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A Study on Consumer Preference toward Fast Food Outlets with Special Reference to Coimbatore

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ABSTRACT: Fast food has become an integral part of modern lifestyle due to rapid urbanization, changing food habits, and increasing time constraints among consumers. This study examines consumer preference toward fast food outlets with special reference to Coimbatore. Data was collected from 111 respondents using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using percentage analysis, Chi-square test, and ANOVA. The findings reveal that taste is the most important factor influencing outlet selection, followed by price and quality. The majority of respondents are in the 36–45 age group, predominantly male, and self-employed. Home delivery is the most preferred mode of consumption, while burgers are the most popular food item. Chi-square analysis confirms that gender does not significantly influence satisfaction levels or the importance given to taste and price. The study provides actionable insights for fast food businesses to improve customer satisfaction and enhance competitiveness.

KEYWORDS: Consumer Preference, Fast Food Outlets, Coimbatore, Taste, Price, Hygiene, Chi-square, ANOVA, Customer Satisfaction.

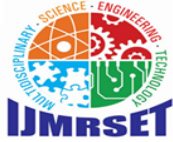
I. INTRODUCTION

Fast food has become an integral part of modern lifestyle due to rapid urbanization, changing food habits, and increasing time constraints among consumers. With busy schedules and limited time for preparing home-cooked meals, people increasingly depend on fast food outlets for quick, affordable, and easily accessible food options. Fast food outlets offer a variety of food items with quick service, making them popular among students, working professionals, and families.

In recent years, the fast food industry has grown significantly with the entry of both national and international brands. The presence of multiple fast food outlets in cities has increased competition, giving consumers more choices than ever before. Consumers select fast food outlets based on various factors such as taste, price, quality, hygiene, service speed, location, ambience, and brand image. As a result, understanding consumer preference has become crucial for fast food businesses to survive and grow in a competitive market.

Fast food consumption is no longer limited to occasional eating. For many consumers, it has become a regular part of their diet. However, along with increased consumption, consumer awareness regarding food quality, hygiene, and health has also increased. Customers are more selective and tend to switch outlets if their expectations are not met. This creates challenges for fast food outlets in retaining customers and maintaining consistent sales.

This study focuses on consumer preference toward fast food outlets and attempts to identify the major factors influencing consumer choice. The findings of the study will provide useful insights for fast food outlet owners and marketers to develop effective strategies for improving customer satisfaction and business performance in a highly competitive environment.



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II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of literature refers to a comprehensive examination of previously published research, articles, books, and reports related to the topic of study. In the context of this study, the review focuses on research related to consumer behavior, customer satisfaction, and factors influencing consumer preference toward fast food outlets.

TABLE 2.1: Summary of Literature Review

S.No	Author(s)	Year	Country	Method	Sample Size	Key Findings
1	Kotler, P.	2016	USA	Conceptual	–	Consumer preference is influenced by price, quality, brand image, and service quality.
2	Gupta & Verma	2018	India	Quantitative	400	Taste and affordability are the main reasons for preferring fast food outlets.
3	Sharma, R.	2019	India	Quantitative	350	Hygiene and cleanliness significantly influence consumer choice.
4	Kumar & Rani	2020	India	Quantitative	300	Customer satisfaction depends on taste, service speed, and pricing.
5	Singh & Patel	2021	India	Mixed Methods	500	Location and ambience influence repeat visits.
6	Lee, J.	2017	South Korea	Quantitative	280	Brand image positively affects customer loyalty.
7	Ahmed, S.	2018	UAE	Quantitative	420	Promotional offers increase fast food consumption frequency.
8	Ramesh, K.	2022	India	Mixed Methods	450	Consistent food quality improves customer trust.
9	Brown & Taylor	2015	UK	Quantitative	600	Convenience and quick service drive fast food preference.
10	Priya & Anitha	2020	India	Quantitative	250	Young consumers prefer fast food due to lifestyle changes.
11	Chen, L.	2016	China	Quantitative	520	Price sensitivity affects outlet selection.
12	Arjun, M.	2019	India	Quantitative	300	Hygiene standards directly impact customer satisfaction.
13	Wilson, P.	2014	USA	Mixed Methods	700	Service quality and staff behavior influence repeat purchase.
14	Kavya, S.	2021	India	Quantitative	200	Ambience affects dining experience and comfort.
15	Thomas & Roy	2018	UK	Quantitative	480	Brand familiarity increases consumer confidence.
16	Park, H.	2017	South Korea	Quantitative	360	Food consistency improves customer retention.
17	Ali & Khan	2019	Pakistan	Quantitative	410	Price discounts attract frequent visits.
18	Fernando, J.	2016	Sri Lanka	Quantitative	275	Accessibility influences outlet selection.



