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**IMPACT OF SITUATIONAL FACTORS IN STUDENTS' PREFERENCE OF FAST FOOD – AN EMPIRICAL STUDY****A. AYESHA SIDDIQUA****Ph. D. RESEARCH SCHOLAR (PART – TIME), MADURAI KAMARAJ UNIVERSITY, MADURAI; &  
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MADURAI****ABSTRACT**

*Fast food culture is a vigorously uprising trend among the youngsters around the world. According to Tif (2015) India has seen a massive rise in the consumption of fast food over the recent few years. Numerous studies in the past were undertaken to identify the influential factors related to the consumer preference of fast food but studies with a specific focus on situational factors were few and limited. In most researches, either the impact of situational factors overlooked or few of them covered alongside other factors. As their influence being increasingly felt especially among youth, examining such factors in their preference and its subsequent research outcome would be of immense value to parties concerned. They normally include favourite time of eating, pocket money possessed, peers influence, time of social interaction, place of advertisements, parent's income and location of restaurant. The present study is an attempt to investigate the influence of these situational factors in preferring the fast food by students. The study would serve the twin objectives in one-go. In one-side, it helps the parents and individuals to regulate and reduce the intake of fast food as the increased eating of the food causes health related problems. On the other side, it suggests the fast food companies to use the situational factors effectively in their advertisements while targeting their audience.*

**KEYWORDS**

fast food, situational factors, students' preference.

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**INTRODUCTION**

**F**ast food culture is a vigorously uprising trend among the youngsters around the world. According to Tif (2015) India has seen a massive rise in the consumption of fast food over the recent few years. According to leading websites, fast food is the term given to that can be prepared and served very quickly, while Habib et al., (2014) described fast food as quickly prepared, reasonably priced and readily available alternatives to home cooked food. We can find the imprints of its existence at restaurants, stadiums, airports, zoos, schools and universities, on cruise ships, trains and aeroplanes, at supermarkets, petrol stations and even hospitals (Schlosser, 2002). The fast food market in India will more than double to around Rs. 15,000 crore by 2018-19 from Rs. 7000 crore in 2016-17, driven largely by new store additions (Crisil). The preference of fast food has become a trend especially among teenagers and youth and has won the palate of those groups. And, hence it has earned the name of 'Tiffin' of students (Ahamed Hossain et. al., 2008). Their most prominent fast food items include burger, pizza, fried chicken, hamburger and sandwich (Islam & Ullah, 2010).

Numerous studies in the past were undertaken to identify the influential factors related to the consumer preference of fast food but studies with a specific focus on situational factors were few and limited. In most researches, either the impact of situational factors overlooked or few of them covered alongside other factors. As their influence being increasingly felt especially among youth, examining such factors in their preference and its subsequent research outcome would be immense value to parties concerned. They normally include favourite time of eating, pocket money possessed, peers influence, time of social interaction, place of advertisements, parent's income and location of restaurant. The present study is an attempt to investigate the influence of these situational factors in preferring the fast food by students. The study would serve the twin objectives in one-go. In one-side, it helps the parents and individuals to regulate and reduce the intake of fast food as the increased eating of the food causes health related problems. On the other side, it suggests the fast food companies to use the situational factors effectively in their advertisements while targeting their audience.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

When the food choices of the children are changed it leads to a dietary problem and affects the health of the children (Joint Report of WHO/FAO, 2002). Many factors such as lifestyle have been linked to college students' eating behaviours. However, it is much related to hours spent with peers, time of social interaction, and weekly budget for food (Jackson et. al., 2009). It is reported that students spent approximately half of their pocket money on fast food, which put extra economic burden on the parents of university students (Yadav K, and Krishnan, 2008). It was indicated that most of the fast food users are well informed about the negative effects associated with its consumption, but they were still reported to have fast food at a regular basis without considering their health complications (Munmeen Shabnam, 2013). Adolescents often compare themselves to their friends and many after their choices to conform to the behaviour of their peers (Rogers et. al., 2016) social relationships and interactions also influenced the eating habits of students (Chang et. al., 2010). Hastings (2010) found that there was a direct casual relationship between children's exposure to food promotion and children's food preferences. Social factors such as eating in groups are another factor, which affects the diet behaviour, because when they act in group, at that time persons are busy in gossiping. People are more attentive in gossiping instead of they eat or how much they eat (Gurven, 2015).

**PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Numerous studies in the field of fast food preference by students documented the influence of various factors like convenience, taste and quality, which were mostly from the perspective of food and store. The influence of situational factors like peers influence, time of social interaction, favourite time of eating, status of parents, amount spending and place of advertising were covered by studies alongside other factors while investigating the preference of fast food. All these factors referred as situational factors were not studied enblock holistically by researchers as evident from the reviews. The present study fills this research gap.

**OBJECTIVES**

The major objectives of the study are

1. To identify the situational factors of students while preferring fast food.
2. To analyse the influence of major situational factors in students preference of fast food.
3. To offer suggestions based on the findings of the study.

