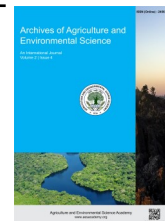This content is available online at AESA

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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Consumer preferences of fast-food items in Mymensingh, Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The goal of the current study was to ascertain Bangladeshi consumers' preferences for fast food items. Data from 80 respondents who were eating fast food in the Mymensingh region were gathered using a purposeful random sample; men made up 52.50 percent of the respondents. The study employed multiple linear regression analysis to determine the primary determinants influencing eating habits among customers. Additionally, descriptive statistics were utilized to determine the demographic characteristics such as age, education, income level etc. of the consumers. Furthermore, the utilization of Likert scale analysis assists in identifying the more favoured reasons why consumers go for fast food. The findings showed that most respondents were government employees with advanced degrees. Nearly 8.75 percent of customers spent more than Tk 2000 (18.22 $) on fast food every month. According to Likert scale research, 47.5% of consumers thought fast food was unhealthy. Consumers in the research region felt generally dissatisfied with fast food, as evidenced by their affirmative responses to seven out of the seventeen questions on the meal. In the Mymensingh District, explanatory factors such education, monthly family income, students, advertisements, and social pressure had the most impacts on the amount of fast food consumed. This research also looked at the critical elements at fast food restaurants and the relationship between customer satisfaction and restaurant service. The results of this study contribute significant knowledge to the literature on the food service sector and offer vital insights for the fast-food business in Bangladesh, indicating areas for development and customer preferences. It will offer insights for businesses to tailor their marketing strategies and menu offerings to align with consumer preferences and health concerns as well as highlights areas for improvement in fast-food establishments to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty because of fast food consumption is becoming more and more appealing these days.

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INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh boasts a rapidly expanding market-based economy, with the service sector playing a pivotal role, contributing to over half of its GDP. Notably, the restaurant business has emerged as one of the most lucrative sectors, making a significant economic contribution. In the 2019–2020 fiscal year alone, it contributed Tk 87,926 crore in gross value to the nation's GDP, as reported by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS, 2020). This growth is further evidenced by a remarkable surge in the number of individuals employed within the hotel and restaurant industry, witnessing a staggering increase of 153 percent. Additionally, the number of businesses operating within this sector has expanded by 58.46 percent, highlighting

its rapid expansion and substantial economic impact. The consistent rise in GDP contribution from hotels and restaurants underscores the industry's vital role in Bangladesh's economic landscape. This fast-food industry first introduced in the America at 1950. With over 200,000 locations and an astonishing $120 billion in sales in the US alone, big chains like McDonald's, KFC, and Pizza Hut have since developed into worldwide enterprises (Bowman *et al.*, 2004). With almost 25% of individuals dining at fast-food establishments, McDonald's in particular has a considerable impact on the nation's economy, society, and diet (Islam & Ullah, 2010). The fast-food sector grew significantly on a global scale; in 2011, its valuation was $102.7 billion, up 4.8 percent from 2006 (Islam & Ullah, 2010). Remarkably, 22 percent of UK residents buy takeaway at least once a week, compared to 37 percent of Americans who eat fast food at least once every two non-consecutive days (Smith *et al.*, 2009). In Beijing, the fast-food sector began to flourish in 1987, and by 2013, it had grown to produce $94.2 billion in revenue (Wang, 2016). Fast food, characterized by its rapid preparation, accessibility, and affordability, is a popular culinary choice for many (Price, 1997). Defined by its low cost, ease of preparation, and convenience for on-the-go consumption, fast food items typically include familiar fare such as fried chicken, sandwiches, burgers, pizza, and more. Unlike traditional dining experiences, fast food meals are often consumed quickly and may be enjoyed alongside other activities. Moreover, the consistent quality and standardized variety distinguish fast food from other cuisines, making it a convenient option for those seeking a quick and reliable meal solution (Jekanowski *et al.*, 2001). Priest *et al.* (2013) studied on how individuals allocate their resources, encompassing time, money, and effort. Fast food has been found to play a significant role in time management, providing convenience for students and job seekers. Initially emerging as a distinct subject of marketing in the 1940s and 1950s, fast food has evolved into an interdisciplinary social science, integrating aspects of marketing, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and ethnography (Fullerton, 2013). Following World War II, it emerged as a novel area of study. Given the various factors influencing consumer choice and the evolving landscape of fast-food consumption, research on consumer preference for fast food items is deemed essential.

