



FAST FOOD CONSUMPTION: IDENTIFYING WORKING WOMEN’S ATTITUDES TOWARDS CONSUMPTION OF FAST FOOD

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Abstract

The study focuses on examining working women’s attitudes towards the consumption of fast food. Five, literature supported, hypotheses were derived and tested to examine the attitudes in relation to the perceived taste, perceived quality, perceived nutrition value, perceived convenience and perceived price of fast food. A survey was conducted using 177 working women in Matara district, Sri Lanka. Structural equation modelling was employed for data analysis. The results showed that perceived convenience of fast food has a significant positive effect over fast food consumption whilst taste, nutrition value and price give a positive but not significant effect. However, perceived quality of fast food indicates a negative but non-significant effect on fast food consumption.

Keywords: Attitude; Fast Food Consumption; Working Women

1. Introduction

Fast food industry is not only a transformation to the traditional diet, but also a new trend to the landscape, economy, workforce and it has created a popular culture within a short period of time (Schlosser, 2001). Fast food can be identified as one of the main food choices of people today. In according to the definition of online Oxford dictionary, fast food can be defined as “easily prepared processed food served in snack bars and restaurants as a quick meal or to be taken away”. Rapid establishment of fast food restaurants in all over the country is an evidence for the popularity of fast food among Sri Lankans. Not only in urban areas, but also in rural areas, there are several numbers of fast food restaurants today and the places where fast food is served have become wider. They are now served at restaurants, stadiums, airports, zoos, schools and universities, on cruise ships, trains and aero planes, supermarkets, petrol stations and even in hospital cafeterias (Schlosser, 2001).

Although fast food is very popular among people, majority of their attitudes towards fast food are ambiguous. Most people believe that they have to face various ailments due to the changes of their new food habits. Pereira et al.(2005) state that there is a positive relationship between fast food consumption and weight gain and insulin resistance as well as leading to adverse health effects. Despite the bad effects, people purchase the fast food. “Hundreds of millions of people buy fast food every day without giving it much thought, unaware of the subtle and not so subtle ramifications of their purchases. They rarely consider

where this food came from, how it was made, what it is doing to the community around them. They just grab their tray off the counter, find a table, take a seat, unwrap the paper, and dig in" (Schlosser 2001, p. 7).

Fastfood is fairly a new food trend in a developing country like Sri Lanka. Although the researchers have opened up various paths to study the fast food consumption (Glanz et al., 1998; Anand 2011), the researchers have given less attention to investigate the fast food consumption in Sri Lanka. As long as attitudes of people varied based on different cultural, economical and sociological factors, the identified attitudes towards fast food need to be assessed in the Sri Lankan context.

Food and food preparation plays a major role in Sri Lankan culture from ancient history. Since Sri Lanka is a multi cultural and multi religious country, the food selection and consumption patterns of Sri Lankans were affected by these diversities. For example, selection of meat for meals is highly affected by corresponding religious views of people and the eating habits of people are varied based on their religious and social backgrounds. However, the concept of fast food and expansion of fast food restaurants all over the country is a situation where multi cultural and multi religious people come under one umbrella for the purpose of food consumption. By today, from multinational fast food brands such as KFC, McDonalds, Dominos, Pizza Hut to Sri Lankan fast food brands such as Perera and Sons, DKW Fast food, etc are serving all over the country for all the culturally, economically and socially diversified customers.

Due to the rapid Socio economic changes in Sri Lanka today, dependent on one earner, basically the father or any other male earner in the family is not enough for majority of families. As a supporting hand, females too have employed in majority of families. There are situations where females act as the bread winner of some families. Not only the economic distress, but also the advances in female education have also led to the increase in female employment today. Whatever their role in the society as an earner, women have to care their families. Playing roles in the society and in the family at the same time has led to some changes in the traditional way of life of Sri Lankan women. In this circumstances, Fast food as a food decision of the family was considered through this research study from the working women's perspective. Unlike house wives, working women may have some rational to justify fast food as their food choice for themselves and their family. Therefore attitude of working women need to be assessed and investigated. The main purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the attitude of working women towards the fast food consumption to achieve the aforementioned objective of the study.

