fast food are often lower. Additionally, other meals were rather affordable, such as burgers and fries. Children in particular, as is well known, have a short attention span and cannot wait for lengthy meals to be cooked at home. Children who miss breakfast might fill up on fast food. Today's youth find fast food places to be the perfect setting for socializing (Gopinath, 2019a). There may be some healthy options on a fast food restaurant's menu.

You can choose from salads, wheat-bread goods, lean meat, boiled dishes, fruit juices, low-fat milk, and diet cola. Additionally, the menu card includes nutritional data. The "Make to Order" option can restrict the use of unhealthy components.

DISADVANTAGES OF FAST FOOD

In addition to having more calories, fast food is higher in soya, fat, sugar, oil, fried meat, salt, cheese, and mayonnaise. The negative impact fast food has on one's health is one of its biggest drawbacks. WHO (2003) states that frequent fast food intake has led to major health issues since most fast meals are high in salt, simple carbohydrates, trans fats, and fats, all of which are linked to type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease. It significantly contributes to childhood obesity as well.

Additionally, going out to eat frequently with your family may get both pricey and unhealthy. Only for a single individual can eating at fast food restaurants make financial sense. Another thing that is said to be causing some families to spend less time together is fast food restaurants (Gopinath & Kalpana, 2019). The time spent eating together as a family is seen as a chance for everyone to connect and share stories. Fast food restaurants are rapidly eroding this precious time. The results of a study involving 5500 primary school students show unequivocally that a bad diet and academic performance are related. When compared to the average, eating too much fast food lowers children's reading and numeracy performance by up to 16 percent.

According to sociologist George Ritzer (2000), McDonald's outlets, which are numerous and gradually spread over the world as well as the US, are more significant than the ease of quick sandwiches and milkshakes. He came up with the phrase "McDonaldization of Society" to describe the growing rationalisation of daily routines. According to this point of view, transnational companies—more especially, American transnational firms, with McDonald's, KFC, and Coca-Cola serving as the key factors behind cultural imperialism—can do significant cultural harm. It is believed that it is difficult to resist these firms' influence and that it might lead to a variety of negative outcomes, such as materialism, dishonesty, and estrangement.

FAST FOOD AND NUTRITION FACT

Experts have been examining the fast food nutrition facts due to the frenzy with which fast food businesses are crammed and the different variety of food items they are offering. By eating healthy foods, one should take good care of their bodies. Health professionals advise that you analyse your daily caloric and nutritional demands and manage your food consumption accordingly. The development of good eating habits should begin in school, especially for youngsters, as fast food intake is believed to be the primary cause of the child obesity pandemic (Gopinath, 2019b). Numerous fast food eating manuals have been published in this context. They offer some nutritional data and information on fast food. This aids in planning quick food while taking into account each person's demands, weight, and body type.

Fast food that is mass-produced generally has few differences from meals made at home:

- It has less fibre and more fat.
- It has more sugar and calories.
- It has more salt.

In the current situation, children's eating habits have completely altered, mostly as a result of food commercials on television. They frequently engage in, or have the practise of: eating poorly, eating too much, overuse of cold beverages, eating unwholesome food, outside of the house eating, consuming foods that are heavy in fat, sugar, and fibre.

The dietary habits of children have drastically changed which depends on the following:

EATING OCCASION

According to various circumstances, the children's eating habits have altered. Occasionally they focus more on afternoon or nighttime snacks while skipping breakfast, lunch, and supper. Some kids like to eat more at night than they do during the day. They typically like to watch television while eating unhealthy food.

LOCATION

The environment in which the children eat has an impact on their eating patterns. The setting might be at home, in a restaurant, or at a party. With respect to the various areas, the degree of food consumption has also altered. Instead of eating at home, they would choose to eat in hotels or restaurants, where they would prefer chats, burgers, cocktails, etc.

SPENDING HABITS

Children today are unwilling to spend time engaging in physical activities and outdoor games. They are more enthusiastic in watching TV shows. Early on, they are encouraged to develop their independence; as a result, they are widely permitted to watch television and make their own purchasing selections.