As, the fast-food industry has been remarkably growing in Bangladesh since the early 1990s (Huq & Sarker, 2020). Thousands of fast-food restaurants now serve millions of people in Bangladesh's urban areas, despite the fact that there are no accurate statistics on the total number of fast-food restaurants (Bhuiyan, 2010). This has now grown into a multibillion-taka business (Farhana & Islam, 2011). Every day, these restaurants serve millions of harried city dwellers. In the food court of Dhaka's Bashundhara City Shopping Complex alone, there are estimated to be 105 fast food outlets (Bhuiyan, 2010). Fast food restaurants have thus grown into a multi-billion-taka industry in Bangladesh. Every day in the capital city, the fast-food restaurant industry generates around Tk. 8.0 million in sales, putting the annual gross revenue of these fast-food retailers at Tk. 3.0

billion (Bhuiyan, 2010). Consumption of poultry farm chicken and potatoes has also increased, indicating a growing demand for fast food in Bangladesh (Bhuiyan, 2010; Bouis and Scott, 1996). The number of customers and gross revenue increased so dramatically, according to Akku Choudhury, Executive Director of Transcom Foods Limited, that he plans to open 50 KFC and Pizza Hut outlets across the country by 2015. Helvetia, another popular local fast-food chain, plans to open around 30 franchised locations throughout the country's suburbs (Bhuiyan, 2010).

The habit of eating fast food is rapidly changing in today's world. When compared to people who live in rural areas, urban people have a higher tendency to consume fast food. The reason for the change is due to the passage of time. They don't have much time at home to prepare food. Economic activities grow in tandem with society's development. As a result, people become overworked, which discourages them from preparing food at home. As a result, the only option is to eat food prepared by others, preferably light in nature. When people choose fast food, they consider a number of factors (Islam & Ullah, 2010). Many studies on fast food have been conducted all over the world. However, a few studies on consumer preferences and influencing factors for fast food consumption have been conducted in Bangladesh. According to a survey, 48.10 percent of university students in Dhaka district make one to three visits to fast food stores per month, and 94.2 percent of them enjoy it (Akhter, 2021). According to a different study, client happiness and rage were significantly impacted by referent deservingness and pricing justice. (Arshad *et al.*, 2021). In his article, Nguyen (2021) demonstrated that the primary factors influencing KFC Vietnam's customer happiness were food quality, ambience, price, and service quality. The factors that have the greatest influence on consumer satisfaction are ambience, pricing, and meal quality. Rai & Rawal (2019) conducted a study where they find out that compare to price; taste, ambience and location have significant and positive impact on consumer preference for fast food items. This results from living a fast-paced, competitive, and active existence in an urban setting with limited time (Platania & Privitera, 2006). Comprehensive study is required since the fast-food restaurant business in Bangladesh is growing and has brought attention to the issue of consumer preference within this sector. There are several justifications for this investigation. First and foremost, it seeks to offer insight into customers' preferences and behaviours by exploring how they see fast food in relation to their nutritional choices. These kinds of insights are valuable when it comes to encouraging better eating practices and addressing issues with nutrition and overall health. Furthermore, this study is a rare chance for fast food vendors to comprehend the requirements and preferences of their target market. Businesses may better meet customer requests by making educated judgments about menu items, pricing schemes, and marketing campaigns by obtaining insights into consumer preferences. Additionally, the results of this study might help fast-food companies raise the overall quality of their goods and services.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Selection of study area

The choice of a research region is a crucial stage in technique since it affects the survey's goals, the potential cooperation of the study population, mobility, time efficiency, and minimization. Mymensingh district was chosen as the current research region, Due to its dense population and rising demand for fast food.

Selection of sample and sampling technique

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select 80 fast food customers for this study. Primary data was gathered from individuals who were either the household heads or had significant influence on family food choices. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and their voluntary participation was ensured. It was confirmed that all participants were willing to provide information and had no objections. Data collection was conducted by the researcher personally through face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire.

Analytical techniques

Descriptive statistics: To investigate the socioeconomic characteristics of respondents, classify their features in various ways, and determine their fast-food consumption patterns, descriptive statistics like percentages and frequencies were applied.