Even though the attitudes towards fast food were investigated in different contexts, there are no highlighting evidences relating to working women's attitude towards fast food consumptions in Sri Lankan context. After a review of the fast food consumption literature, we explain the setting for our research study more fully. Then we develop the conceptual model to find an answer for the following question, how working women's attitudes impact on fast food consumption in Sri Lanka. By identifying the attitudes towards fast food, it will be easy to evaluate the present direction of fast food industry in Sri Lanka and can bring out necessary modifications to the industry. Furthermore, the findings can be used by retailers for better understanding of consumers. This is of particular important to new comers to fast food industry in deciding the direction of their business models.

2. Literature review

Identification of consumer attitudes towards goods and services at the market place is of greater importance in marketing them along the target audiences. Consumer attitudes therefore play an important role in consumer behaviour literature and extend along vast majority of goods and services at the market place. The

literature review of the present study consists of reviewing attitudes of working women towards fast food consumption with focus on the areas of perceived taste, quality, nutrition value, convenience and price of fast food. Prior research has found several attitudes towards fast food and some of them are taste, cost, nutrition, convenience, weight concerns and cheapness that affect to the fast food choice in worldwide (Glanz et al., 1998 and Anand, 2011).

2.1.1 Fast Food Consumption

Consumer attitudes play an important role in modern research context due to its contribution towards predicting behaviour. Greenwald and Banaji (1995) have been identified attitudes as favourable and unfavourable dispositions towards objects. Attitudes can be used to understand and predict people's reactions towards certain objects and therefore, attitudes towards fast food can use as a predictor of fast food consumption behaviours.

The characteristics and patterns of food consumption are varied based on the country and/or regimes. Kromhout et al. (1989) has proved this fact by observing food consumption patterns of seven countries in 1960's. According to Goyal and Singh (2007), fast food consumption is a result of an influence of Western culture. As a result, the increased food consumption is one of the new trends in today's society that leads to the increase in caloric intake by people. In some Western cultures like America, increase in dependence on food eaten away from home is the one of the largest change in the food habits (Binkley, 2006). As a response to these changes in food habits, individuals and institutes interfere to the food consumption of people for wide range of reasons such as hospitality industry interfere to decrease food costs, public policy makers want to decrease food waste, Health and nutritionists want to reduce overconsumption and under consumption, etc. (Wansink, 2004).

2.1.2 Perceived Taste

According to Cardello (1998, p.5), "taste is the sensory experience that results from stimulation of chemoreceptor's located on the tongue, palate, pharynx, larynx, and other areas of the oral cavity". Taste is a sense that gives an appetite for hunger and thirst and which is sensible only for one flavor at a time (Brillat- Savarin, 2012). Taste buds are not the only influencer for the generation of taste. Other senses too collectively contribute to the taste of humans (Elder et al, 2010). Taste of food affects to the consumption volume of food. However, the research study conducted by Wansink et al. (2000) to identify the impact of external cues and perceived taste over the consumption volume in a sample of moviegoers in relation to popcorn and soft drink consumption has discovered that container size affect to the consumption volume regardless of perceived taste.