FACTORS INFLUENCING CHILDREN'S FOOD CHOICES

The broad understanding is that food preferences, consumption, and behaviours are all influenced by a variety of factors. Children's safety has been proven to be affected by a number of variables, including:

1. psychological variables, such as food preferences, food meaning and perception, and food knowledge; 2. biological elements (such as sender, hunger, and heredity); 3. variables related to behaviour (such as time and convenience, eating habits, and dieting); 4. Family variables (such as parental weight, nutrition, and knowledge), family eating habits, mother's employment position, and income; 5. Friends' influence (example: norms, networks of peers, and conformance); 6. The school setting (meals, sponsorship, vending machines, and schedules); 7. Commercial establishments (fast food outlets, shops); 8. The media (particularly television advertising for food promotion); and 9. Consumerism (Youth Market and peer power) However, the aforementioned characteristics lack precise relevance and have a broader meaning.

FAST FOOD MARKETING TO CHILDREN

The industry of food and beverage invest billions on children's marketing and advertising. Children are regularly exposed to commercial food promotion through both traditional and new media every day. After seeing an advertising, a youngster will form an opinion on all of its components, including the advertised product, brand, makers, and seller. The complex of attitudes gives rise to the behaviours. Three variations exist for this. Children will first examine food and compare it to other brands, which raises the likelihood that they will purchase the item. The second type of action is when kids try to persuade their parents to either buy the thing or to give them the money they need to buy it. Last but not least, peer pressure can affect how a child behaves toward a product. TV viewing is also strongly linked to eating unhealthy foods, including fast food, and there is ample proof that TV advertising affects children's eating preferences, shopping habits, and eating behaviours when they are younger than 12 years old. Television marketers have stepped up their attempts in recent years to reach audiences of young children under the age of eight. A new survey claims that the fast food business is increasingly focusing its marketing efforts on reaching youngsters as young as two years old who are exposed to ads. Fast food TV advertising are now seen by kids by nearly a third more than they were just six to seven years ago, while preschoolers see a whopping 21 percent more.

MARKETING STRATEGIES OF FAST FOOD COMPANIES TARGETING CHILDREN

Fast food corporations have been drawn to them because of the children's enormous purchasing power and influence over their parents' purchases, and as a result, marketing methods geared for them have grown¹⁷⁶. A desire for a product is created through effective marketing techniques. A marketer must comprehend the preferences of the client. The marketer must also be aware of the information consumers need to purchase their goods and the sources they see as reliable.

Fast food businesses are quite creative in implementing tactics that affect their customers, particularly kids. They employ all available strategies to captivate kids with adored fictional characters. Children in America can recognise Ronald McDonald 96% of the time. Santa Claus is the only fictitious character with a higher level of recognition. According to Schlosser, it is practically hard to overestimate the influence of the fast food industry's marketing technique on the culture, economics, and diet of the country (Gopinath & Kalpana.2011).

Mc Donald's has employed a highly targeted but sophisticated branding approach. The Mc Donald's brand has grown into one that is well known, distinctive, and has a long-term future. To position and market itself, it has done so through utilising children's toys, novels, games, educational institutions, and all forms of promotion. The focus of Mc Donald's branding strategy is the requirements and wants of the consumer, sometimes even placing the company's ideas before the consumer is even aware of what they want or anticipate.

It is clear that Mc Donald's cares about its Indian clientele. They introduce items that taste hot and are flavoured to appeal to Indian consumers. Its wide variety of products concentrates more on vegetarians. Additionally, they provide some goods that people with limited incomes may purchase. One of Mc Donald's most important business practises is its pricing strategy, which is readily apparent from the chain's current clientele.

KFC, the second-largest fast food company in the world and the biggest chicken eatery, bases its brand on the legendary colonel Harland Sanders. Customers hold a positive perception of KFC because of its chicken selection. It previously served the same menu everywhere, indicating that it was utilising an undifferentiated targeting technique. However, KFC has been localising its menu recently, following the lead of McDonald's, improving its marketability. Additionally, it recently changed its positioning approach from one that was value-based to one that was product-based.