Likert scale analysis: Consumer perceptions regarding fast food consumption were evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, a widely utilized method in consumer research for gauging opinions and preferences. This scale ranged from 5 to 1, with higher values representing favourable perceptions and lower values indicating unfavourable ones. To ensure the validity of the Likert scale, item analysis was conducted to select the final scale items. This process involved assessing each item's discriminative power (DP), which measures its ability to distinguish between respondents with differing attitudes. DP was calculated by comparing the weighted means of scores above the upper quartile (Q1) and below the lower quartile (Q3), with the formula DP = Q1 - Q3. Subsequently, the 17 statements were ranked based on their variability to identify the items that most effectively differentiated attitudes toward fast food (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992).

Methods of identifying the factors influencing consumer's preference in purchasing fast food

When independent variables exhibit correlation, multicollinearity is present. Drawing conclusions regarding individual regression coefficients and their implications on the dependent variable is challenging when dealing with linked independent variables. The variance inflation factor is a more accurate way to assess the multicollinearity of the independent variables. Typically, it is written VIF. When the VIF value exceeds 10, it is deemed inadequate and suggests that the independent variable

has to be eliminated from the study (O'brien, 2007). Multiple linear regression analysis was utilized because of its ease in identifying the variables impacting a consumer's propensity for buying fast food (Chowdhury *et.al.*, 2018). The following equation represents the multiple linear regression model.

$$Y = a + b_i X_i + U_i ; i=1,2,3,...n$$

Where, Y = Monthly expenditure on fast food in Tk; X_1= Family member; X_2= Age; X_3= Monthly income; X_4= Monthly food expenditure; X_5= Gender (Dummy variable,1 for male; otherwise, 0); X_6= Education (Dummy variable); X_7= Occupation (Dummy variable); X_8= Marital Status (Dummy variable,1 for Married; otherwise, 0); X_9= Family Type (Dummy variable,1 for Nuclear; otherwise, 0).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic profile of fast-food consumers

According to Figure 1, out of the total 80 respondents, 52.50 percent were male, while the remaining 47.50 percent were female participants. The highest proportion (47.50 percent) of consumers fell within the age group of 20-30 years, followed by 32.50 percent in the 30-40 years age group. In terms of occupation, 27.50 percent of consumers were Government job holders, with 25 percent being students. Additionally, customers employed in private jobs constituted 17.50 percent of the customer base, while those in corporate jobs comprised 13.75 percent. Education emerged as a significant factor influencing decision-making processes. On the other hand, as depicted in Figure 2, approximately 32.5 percent of consumers reported spending Tk. 10,000 to Tk. 14,999 on food per month. Meanwhile, about 23.75 percent spent Tk. 5,000 to Tk. 9,999, and 20 percent spent less than Tk. 5,000 monthly on food. Moreover, more than 60 percent of respondents indicated consuming fast food 4 to 6 times per week. Regarding family income, as shown in Figure 3, around 30 percent of consumers reported a monthly family income ranging from Tk. 20,000 to Tk. 29,999, while 13.75 percent reported an income range of Tk. 30,000 to Tk. 39,999.

