

Restaurant Image Parameters and its Importance in Building Children's Perception for Multinational Fast Food Restaurants

Daisy Kurien*
Jitendra Sharma**
Siddharth Das***

Abstract

Children and fast food have a symbiotic relationship. As in the case of the situation depicted in the poem titled "The Pied Piper of Hamelin", the children follow the marketing communications of multinational fast food restaurants, have food, spend some cherishable moments and enjoy. Children are the primary market, influencer market and the future market (Mc Neal, 1999). Hence, the objective of the study was to understand the perception of children for MNC fast food restaurants so that marketers can offer services as per the requirements of the target market and improvise accordingly.

The entire study was conducted taking the help of 410 urban schools going children belonging to the age group of 8 years to 17 years. The study was done in the major cities of Gujarat namely Ahmedabad, Anand, Vadodara, Rajkot and Surat. The various restaurant image parameters based on which children select and visit fast food restaurants include the taste of food items, variety of food, quality of food, the location convenience, quantity of food, the interior design, the behaviour of professional staff, cleanliness and low price. The children's consumption pattern for fast food at five MNC fast food restaurants which includes McDonald, Dominos, Subway, Pizza Hut and KFC were also examined. The study revealed that children gave the highest level of importance to taste, variety and quality of food offered at the restaurants.

Keywords: Children, Perception, Restaurant Image Parameters, Importance, Multinational, Fast Food Restaurants

Introduction

Fast food is growing in popularity because of its convenience, easy availability, taste, price and quality. The current size of the Indian food service industry is INR 247,680 crore and is projected to grow at 11 percent to INR 408,040 crore by 2018. As the purchasing power of consumers increased, coupled with the impact of globalisation, fast food became one

of the favourite options of consumers. Children were equally attracted to local as well as multinational fast food restaurants where food is made available not only in less time, but which was perceived as tasty and of good quality. Halan (2000) and Singh (1998) have opined that children are a part of a major consumer market, with direct purchasing power for snacks and sweets, and have indirect purchase influence for shopping involving big ticket-items.

For marketers, children of various age groups - infants, toddlers, young children or adolescents, are attractive segments. For children across the world and also in India, due to their increasing population, they present themselves as a huge market (Gandhi, R, 2010). Children are the primary market, influencer market and the future market (Mc Neal, 1999). Increasing income of parents and changing lifestyle have led to a rise in the pocket money of kids which have given

Daisy Kurien*

Associate Professor, Xcellon Institute-School of Business, Ahmedabad

Jitendra Sharma**

Associate Professor, Xcellon Institute-School of Business, Ahmedabad

Siddharth Das***

Associate Professor, L.J. Institute of Computer Application, Ahmedabad

them the buying capacity, thereby becoming a part of the primary market. Children have always been able to influence their parents to buy them what they want, hence becoming the influencer market. Earlier literature shows that a number of studies have been conducted on children of different age group.

Literature Review

Fast Food

To determine the definition of fast food, 55 epidemiologic studies that had conducted primary or secondary study on 'fast food' were reviewed. (Kapica, C et al, 2006). In a few studies, it was found that fast food was defined as the specific restaurant or food item used type of service provided and restaurant food or food obtained outside the home while few other studies did not provide any specific criteria. According to Merriam Webster dictionary, fast food is defined as 'of relating to, or specialising in food that can be prepared and served quickly'. In India, there are local, national and multinational fast food restaurants which offer food which can be cooked and served in quick time. The food offered at fast food restaurants is relished by both young and old. Children visit fast food restaurants, not only for tasty food but also for an experience. The food offered at multinational fast food restaurants are pizza, burgers, french fries, sandwiches, cold drinks etc., food which is enjoyed by mostly all children.

Children

According to John (1999), children pass through 3 stages of consumer socialisation which are the perceptual stage (3-6 years), analytical stage (7-11 years) and reflective stage (11-16 years). In the analytical stage, children become more flexible in their approach, making them more adaptive and responsive, while in the reflective stage, cognitive and social development of child takes place and children begin to understand the nuances of market place concepts such as branding and pricing. A number of researches have been done, to understand children of different age groups. Tweens and teens (teenagers) are terms which have been used for children. Most researchers in academics have defined "tweens" as 8-12 year olds (Anderson, Tufle, Rasmussen, & Chan, 2001) while some consider the age group 8-14 year olds as tweens.