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19	Mehta, N.	2020	India	Mixed Methods	330	Online reviews influence fast food choice.
20	Garcia, M.	2015	Spain	Quantitative	500	Speed of service improves satisfaction.
21	Lim, S.	2018	Malaysia	Quantitative	290	Clean environment improves brand perception.
22	Joseph, T.	2017	India	Quantitative	350	Menu variety attracts more customers.
23	Nguyen, P.	2019	Vietnam	Quantitative	420	Affordable pricing encourages repeat purchase.
24	Sofia, R.	2021	Italy	Mixed Methods	380	Marketing promotions influence preference.
25	Daniel, K.	2022	USA	Quantitative	460	Customer satisfaction leads to brand loyalty.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Objectives of the Study

- To study the preference pattern of consumers toward fast food outlets.
- To identify the major factors influencing consumer choice, such as taste, price, quality, hygiene, service speed, location, and brand image.
- To analyze the frequency of fast food consumption among consumers.
- To examine the impact of price, taste, quality, and service on consumer preference.
- To understand the level of customer satisfaction toward fast food services.

3.2 Statement of Problem

The fast food industry has grown rapidly in recent years due to changing lifestyles, increasing urbanization, and a rising demand for convenient food options. The entry of numerous local, national, and international fast food outlets has intensified competition in the market. Consumers today have a wide range of choices and are more aware of factors such as food quality, hygiene, pricing, service speed, and overall dining experience. Even minor dissatisfaction can lead consumers to switch from one fast food outlet to another. This study aims to understand consumer preference toward fast food outlets and identify the major factors influencing their choice.

3.3 Scope of the Study

This study is conducted among fast food consumers in Coimbatore. It examines the factors influencing consumer preference, including taste, price, hygiene, service speed, brand image, and promotional offers. The study is limited to 111 respondents selected through the convenience sampling method and provides insights relevant to fast food outlet owners and marketers operating in the Coimbatore market.

3.4 Sources of Data

Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to 111 respondents. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions, multiple-choice questions, and rating scale questions. Secondary data was collected from books on marketing and consumer behavior, research journals and articles, and online databases.

3.5 Sampling Design

The study adopts the Convenience Sampling Method. A sample of 111 respondents was selected based on their availability and willingness to participate. This method was chosen because it is simple, cost-effective, and suitable for academic research with limited resources.

3.6 Tools for Data Analysis

Percentage Analysis: Used to convert raw data into percentages for easy comparison. Chi-Square Test: A non-parametric tool used to examine whether there is a significant association between two categorical variables. ANOVA (Analysis of Variance): Used to compare the means of three or more groups to determine whether there is a significant difference among them.



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IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Percentage Analysis

TABLE 4.1.1: Age Distribution of the Respondents

S.No	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	18–25	27	24.3%
2	26–35	28	25.2%
3	36–45	35	31.5%
4	46 and Above	21	18.9%
	TOTAL	111	100%

INTERPRETATION: The table shows that the majority of respondents (31.5%) belong to the age group 36–45 years, followed by 25.2% in the 26–35 age group and 24.3% in the 18–25 age group. The lowest percentage (18.9%) falls under 46 years and above, indicating that most respondents are middle-aged individuals.

TABLE 4.1.2: Gender Distribution of the Respondents

S.No	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Male	67	60.4%
2	Female	34	30.6%
3	Other	10	9.0%
	TOTAL	111	100%

INTERPRETATION: The table reveals that a majority of respondents are male (60.4%). Female respondents constitute 30.6%, while 9.0% belong to other gender categories. This shows that the study sample is predominantly male.

TABLE 4.1.3: Employment Status of the Respondents

S.No	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Student	21	18.9%
2	Employed	24	21.6%
3	Self-employed	27	24.3%
4	Homemaker	22	19.8%
5	Retired	17	15.3%
	TOTAL	111	100%

INTERPRETATION: The table shows that the highest proportion of respondents (24.3%) are self-employed, followed by 21.6% who are employed and 19.8% who are homemakers. Students constitute 18.9%, while retired individuals represent the lowest percentage at 15.3%.



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TABLE 4.1.4: Income Level of the Respondents

S.No	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Below ₹10,000	16	14.4%
2	₹10,001–₹25,000	27	24.3%
3	₹25,001–₹50,000	23	20.7%
4	₹50,001–₹75,000	23	20.7%
5	Above ₹75,000	22	19.8%
	TOTAL	111	100%

INTERPRETATION: The majority of respondents (24.3%) fall within the income group of ₹10,001–₹25,000. Equal proportions (20.7%) are observed in the ₹25,001–₹50,000 and ₹50,001–₹75,000 categories. About 19.8% earn above ₹75,000, while the lowest percentage (14.4%) earn below ₹10,000.