2.1.3 Perceived Quality

Food quality can be defined in various perspectives. For a nutritionist, it's the nutrition value of food. For a microbiologist, it's the safety of food. However, from the perspective of a consumer, it's the all characteristics of food such as safety, convenience, cost, value, etc as well as the sensory attributes of food (Cardello, 1998). Commercial food companies highly believe on social influences over the food quality and, as a result, they spend on large sum of money for the role models such as athletes, film stars and rock idols to sponsor their food products (Cardello, 1998). Hooker and Caswell (1995) describe this multidimensional food product quality under four categories. They are food safety attributes, nutrition attributes, value attributes and package attributes. In addition, there is a general agreement that quality has an objective and

subjective dimension. Objective quality refers to the physical characteristics built into the product and is typically dealt with by engineers and food technologists (Grunert, 2005). Subjective quality is the quality that perceived by consumers (Grunert, 2005). The relationship between the two is at the core of the economic importance of quality: only when producers can translate consumer wishes into physical product characteristics, and only when consumers can then infer desired qualities from the way the product has been built, will quality be a competitive parameter for food producers (Grunert, 2005).

2.1.4 Perceived Nutrition Value

Oxford dictionary defines nutrition as “the process of providing or obtaining the food necessary for health and growth”. The importance of nutrition value varies person to person and it is emotionally attached (Lang, 2005). However, Worsley (2002) has suggested that energy content of food, fat, vitamins and minerals, food production, ecology and sustainability are some of the possible areas of nutrition that a consumer must consider in general. In eating at a restaurant, nutritional value of the food is not an important factor that affect to the ordering behavior since primary purpose of eating out is to find a means for hunger (Yamamoto et al, 2004). The marketer’s responsibility towards the food products they sell go up day by day though they play a less attention in promoting the nutrition value of food in prime time advertisements (Henderson et al., 2005).

2.1.5 Perceived Convenience

Scholderer et al. (2004, p.108) state that food convenience can be defined roughly as “a positive attitude towards time and energy saving aspects in household meal production”. They have discovered that consumer attitude towards the convenience has a direct and significant effect towards the behaviour related to convince and it directly depend on the extent to which the consumer has involvement with the food and availability of household resources. Greater availability of fast food outlets reduces the time opportunity cost of fast food consumption (Sturm and Datar, 2005) and provide a more convenient mean for hunger.

2.1.6 Perceived Price

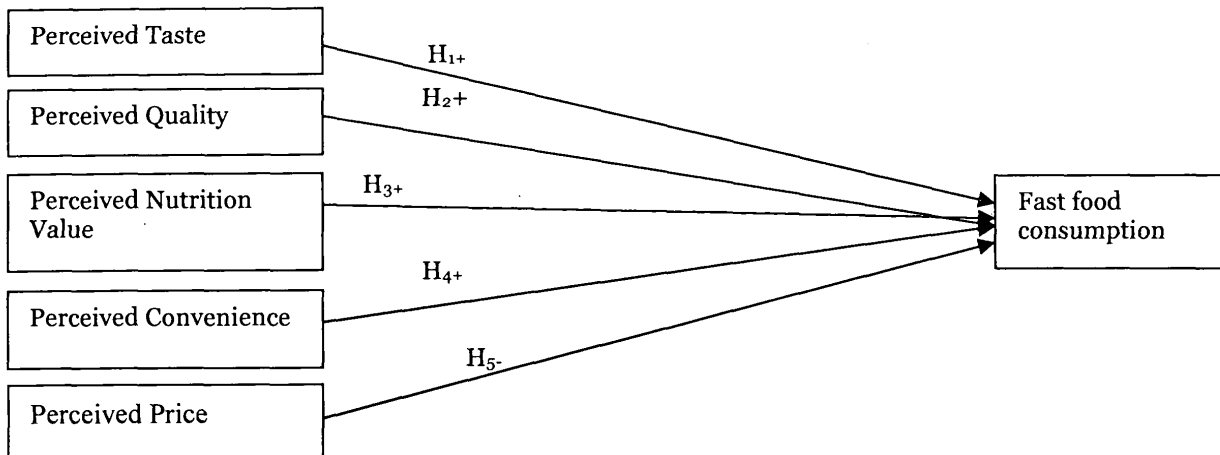
According to classical economic theory, price increase in a particular food leads to a decrease in consumption of that food. However there are situations that invalidate this argument. According to Epstein et al. (2010), mothers purchasing pattern towards low energy dense food was inelastic: 1% rise in price lead to less than 1% reduction in purchases, and purchases of high energy dense food roughly inelastic. Rohr et al. (2004) have found that price sensitivity of consumer for food is negatively correlated with the factor of “safety” while positively correlated with “price” and “appearance” of food. Based on these findings, he concluded that consumers are consistent with the willingness to pay a premium price for food safety.