(Lindstrom,2004). Also a narrow age group (11-12 year olds) have also been referred to as tweens (Dibley& Baker, 2001). In this study, children of age group 8 to 12 as well as 13 to 17 year have been considered so that children from 2 stages, analytical and reflective, together provide better perspective.

Restaurant Image Parameters which Influence Perception

Zeithaml (1988, P 14) suggests that overall assessment of the utility of a product/service based on the perception of what is received and given can be regarded as the perceived value. Before the food is served in a restaurant, it is the ambience of the place which builds the customer's perception (Bitner, 1990). If the perception of ambience of a place is positive, it will directly influence their perception of food quality and service of the fast food restaurant. (Lazarova & Krystallis, 2010), Perception of atmosphere impacts customer's perception of overall quality of the restaurant, which also directly affects customer experience (Ryu & Han, 2008). Food quality was one of the most important reasons to visit the fast food restaurant and an important determinant of product choice (Zeithaml, 1988).

The top five attributes described as drivers of positive experiences include quality of food/drink, quality of service, friendliness of staff, atmosphere of restaurant, and speed of service (Harrington, 2012). Research conducted by (Goyal, 2007) found that respondents gave importance to taste and quality (nutritional values) which was followed by ambience and hygiene. Various factors like variety of food items, quality, taste, ingredients etc. were analyzed to study consumer perception about food franchisee (Thakkar et al., 2014). The study revealed that price of the food items affect the frequency of visits to food outlets. Customer satisfaction is also influenced by consumer's perception of how service employees care for them (Smith et al., 1999).Mohammad *et al* (2005) studied service perceptions, atmospheric perceptions, food perceptions, positioning, food product attributes, service personnel, price and cleanliness among four cultural groups. For this study, the researchers selected ten restaurant image parameters which were Quick Service, Overall Cleanliness, Taste of Food, Low Price,

Variety in Menu, Convenient Location, Quality of food, Interior design, Professional Staff, Quantity of food.

Research Methodology:

Research Objectives:

- To determine the importance of several restaurant image parameters and factors in building perception of children for MNC Fast Food Restaurants
- To understand the consumption pattern of fast food among children in Gujarat

Methodology: Exploratory research design was used to identify the various restaurant image factors which impacted perception. Exploratory research was conducted with the help of literature review. A total of 410 urban school going children belonging to the age group 8 to 17 years were approached for the study. The children were approached in school. The 5 multinational fast food restaurants considered for the study are McDonalds, Dominos, Subway, Pizza Hut and KFC. The 5 restaurants were chosen as they are the only operating multinational fast food restaurants in Gujarat state during the period of the study (2016). Survey was conducted in 5 major cities of Gujarat i.e Ahmedabad, Anand, Vadodara, Rajkot and Surat. Respondents were chosen from all board categories of schools includes state board (Gujarati and English medium), CBSE and IB/ICSE/IGCSE. This was done to cover respondents with different demographics representing different educational background. Within the cities, maximum region has been covered so that the sample is representative of the population.

Data Collection:

Primary Data Source: Primary data from children was collected by a survey approach using a structured questionnaire which was designed as per the objectives of the study. As children of extreme age brackets (8 years and 17 years) were to be surveyed and their comprehension level is different, hence data of tweens and teens was collected using two separate sets of questionnaires. Both the questionnaires had the same set of questions, but had different design and scales. In the questionnaire for tweens, smileys and cartoon

images were used which made it easy for tweens to understand the questions. This was also done to keep the children interested in the survey. Also a 3 point likert scale was used for tweens questionnaire while a 5 point scale was used for teens, which was later reduced to scale of 3 for analysis. The questionnaire was designed both in English and Gujarati(vernacular), and was used as per the requirement of the respondents.

Secondary Data Sources: Secondary data was collected from journals (national and international), books, magazines, newspapers and websites.

Sampling Plan: Quota sampling was used as a sampling procedure where data was collected from schools of all boards located in major cities of Gujarat. The questionnaire was validated by a pilot study which was administered on 60 children. The Chronbach alpha value of the pilot study was 0.756 which stated the validity of the instrument. Post the pilot study, minor corrections were made in the questionnaire, like further simplifying few statements which children found it difficult to comprehend.

Data Analysis: Data was analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics 20.

Results and Analysis:

Data was collected from 426 urban school going children. Out of 426 questionnaires given to children for the survey, 16 were found to be incomplete.