Consumer's preference using Likert scale

Data were collected using a five-point Likert scale to gauge consumers' impressions, encompassing eleven positive and six negative phrases. This scale indicates the extent to which individuals agree or disagree with specific statements. Analysis of consumer preferences from the Likert scale revealed notable trends. Table 1 shows, the 12th statement garnered the highest proportion of "strongly agree" responses (52.5%), indicating that the majority of consumers strongly agreed that fast food is more expensive. Conversely, 47.5% of respondents expressed concerns about the health implications of fast food (4th statement). Additionally, the 9th statement received the highest "agree" responses (71.25%), suggesting widespread agreement that fast food is easy to carry. Conversely, the 15th statement elicited the highest "disagree" responses (15%), indicating disagreement with the notion that fast food is affordable (Islam & Ullah, 2010). Furthermore, the 13th
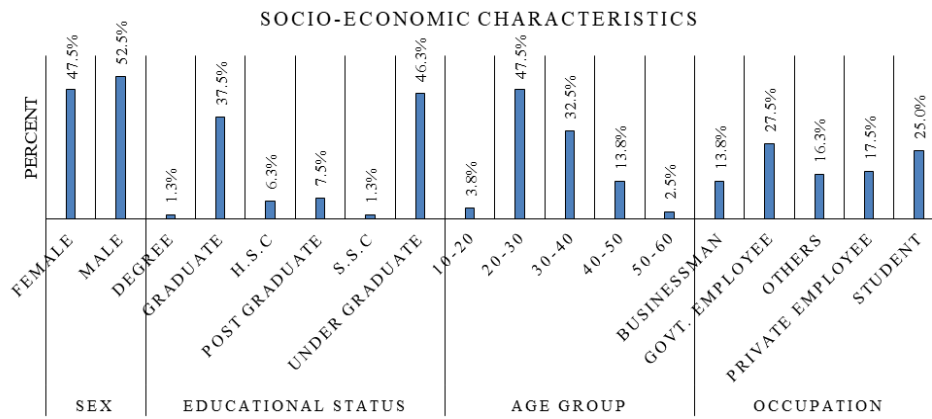
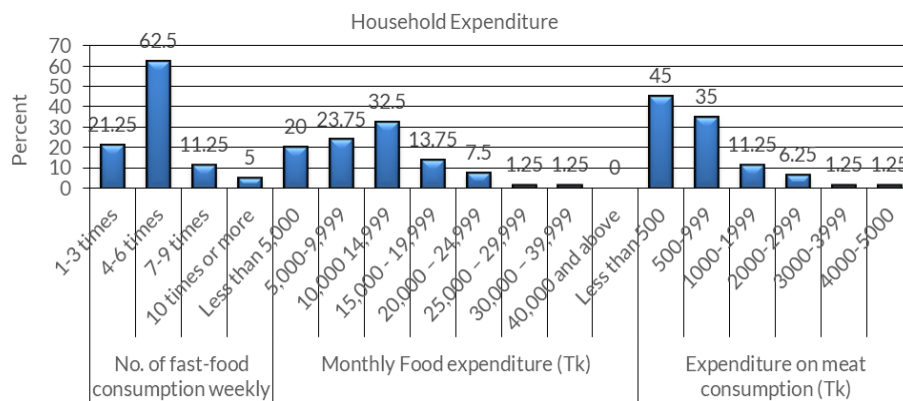**Figure 1.** *Socioeconomic characteristics of fast-food consumers.*

Figure 2. *Household expenditure of fast-food consumers.*
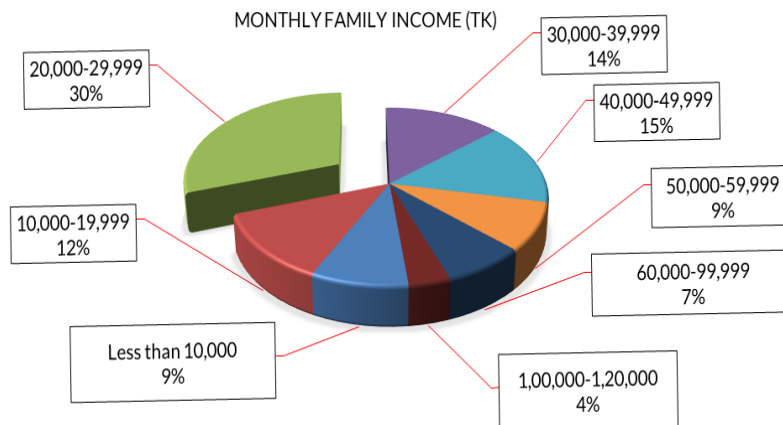

Figure 3. *Monthly family income of household.*

statement received the highest "strongly disagree" responses (7.5%), indicating strong disagreement with the assertion that fast foods contribute to an easy lifestyle. Among these statements (Table 2), the 14th statement, "Good business issue," obtained the highest mean score, implying that customers perceived this aspect as particularly significant and favourable. Similarly, the 10th statement, "Satisfy our taste," ranked second in mean score, followed by the 9th statement, "Easy to carry." Conversely, the statement "It is more expensive" received the lowest mean score. Weighted average values supported each statement, with higher values indicating greater significance. Notably, seven statements had weighted score values exceeding three, suggesting a predominance of positive opinions regarding

fast food among respondents. Further analysis using Table 2 revealed that the statement "Fast foods are good for easy lifestyle" had the highest DP (Differentiation Point) value of 1.3, indicating a greater influence compared to other statements. Notably, "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" responses showed a more pronounced difference at the endpoints. Additionally, a higher DP value indicated greater agreement with weights in the highest 25% of summated scores compared to the lowest 25%. Conversely, the statement "Good business issue" had the lowest DP value at 0.15, indicating minimal separability between the highest and lowest 25% of summated scores. Overall, these findings suggest that consumers' perceptions of fast food were predominantly negative.