2.2 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

“People like eating out or purchase fast food because it is cheap, convenient, tasty and above all heavily promoted. Evolution of eating out and food away from home to an extent of food revolution is an outcome of changing food and eating habits of the consumers towards convenience in the present time-starved societies, where both husband and wife are working” (Anand. 2011, p.182). Although these favourable features of fast food have led to increase in consumption, the real attitude towards fast food consumption is needed to be identified. The author has selected five areas that affect in generation of attitudes relate to the fast food consumption: perceived taste, perceived quality, perceived nutrition value, perceived convenience and perceived price to identify the influence towards the consumption act of fast food.

Scholars: (Mohr et al., 2007, Block et al., 2004) have defined or interpreted fast food restaurants differently in various occasions based on diverse criteria. The author has identified below mentioned food outlets as fast food outlets based on following characteristics that were driven from prior literature: “expedited food service, limited or no waiter staff, payment tendered prior to receiving food” (Block et al., 2004, p.212) and provide facilities to customers to consume their meals on site or take way. The author has identified 6 dominating Sri Lankan fast food outlets in Matara area. They were Perera& Sons, AmbaSewana, Mayura, Samanmal, DKW and the fast food outlet available at Keels Super, super market outlet.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



2.2.1 Hypotheses

It has been found that food consumption increases with the improvement of food taste (Wansink, 2000). In Glanz et al.,’s research study (1998) for examine whether taste, nutrition, cost, convenience and weight control concerns as influences on food consumption has found that taste is the most important factor over the other factors in selecting food for consumption. Females scored taste as the important predictor of food choice over the other factors. Based on the aforementioned reasons the hypothesis was built on the premise that consumption of fast food is influenced by the taste of the fast food and there is a positive relationship between fast food taste and consumption of fast foods.

H1: There is a positive relationship between perceived food taste and consumption of fast food

Adding value to the food to the extent that customers feel the product is worth in purchasing can create a better perception of the product quality (Grunert, 2005). In a sample of 422 members in city of Kiel, 33% of respondents have indicated “quality” as a decision making criteria for food choice and in general, quality perceptions of consumers towards food have been increased positively over the time (Rohr et al., 2004). This indicates the importance of quality as a criterion for food selection and consumption and the hypothesis was derived to identify this importance in the context of fast food consumption.

H2: There is a positive relationship between perceived food quality and consumption of fast food

Nutrition value of food has a significant influence over food selection and women place a greater importance for nutrition value than males over food consumption (Glanz et al., 1998).According to Binkley (2005), negative publicity of nutrition value has adversely affected to the fast food and hence, nutrition oriented customers prevent from consuming fast food. The following hypothesis was therefore built up to indicate this relationship with fast food consumption among working women.

H3: There is a positive relationship between perceived nutrition value and consumption of fast food

The existing literature has identified the term “convenience” as the time saving due to the avoidance of meal preparation in the context of food away from home (Jekanowski et al., 2001). Glanz et al. (1998) has found that the importance of convenience factor has led to a positive relationship with the consumption of fast food. RituAnand states that food choice of dual income families in urban India is based on convenience factor. These findings were further investigated by the following hypothesis through this research study in Sri Lankan context.

H4: There is a positive relationship between perceived convenience and consumption of fast food

The consumers who concern more for price tends to prevent from frequent dine outs such as eating fast foods (Binkley, 2005) and according to Glanz et al. (1998), in addition to young consumers, females concern more of food prices in general. According to Powell et al, decrease in Fast food prices has led to increase in body weight (2009). It indicates when fast food prices are low, people consume fast food more. The following hypothesis was therefore developed to identify the impact of fast food prices over fast food consumption based on these findings.