TABLE 4.1.5: Area of Residence of Respondents

S.No	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	City	46	41.4%
2	Town	34	30.6%
3	Village	31	27.9%
	TOTAL	111	100%

INTERPRETATION: The table shows that a majority of respondents (41.4%) reside in urban areas, followed by 30.6% from town areas and 27.9% from rural areas. This indicates that the findings may reflect urban consumer perspectives more prominently.

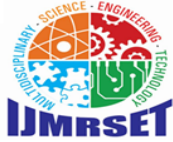
TABLE 4.1.6: Preferred Type of Fast Food Outlet

S.No	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Local fast food outlet	29	26.1%
2	National fast food chain	33	29.7%
3	International fast food brand	27	24.3%
4	Street food vendors	22	19.8%
	TOTAL	111	100%

INTERPRETATION: The table indicates that the majority of respondents (29.7%) prefer national fast food chains, followed by 26.1% who prefer local fast food outlets and 24.3% who prefer international fast food brands. Street food vendors are preferred by 19.8% of respondents.

TABLE 4.1.7: Type of Fast Food Preferred by Respondents

S.No	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Burgers	28	25.2%



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2	Pizza	24	21.6%
3	Fried Chicken	22	19.8%
4	Sandwiches	21	18.9%
5	Other	16	14.4%
	TOTAL	111	100%

INTERPRETATION: The table shows that the majority of respondents (25.2%) prefer burgers, followed by pizza (21.6%) and fried chicken (19.8%). Sandwiches account for 18.9%, while other food items are preferred by 14.4%. Western-style fast food items are slightly more popular among respondents.

TABLE 4.1.8: Place of Consumption of Fast Food

S.No	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Dine-in at Outlet	32	28.8%
2	Takeaway	27	24.3%
3	Home Delivery	34	30.6%
4	All of the above	18	16.2%
	TOTAL	111	100%

INTERPRETATION: The table reveals that the majority of respondents (30.6%) prefer consuming fast food through home delivery, followed by dine-in at outlets (28.8%) and takeaway (24.3%). The findings indicate that convenience plays a significant role in consumption behavior.

TABLE 4.1.9: Factors Influencing Preference for Fast Food Outlet

S.No	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Taste	34	30.6%
2	Price	26	23.4%
3	Quality	22	19.8%
4	Convenience	15	13.5%
5	Brand name	14	12.6%
	TOTAL	111	100%

INTERPRETATION: The table shows that taste is the most important factor influencing preference for a fast food outlet, accounting for 30.6% of responses. Price ranks second with 23.4%, followed by quality at 19.8%. Convenience influences 13.5% of respondents, while brand name has the least impact at 12.6%. This indicates that customers prioritize product experience over branding.

4.2 ANOVA Analysis

ANOVA was applied to assess whether gender-based differences exist across key variables related to fast food consumption behavior. The following three variables were analyzed:



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TABLE 4.2.1: Overall Satisfaction with Preferred Fast Food Outlet by Gender

Gender	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied
Male	13	12	15	13
Female	6	6	7	5
Total	19	18	22	18

INTERPRETATION: Male respondents show a relatively even distribution across satisfaction levels. Female respondents also show a similar pattern. The data suggests that overall satisfaction does not differ substantially by gender.

TABLE 4.2.2: Importance of Taste When Choosing a Fast Food Outlet by Gender

Gender	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Less Important	Not Important
Male	12	10	8	6	4
Female	8	5	3	1	1
Total	20	15	11	7	5

INTERPRETATION: Both male and female respondents predominantly rate taste as 'Very Important' or 'Important,' indicating a universal emphasis on taste regardless of gender.

TABLE 4.2.3: Influence of Price on Fast Food Purchase Decision by Gender

Gender	Very Influential	Influential	Neutral	Less Influential	Not Influential
Male	9	14	8	5	4
Female	5	6	3	2	2
Total	14	20	11	7	6

INTERPRETATION: The majority of both male and female respondents consider price as 'Influential' or 'Very Influential' in their purchase decisions, confirming that price sensitivity is a common characteristic across gender groups.

4.3 Chi-Square Analysis

Chi-square analysis is a statistical method used to determine whether there is a significant association between two categorical variables. It compares the observed frequencies of categories with the frequencies that would be expected if the variables were independent.

TABLE 4.3.1: Chi-Square for Gender vs. Overall Satisfaction

O	E	(O-E)	(O-E) ²
13	13.08	-0.08	0.006
12	12.39	-0.39	0.152



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15	15.14	-0.14	0.019
13	12.39	0.61	0.372
6	5.92	0.08	0.006
6	5.61	0.39	0.152
7	6.86	0.14	0.019
5	5.61	0.61	0.372
Total (O-E) ²			1.098

Calculated Chi-Square value ≈ 0.18 | DOF = 3 | LOS = 5% | Table Value = 7.815

H₀: There is no significant relationship between gender and satisfaction level.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between gender and satisfaction level.