**METHODOLOGY**

It is an empirical study based on primary data. The students who were in the age group of fifteen and above considered for the study. By a judicious mixture of non-probability sampling methods of judgemental and quota sampling, a sample of 300 students were selected for the study. Responses on 20 statements expressing the effect of situational factors on the preference of fast food by respondents were received and analysed. Statistical tools like percentage analysis and chi-square test were applied and inferences were drawn. The study was conducted among the students of selected schools and college in the Madurai city of Tamil Nadu.

**ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

Table-1 shows the situational background of factors where the respondents usually prefer and eat fast foods.

**TABLE 1: SITUATIONAL FACTORS OF RESPONDENTS**

S. No.	Situational Factor	Sub-categories	Number	%
1.	Favourable time of eating	Leisure time	91	30.30
		Class interval	132	44.00
		Holidays	77	25.70
			300	100.00
2.	Status of peers	Classmates	119	39.70
		Friends	181	60.30
			300	100.00
3.	Pocket-money spent (Per week)	Upto Rs. 1000	122	40.70
		Between Rs.1000 and Rs.2000	95	31.70
		Above Rs.2000	83	27.60
			300	100.00
4.	Educational level	Schooling	156	52.00
		College	144	48.00
			300	100.00
5.	Occupational status of Parents	Govt. employee	88	29.30
		Private employee	125	41.70
		Business and industry	87	29.00
			300	100.00
6.	Location of school / college studied	Busy area	79	26.33
		Outskirts of the city	124	41.33
		Residential / Far off	97	32.33
			300	100
7.	Time of social interaction	Birthday parties/ functions	100	33.30
		Evening get together	114	38.00
		Weekend meetings	86	28.70
			300	100.00
8.	Place of advertisement	In-School/College	156	52.00
		Indirect	144	48.00
		Total	300	100.00

Source: Primary data

It is known from Table-1 that a majority of 44%, 60.30%, 40.70%, 41.70%, 41.33% and 38% of respondents belong to the situational sub-categories of 'class interval' (favourable time of eating), 'friends' (status of peers), 'upto Rs. 1000' (pocket-money spent), 'schooling' (educational level), 'private - employee' (occupational status of parents), 'outskirts of the city' (location of school/college studied) and 'evening get together' (time of social interaction) respectively.

To ascertain the impact of selected eight situational factors, a broader null hypotheses that 'the situational factors of students do not have any impact on their preference of fast food' was framed and tested.

The result of Chi-square test are furnished in Table-2

**TABLE 2: RESULTS OF CHI – SQUARE TEST ON SITUATIONAL FACTORS**

Sl. No.	Situational Factor	Calculated Value of Chi – Square	Degrees of freedom	Table Value of Chi – Square	Acceptance / Rejection of Null hypothesis
1.	Favourable time of eating fast food	25.685	4	9.49	Rejected
2.	Status of peers	13.492	2	5.99	Rejected
3.	Amount of pocket money – spent	9.876	4	9.49	Rejected
4.	Level of Education	36.686	4	9.49	Rejected
5.	Educational status of parents	2.908	4	9.49	Accepted
6.	Location of school/college	2.497	4	9.49	Accepted
7.	Time of social interaction	10.313	4	9.49	Rejected
8.	Place of advertisement	0.574	2	5.99	Accepted

Source: Computed data

From the result of the analysis (Table 2) it is inferred that out of the eight situational factors considered for the study, the five factors such as 'favourable time of eating', 'status of peers', 'amount of pocket-money spent', 'level of education' and 'time of social interaction' have significant impact on the preference of fast food by students as their null hypotheses were rejected. The remaining three factors such as 'occupational status of parents', 'location of school/college, and 'place of advertisements' do not have any impact in preference.

**SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Increasing economic status and appetite for western food among students throughout the country has seen a massive rise in the consumption of fast food over the recent few years. Marketers may benefit by adjusting their marketing and promotional mixes to the different segments of consumers. While targeting student-consumers, situational factors like time of eating, influence of peers, pocket-money spent, educational and time of social interaction have to be rightly mixed in the future promotional strategy as their value being empirically established in the present study.

But, excessive consumption of fast food is not good for health as they are rich in saturated fats, trans-fat, simple carbohydrates and sodium-all of which are nutrients associated with hypertension, heart disease and type-2 diabetes. Developing healthy lifestyle among younger generation is a concern for all. Government on its part, may play an effective regulatory role in the fast food industry. The parents who are the genuine protector of their wards, have to play a role of 'watch-dogs' in the area of food choices of their children. The findings of the present study draw the attention of parents and require them to be cautious and exercise strict vigil on influential situational factors like their time of eating, peers presence, pocket-money given, and time of their social interaction and gatherings, while their children away home. Further researches in vast geographical area with large sample size, may be attempted to gain more and more valuable insights on the most influential situational factors in the preference of fast food by students.

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