The younger generation who are outgoing and in schools or colleges are targeted by the marketing approach of "Subway," which has locations in all of India's main cities. Since its start, Subway has been recognised for its strategy of providing healthy and freshly prepared MTO (Made to Order) vegetarian meals. It makes use of a positioning strategy based on values to forge an enduring brand image in the minds of prospective customers. The subway became the top fast food chain in the globe because to its dedication to providing sanitary fast food items, good customer service, and the growth of its restaurant network.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To find the factors that influencing the children's preference of fast food at various restaurants in trichy city.
- To analyse the most determined influenced factors that influencing the children's preference of fast food at various restaurants in trichy city.
- To provide suitable recommendations to improve the business of fast food restaurants especially in children segment at trichy city

IDENTIFICATION OF FACTORS INFLUENCING CHILDREN'S PREFERENCE OF FAST FOOD

Children's preferences for fast food are expressed in 26 statements, and their replies to these statements were gathered in order to determine the influential set of criteria. Through factor analysis, they are examined. With the use of the KMO measure of sampling adequacy and the Bartlett's Test, the applicability of factor analysis and the reliability of the data employed were first assessed. Table 1 presents the analysis' findings.

Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser - Meyer – Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.379
Barlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	12011.567
	Df	325
	Sig.	0.000

Source: Computed data

According to Table 1, the KMO measure of sampling adequacy has a value of 0.379. It is more than 0.5, indicating that the study's sample size was appropriate. The results of the Bartlett's test showed that the variables may be grouped since they had a strong association with one another. The fact that the "P" value is 0.000—less than the threshold of 0.05—indicates that factor analysis is a suitable method to use for the data.

Factor Analysis

This analysis makes use of the Principal Factor with Orthogonal Varimax Rotation, which is often used and publicly accessible in the Factor Analytic Computer Program (FACP). Table 2 displays the analysis's findings.

Table 4.2 Rotated Factor Matrix for Identifying Factors Influencing Children's Preference of Fast Food

Factor	Variable	Factor Loading	h2	Percentage of Variance explained	Cumulative percentage of variance explained	Cronbach' sAlpha
Convenient and Pleasure Factor (F1)	1. Best at time of get together	0.326	0.391	26.651	26.651	0.970
	2. Easy availability	0.318	0.307			
	3. Served quickly	0.316	0.370			
	4. Feeling of joy while eating	0.314	0.362			
	5. Easy to buy and eat	0.314	0.392			
	6. Restaurants are most convenient	0.312	0.359			
	7. Moderately priced	0.360	0.316			
	8. Pleasure of eating modern food	0.251	0.270			
Versatility of Food Factor (F2)	9. Tasty and delicious	0.340	0.351	23.106	49.756	0.961
	10. Variety of items	0.321	0.357			
	11. Like the textures and flavours	0.319	0.312			
	12. Fill with anything we want with the food	0.317	0.327			
	13. Feel energetic after eating	0.317	0.399			
	14. It's crispy and gravy	0.317	0.359			
	15. Once tasted, want more	0.206	0.121			
Normative Belief Factor (F3)	16. My friends ate and recommend	0.324	0.388	17.734	67.494	0.915
	17. My parents like and so I	0.324	0.389			
	18. Fast food served in my home also	0.319	0.391			
	19. Restaurants always crowded	0.388	0.330			
	20. Fast food available in school canteens also	0.280	0.169			
	21. See teachers eat fast food	0.208	0.111			
Impact of Advertising Factor (F4)	22. Like the attractive look of restaurants / outlets	0.362	0.330	15.036	82.530	0.920
	23. Willing to see fast food advertisements	0.354	0.313			
	24. Advertisements on fast food are exiting and inductive	0.342	0.395			
	25. Discounts and special offers make me buy fast food frequently	0.222	0.147			
	26. See all children eating fast food	0.203	0.102			
	Combined Cronbach's Alpha					

Source: Extraction Method, Principal Component Analysis

The rotating factor loadings for 26 utterances representing children's liking for fast food are shown in Table 2. The variables that are more or less comparable and have ratios that are closely connected gathered together to form "factors." The "four" element solution has been revealed by analysis. The ratios that are most strongly correlated with each factor are boxed, which are the ratios that have the greatest and most significant loadings in each factor. A factor's common variance is a measure of its communality. Significant factors are those that have factor loadings of at least 0.05. The communality values (h²) of the factors are larger than 0.05, making the results as they have been arrived at credible. For the indicated factors, the Cronbach's Alpha values are:

Factor – 1 = 0.372

Factor – 2 = 0.363

Factor – 3 = 0.317

Factor – 4 = 0.322

Cronbach's Alpha value overall is 0.885. Since every value above 0.8, the findings are regarded as substantial and extremely credible. Additionally, the findings show that all of the variables together accounted for 82.530 percent of the overall variation. The findings also suggested that the order in which the components are present more or less determines how people prefer fast food.