H5: There is a negative relationship between perceived price of fast food and consumption of fast food.

3. Method

3.1 Data Collection and Sample Selection

The data for the study were collected through a self-administered questionnaire. Convenience sampling technique was used as there was no sample frame of fast food consumers in Sri Lanka. The sample was comprised with 177 working women in Matara district from which 6% were self-employed, 20% were operational level workers, 52% were clerical level workers and 22% were management level workers. Matara is a commercial city in Southern province, Sri Lanka and have considerable number of governmental and nongovernmental organizations. A diverse population of working women, therefore, can be accessed in Matara district and hence Matara was selected as the research context.

The questionnaire was consisted with three sections. The first section was for the identification of general demographic characteristics of the respondents. The second section dealt with identifying fast food consumption, whilst the third section was focused on attitudes towards fast food consumption. The questionnaire was first prepared in English and then translated to Sinhala, the mother tongue of majority of Sri Lankans. The dimensions to measure attitudes towards fast food were derived from prior literature and shown in appendix A. Other than the questions for general demographic factors, all the other questions were addressed by a five-point scale (1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree).

4. Data Analysis

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test the study hypotheses. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was undertaken on the data to verify the unidimensionality and reliability of the scales used to measure the attitudes fast food consumption and to demonstrate the convergent, discriminant and predictive validity of these constructs. SmartPLS was used as the statistical data analysis tool.

The measurement model proposed for this analysis conceptualizes fast food consumption (FFC) as five unidimensional constructs. They were perceived taste (PT), perceived quality (PQ), perceived nutrition value (PNV), perceived convenience (PC) and perceived price (PP). CFA assessed the degree to which the hypothesized structure of items were capable of represent the relationships in the data by attempting to

recreate the original correlations among all the items. The similarity of the original and model-reproduced covariance is referred to as the fit of the model.

5. Results

5.1 Measure Validation

Initial step of using PLS was to establish the validity and reliability of the measurement model. The rule of thumbs were outer loading $>.70$, the average variance extracted (AVE) $>.50$, and the communality $>.50$ (Vinzi et al, 2010). The initial measurement model was consisted with 32 constructs and eight of them did not load strongly and showed unsatisfactory fit (table 1). The constructs that were loaded with below 0.7 were removed and a further analysis was performed. The discriminant and convergent validity was tested using the methods suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). They have suggested that convergent validity of constructs can be achieved if the AVE of respective items is greater than the variance unexplained. As shown in table 2 all the corresponding AVE values are more than 0.5 and indicates satisfactory the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs.

Composite Reliability and Cronbachs Alpha indicates the reliability of the constructs. All the constructs indicates Cronbachs Alpha values that are $>.60$ and composite reliability values that are $>.70$ of the constructs (table 3) and it indicates the reliability of constructs.

Table 1: Validity and Reliability Measures, Initial Analysis

	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbachs Alpha	Communality
FFC	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.8
PC	0.6	0.9	0.8	0.6
PNV	0.5	0.9	0.8	0.5
PP	0.6	0.9	0.9	0.6
PQ	0.2	0.6	0.7	0.2
PT	0.1	0.0	0.8	0.1

Table 2: Validity and Reliability Measures, Final Analysis

	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbachs Alpha	Communality
FFC	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.8
PC	0.6	0.9	0.8	0.6
PNV	0.5	0.9	0.8	0.5
PP	0.6	0.9	0.9	0.6
PQ	0.6	0.8	0.7	0.6
PT	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.7

5.2 Test of the Hypotheses

A SEM methodology was used to test the hypotheses. Table 3 shows the proposed latent variable values and the direction of the hypothesised effects over the fast food consumption, and whether they are supported by the findings or not.