Table 1. Consumer preference using Likert scale.

Statement No.	Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1	Fast food serves quick	3(3.75)	44(55)	18(22.5)	15(18.7)	0(0)	275
2	Fast Food is convenient	2(2.50)	34(42.5)	21(26.2)	20(25)	3(3.75)	252
3	It is rich in calories	20(25)	36(45)	8(10)	16(20)	0(0)	300
4	Fast food is not good for health	38(47.5)	34(42.5)	5(6.25)	2(2.50)	1(1.25)	134
5	Lack of essential nutrients	20(25)	47(58.7)	8(10)	5(6.25)	0(0)	158
6	Fast food is very fattening	29(36.2)	45(56.2)	5(6.25)	1(1.25)	0(0)	138
7	Not preferred every day and every time	35(43.7)	42(52.5)	3(3.75)	0(0)	0(0)	128
8	Fast food is a source of energy	2(2.50)	27(33.7)	23(28.7)	26(32.5)	2(2.50)	241
9	Easy to carry	7(8.75)	57(71.25)	11(13.75)	5(6.25)	0(0)	306
10	Satisfy our taste	17(21.25)	48(60)	12(15)	3(3.75)	0(0)	319
11	Not satisfy your hunger compare to main dish	10(12.50)	46(57.50)	14(17.50)	10(12.50)	0(0)	184
12	It is more expensive	42(52.50)	31(38.75)	6(7.50)	1(1.25)	0(0)	126
13	Fast foods are good for easy lifestyle	4(5)	27(33.75)	24(30)	19(23.75)	6(7.50)	244
14	Good business issue	21(26.3)	51(63.75)	6(7.50)	25(2.50)	0(0)	331
15	Affordable price	1(1.25)	14(17.5)	17(21.25)	45(56.25)	3(3.75)	205
16	Comfortable environment	1(1.25)	22(27.5)	33(41.2)	23(28.7)	1(1.25)	239
17	Consumers are busy to cook	1(1.25)	40(50)	29(36.25)	9(11.25)	1(1.25)	271
Total		569	2090	729	451	21	3884

Table 2. Average ratings for the opinion of customers.

Statement No.	Mean	Ranked by mean	DP value	Ranked by DP value
14	4.08	1	0.15	17
10	3.91	2	0.85	8
9	3.75	3	0.5	12
3	3.58	4	1.15	5
17	3.35	5	0.5	13
1	3.32	6	0.85	7
13	3.20	7	1.3	1
2	2.98	8	1.15	4
8	2.91	9	1.25	2
16	2.87	10	1.2	3
15	2.43	11	1.1	6
11	2.15	12	0.6	11
5	1.83	13	0.65	10
6	1.61	14	0.15	16
4	1.52	15	0.75	9
7	1.51	16	0.25	15
12	1.45	17	0.5	14

Table 3. Testing multicollinearity among independent variables.

Variable	VIF	1/VIF
Monthly food expenditure	7.11	0.14059
Family monthly income	7.11	0.14071
Government employer	3.69	0.27119
Privet job	3.05	0.32761
Student	2.74	0.36523
Others	2.15	0.46507
Age	2.2	0.4538
Marital Status	1.98	0.50418
Education	1.6	0.62689
Number consumed fast food	1.57	0.63809
Time constraints	1.53	0.65252
Cost Fast food	1.44	0.69214
Advertising and Promotion	1.4	0.71622
Peer influence	1.37	0.73048
Accessibility	1.29	0.77514
Sex	1.26	0.79427
Lifestyle family member	1.25	0.80043
Mean VIF	2.51	

Table 4. Factors influencing consumption of fast food.

Spend on Fast food monthly	Coefficient	SD	t	P>t
Sex	133.5681	90.06	1.48	0.143
Age	6.795151	10.13	0.67	0.505
Lifestyle family member	-33.2753	60.64	-0.55	0.585
Education	-106.312	54.78	-1.94	0.057**
Government employer	-253.225	157.98	-1.6	0.114
Privet job	-182.118	185.66	-0.98	0.33
Student	-394.293	168.72	-2.34	0.023**
Others	-210.483	158.64	-1.33	0.189
Marital Status	-144.669	164.85	-0.88	0.384
Family monthly income	0.045182	0.007	5.96	0.00***
Monthly food expenditure	0.0012	0.018	0.07	0.947
Number consumed fast food	96.45869	87.45	1.1	0.274
Advertising and Promotion	173.2014	102.36	1.69	0.096**
Peer influence	76.5383	41.65	1.84	0.071**
Time constraints	33.65719	49.03	0.69	0.495
Accessibility	-60.01	64.75	-0.93	0.358
Cost Fast food	-45.3348	58.06	-0.78	0.438
_cons	-270.471	502.65	-0.54	0.592
Number of	80			
F(17, 62)	38.68			
Prob > F	0			
R^2	0.9085			
Root MSE	395.63			

*10 percent level of significance; ** 5 percent level of significance; *** 1 percent level of significance.