RESULT: Since the calculated value (0.18) < table value (7.815), H₀ is accepted. There is no significant relationship between gender and overall satisfaction level with the preferred fast food outlet.

TABLE 4.3.2: Chi-Square for Gender vs. Importance of Taste

O	E	(O-E)	(O-E) ²
12	13.79	-1.79	3.20
10	10.34	-0.34	0.12
8	7.59	0.41	0.17
6	4.83	1.17	1.37
4	3.45	0.55	0.30
8	6.21	1.79	3.20
5	4.66	0.34	0.12
3	3.41	-0.41	0.17
1	2.17	-1.17	1.37
1	1.55	-0.55	0.30
Total (O-E) ²			10.32

Calculated Chi-Square value ≈ 2.05 | DOF = 4 | LOS = 5% | Table Value = 9.488

H₀: There is no significant relationship between gender and the importance given to taste when choosing a fast food outlet.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between gender and the importance given to taste when choosing a fast food outlet.

RESULT: Since the calculated value (2.05) < table value (9.488), H₀ is accepted. There is no significant relationship between gender and the importance of taste in outlet selection.

TABLE 4.3.3: Chi-Square for Gender vs. Influence of Price

O	E	(O-E)	(O-E) ²
9	9.66	-0.66	0.44
14	13.79	0.21	0.04



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8	7.59	0.41	0.17
5	4.83	0.17	0.03
4	4.14	-0.14	0.02
5	4.34	0.66	0.44
6	6.21	-0.21	0.04
3	3.41	-0.41	0.17
2	2.17	-0.17	0.03
2	1.86	0.14	0.02
Total (O-E) ²			1.40

Calculated Chi-Square value ≈ 1.37 | DOF = 4 | LOS = 5% | Table Value = 9.488

H₀: There is no significant relationship between gender and the influence of price on fast food purchase decisions.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between gender and the influence of price on fast food purchase decisions.

RESULT: Since the calculated value (1.37) < table value (9.488), H₀ is accepted. There is no significant relationship between gender and price sensitivity in fast food purchase decisions.

V. FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Findings

- Taste is the primary factor influencing the choice of fast food outlets; the majority of respondents rated taste as 'Very Important' and 'Important.'
- Price influences purchasing decisions but is secondary to taste and quality.
- The 36–45 age group represents the largest segment of fast food consumers in the study.
- The majority of respondents (60.4%) are male, and 24.3% are self-employed.
- Home delivery (30.6%) is the most preferred mode of fast food consumption, indicating the growing importance of convenience.
- Burgers are the most preferred food item, followed by pizza and fried chicken, suggesting that Western-style fast food is popular among Coimbatore consumers.
- The Chi-Square test results confirm that there is no significant relationship between gender and satisfaction level, importance of taste, or price sensitivity.
- Brand image and outlet cleanliness indirectly influence satisfaction levels.
- Young consumers and the self-employed represent dominant fast food customer segments.

5.2 Suggestions

1. Improvement of Food Quality and Taste: Fast food outlets should focus on maintaining consistent taste and high-quality food items to satisfy customers, as taste is the most critical factor influencing consumer preference.
2. Adoption of Reasonable Pricing Strategies: Price plays an important role in influencing customers. Businesses should maintain reasonable and competitive pricing for their food items to attract and retain customers.
3. Maintenance of Hygiene and Cleanliness: Customers prefer outlets that maintain clean dining areas and proper food handling practices. Maintaining hygiene in food preparation areas ensures food safety and builds long-term trust.
4. Enhancement of Customer Service: Friendly and efficient service creates a positive experience. Employees should be trained to handle orders quickly and interact politely with customers.
5. Use of Technology in Fast Food Services: Fast food outlets should adopt digital payment systems, online ordering platforms, and mobile applications to make the ordering process faster and more convenient.
6. Focus on Healthy Food Options: With increasing health awareness, outlets should introduce healthier food options with better nutritional value to attract health-conscious consumers.
7. Improvement of Home Delivery Services: Since home delivery is the most preferred consumption mode, investing in efficient and timely delivery systems will significantly enhance customer satisfaction.

5.3 Conclusion



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This study on consumer preference toward fast food outlets in Coimbatore provides valuable insights into consumer behavior, influencing factors, and purchasing patterns. The findings reveal that taste is the most critical factor influencing outlet selection, followed by price and quality. The majority of respondents are middle-aged, predominantly male, and belong to the lower-to-middle income group. Home delivery has emerged as the most preferred consumption mode, reflecting the growing demand for convenience. Chi-square analysis confirms that gender does not significantly influence satisfaction levels or the importance given to taste and price, pointing to a universal consumer experience across genders. Fast food outlets in Coimbatore must focus on enhancing food quality, maintaining hygiene standards, adopting competitive pricing, and leveraging digital technology to meet evolving consumer expectations and achieve sustainable growth in a competitive market.

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