The variables are grouped and named as 'Impact of Advertising Factor'. Variables Having Highest Factor Loadings

Table 3 shows the variables having the highest factor loadings in factors identified.

Table 3 Variables Having Highest Factor Loadings in Factors

S.No.	Factor	Variable	Factor Loadings
1.	Convenient and Pleasure	Best at the time of get together	0.329
2.	Versatility of Food	Tasty and delicious	0.340
3.	Normative Belief	My friends eat and recommend	0.318
4.	Impact of Advertising	Like the attractive look of restaurants / outlets	0.362

Source: Factor Analysis

The most important variable in the variables affecting the choice for fast food is shown in Table 3. In other words, these four distinct variables, which came in at the top of their respective categories, show that they have a significant impact on the way that youngsters in the research region favour fast food.

FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

- Results on Factors That can influence Children's Preference for Fast Food The KMO measure of sampling adequacy shows that the sample used in the study is sufficient (value 0.379)
- The Bartlett's Test demonstrates that the factor analysis method used is appropriate for the data.
- The factor analysis clearly shows that the four elements, namely 1. Factors of Convenience and Pleasure (F1), 2. Food's adaptability factor (F2), 3. F3 for Normative Belief Factor and 4. The effect of advertising (F4).
- The results of the factor analysis are determined to have an overall Cronbach Alpha score of 0.885, which shows that they are quite trustworthy.
- It was discovered that the four variables combined explained 82.530 percent of the variance.

- It has been determined that the following elements have a significant impact on each other: Factor 1 is "Best at the time of get-together," and Factor 2 is "Tasty and tasty." Factors 3 and 4 are "Like the appealing look of restaurants" and "My friends eat and suggest."
- Finally, it is determined via the correlation analysis that the factors derived from the factor analysis are both important and tightly connected to one another.
- Finally, it is noted that these are the primary four elements influencing children's choice for fast food.

SUGGESTIONS

- The researcher has advised fast food businesses to use the potential of the children's market by offering the following recommendations based on the study's abridged results.
- The study's main findings did show that fast food consumption among youngsters in the study region was on the rise, but this was largely limited to certain groups with particular backgrounds. Fast food preferences were slightly greater among children from joint families, who were mostly male and in the ninth and tenth grades, had higher family incomes, and had more employed parents. These hints are taken into account as the fast food businesses develop their tactics in an effort to appeal to the whole children's market.
- The average person visited local restaurants, bakeries, and roadside eateries more frequently than they visited fast food outlets, which was only about three times each month. The exclusive, well-known fast food businesses have not yet penetrated Trichy's rural core. Along with strong advertising, targeted promotions for particular customers may be introduced. For example, reward points may be given for visits, and the total reward points might be redeemed for deals and discounts at following visits.
- Older kids have already begun taking their friends and classmates to the well-known establishments. However, parents typically bring younger children. Some people are hesitant due to health and western food issues. By putting healthier options in their menu and giving them dietary advice, you may win the support of the parents.
- Due to the fact that food is typically chosen for special occasions and shared with friends and classmates, fast food businesses may be able to boost sales of their current menu items by implementing creative promotions like entertainment week, birthday fun, and friends feast.
- Due to the fact that most kids prefer sandwiches over pizzas, salads, and burgers, huge brands may add new items in these categories to their menus, such as "small burgers," "mushroom burgers," "green peas burgers," and "jelly burgers."

CONCLUSION

The current study's empirical findings have attested to the fact that fast food consumption is on the rise in Tamil Nadu. This increase has been made possible by urbanisation, shifting economic conditions, and market forces, which are also drastically changing how young children eat. Fast food has become a staple of modern cuisine, and is become a part of our daily lives. Some of the findings of the current study are consistent with those of past investigations conducted in this Indian setting. Its contribution from the perspective of kids, many of whom come from rural backgrounds, would support the notion that fast food chains should pay extra attention to marketing to this group of kids. In addition to flavour, fast food causes many health problems in kids. The balanced diet that should be maintained for children's nutritional health has been displaced by the rising trend of fast food intake. The scientific research in India supports the claim that this high-calorie diet is the primary contributor to childhood overweight and obesity. Health professionals and civic organisations call for the government to take adequate legislative and educational measures to control the marketing of fast food to minors.

Although it is outside the scope of the current study to address children's health issues, its findings on the context of fast food regulation, improving the eating patterns of rural children would be a significant contribution.

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