Table 3: Structural Parameter Estimates and Direction of Hypotheses

Path	Fast food consumption β (t-value)	Hypothesis number	Direction
PT \longrightarrow FFC	0.015(0.199)	H ₁₊	Supported
PQ \longrightarrow FFC	-0.106(1.423)	H ₂₊	Not supported
PNV \longrightarrow FFC	0.082(1.142)	H ₃₊	Supported
PC \longrightarrow FFC	0.461(4.783)	H ₄₊	Significantly Supported
PP \longrightarrow FFC	0.088(0.820)	H ₅₋	Not supported
R ² Fast food consumption	0.272		

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The research examined the working women's attitude towards fast food consumption with reference to perceived taste, quality, nutrition value, convenience and price of fast food. Table 3 summarizes the findings. As hypothesized, perceived taste, convenience and nutrition value is positive. However, the findings suggest that perceived quality and price provide no support to the hypotheses. According to the findings, perceived convenience is the only factor that exerts a significant impact on fast food consumption of Sri Lankan working women.

Prior research has explored that taste is the minimum standard for food consumption (Glanz et al, 1998). Even though the finding of the present research suggests that perceived taste of fast food exerts a positive impact over fast food consumption, taste does not emerge as a significant predictor of fast food consumption among working women in Sri Lankan context. However, based on this finding, it cannot be concluded that fast food manufacturers are solely responsible for the taste, generated from their food. According to the findings of Wright et al. (2001), consumer food taste preference does not solely depend on biological factors. It is partly influenced by social and cultural factors that people are exposed and acquired in the process of upbringing. It indicates the influence of taste over consumption is context-dependent and marketers, therefore, have to exploit relevant cultural and social factors of their target audiences as well for successfully performed at the market place.

Findings suggest that convenience factor influence strongly over selecting fast food for consumption among working women. Indeed, it is natural that the importance of convenience of fast food is highly considered by working women when go for fast food as a mean for hunger. Fast food is a ready meal. After a tired and busy day, a readymade meal provides some sort of consolation for women, since they are the one who is responsible for the food decision of Sri Lankan family. Since convenience feature of fast food exerts a more favourable influence over fast food consumption, fast food retailers have to maintain and capitalize on this feature to attract and maintain their customer base.

Perceived price and perceived quality of fast food is opposed to the hypotheses developed. Perceived price gives a positive association towards fast food consumption. Normally, it is believed that fast food prices are attainable than the meals of full service restaurants and perceived quality of fast food has a negative association with consumption. It indicates a gap between perceived quality of the fast food and the experiences quality of fast food. This issue needs to be addressed by fast food retailers for the development of fast food industry. In addition, fast food providers need to invest on providing high level of convenience to customers in Sri Lankan context since findings clearly indicate convenience exert a significance influence over the choice of fast food and future researches, therefore, must focus on finding ways to how to improve the convenience factor in the context of fast food.

The study is subject to few limitations. First the study limit only to five predetermined attitudes for the purpose of analysis. There can be various forms of attitudes towards fast food consumption and they are out of the concern. Second the sample is limited to 177 members due to the financial and time constraints. Future research will contribute to overcome these limitations.

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Appendix

Variable	Item	References
perceived taste (1=Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree)	Colour Visible fat content Smell	Grunert, 2005
perceived quality (1=Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree)	Brand, Cues related to product origin, Quality labels, Product attractiveness, Colour, Packaging, Food safety	Grunert, 2005
perceived convenience (1=Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree)	perceived resources reduced effort-saving of time, physical energy, or of mental energy	Scholderer et al, 2004
	Easily reached Available at nearby locations	Jekanowski et al, 2001
perceived price (1=Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree)	Fairness Not expensive Cheap Good value for money	Steptoe et al, 1995
Perceived Nutrition Value (1=Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree)	Fat content Vitamins Minerals	Worsley (2002)