Factors influencing consumption of fast food

From Table 3, it is evident that the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values of the independent variables indicate a lack of strong correlation among them. While monthly food expenditure and family monthly income approached the boundary level of 10, they remained below this threshold, mitigating any serious concerns regarding multicollinearity. Analysing Table 4, the study unveils noteworthy trends regarding the factors influencing monthly fast-food consumption in terms of Tk (Bangladeshi Taka). Although gender appeared to positively influence fast food intake, suggesting that males consumed more than females, this relationship lacked statistical significance. However, education emerged as a significant determinant, with a one-unit increase resulting in a decrease of 106 Tk in consumers' monthly expenditure. Occupation also played a pivotal role, with students displaying significant associations at a 5% level of significance, indicating differing consumption patterns. Furthermore, monthly family income exhibited a notable positive impact on fast food expenditure, with each 1 Tk increase in monthly family income leading to a 0.045 Tk rise in fast food expenditure, a statistically significant influence at the 1% level. Additionally, both peer pressure and advertising promotions positively impacted monthly expenditure on fast food which is also found by Al Harthy *et al.* (2021).

Conclusion and recommendations

The socioeconomic profile of fast-food consumers in the urban context of Bangladesh reveals several critical insights. The majority of respondents are within the age range of 20-30 years, predominantly male, and employed in government jobs or students. Education levels significantly influence decision-making processes, indicating a potential correlation between educational attainment and fast-food consumption patterns. Additionally, monthly food expenditure, family income, and frequency of fast-food consumption exhibit notable trends, highlighting the significance of socioeconomic factors in shaping consumer behaviours within the fast-food landscape. In addition, the majority of responders were from the undergraduate education category. The group of responders with the second-highest percentage were graduates. The types of family were nuclear in most cases and most of the respondents were unmarried and most of the respondents consumed fast-food 1-2 times in a week and spend less than Tk. 500 on fast-food consumption per month and majority of individuals surveyed worked in government jobs, as opposed to those in business, the private sector, as students, or in other occupations. Consumer preferences, as estimation through the Likert scale, reflect a nuanced perspective on fast food. While certain aspects, such as ease of carrying and taste satisfaction, receive favourable responses, concerns regarding affordability and health implications emerge prominently. Despite a predominantly negative perception, specific attributes, notably related to business viability, resonate positively among consumers, underscoring the multifaceted nature of consumer attitudes towards fast food. Further analysis of factors influencing fast-food consumption elucidates intriguing trends. While gender and peer pressure exhibit nominal impacts, education level, occupation, family income, and advertising promotions emerge as significant determinants. These findings underscore the intricate interplay of socioeconomic variables and external influences on consumer behaviours within the fast-food sector. The study's findings suggest that household socioeconomic status and demographic traits have a major role in determining how much fast food is consumed.

This study presents some relatively new information regarding consumer preferences in this area and advances our understanding of the numerous elements that impact our decision to eat fast food. The study's conclusions will benefit the fast-food sector, restaurants, and this prospective customer. Additionally, In order to help fast food marketers, create effective marketing strategies and to support legislative measures by the government, the study's findings offer some relatively new insights. Consequently, in order to enhance the sector's overall development, attention should be paid to brand reputation, proximity, price, quality, discount, and flavour similarity. Owners of restaurants should review their product pricing, uphold a high level of service, and offer suggestion boxes and customer assistance stations. However, it's crucial to show that individuals have a good awareness of fast food. To enhance awareness regarding fast food and its misconceptions among consumers, an effective strategy would be to initiate educational campaigns and interactive sessions. Consider organizing workshops, seminars, or community events focused on debunking myths and providing factual information about fast food. Engaging through social media platforms, creating informative videos, infographics, or blog posts can also serve as valuable tools to spread accurate information and encourage a healthier perception of fast-food consumption.

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