Frequency of Visit to Multinational Fast Food Restaurants:

Figure 1 shows how frequently children visited multinational fast food restaurants. The question stated that 'Very Frequently' meant Once in a week visit, 'Frequently' meant Once in a month visit, 'Occasionally' meant On specific occasions only, Rarely meant Once in 6 months while 'Very Rarely' meant Once in a year..

The findings showed that 38.32 percent of the children visited MNC fast food restaurants frequently, while 15.12percent of the children were 'very frequent' visitors. Occasional visits were reflected by 23.17percent of the children while 24.39 percent of the children visited the restaurants 'rarely' or 'very

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Based on Gender	N	Percent
<i>Males</i>	215	52.4
<i>Females</i>	195	47.6
Based on School Board		
<i>State board</i>	130	31.7
<i>CBSE board</i>	195	47.6
<i>IB/ICSE/IGCSE board</i>	85	20.7
Based on Age groups		
<i>Tweens (8-12 years)</i>	206	50.2
<i>Teens(13-17 years)</i>	204	49.8
Based on City		
<i>Ahmedabad</i>	105	25.6
<i>Anand</i>	85	20.7
<i>Surat</i>	80	19.5
<i>Vadodara</i>	60	14.6
<i>Rajkot</i>	80	19.5

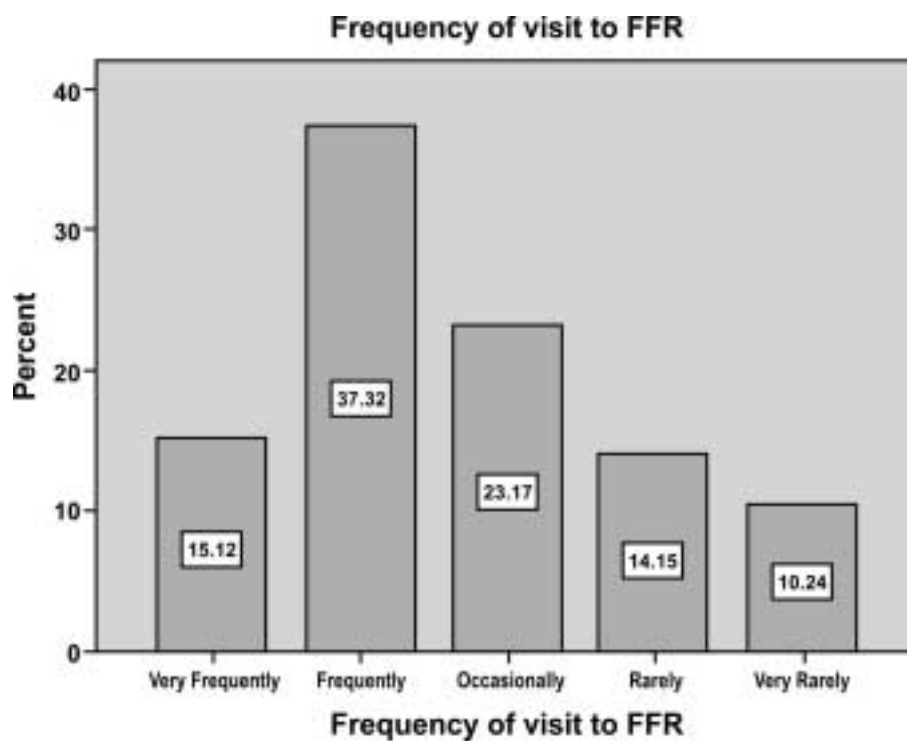


Figure 1: Frequency of Visit to Multinational Fast Food Restaurants

rarely'. The finding shows the popularity of MNC fast food restaurants among both children.

Mode of Eating Fast Food:

Children were asked their mode of eating fast food. The researcher wanted to know whether they personally visited the fast food restaurant or had the food delivered at home. A new meaning has been assigned to the term 'fast food'. It means ordering your favourite meal from your favourite restaurant and getting it delivered at your door step instantly. Getting food delivered at home is increasingly becoming a trend because of the marketers 'Free home delivery' option within a particular range of

kilometres of the restaurant vicinity. Domino's Pizza with its offer of delivering food within 30 minutes of receiving the order has given tough competition to the other MNC fast food joints.

Figure 2 show that 78.29 percent of the children personally visited the MNC fast food restaurants to eat food while 21.71 percent of the children ordered food at home. It is interesting to see the latter percentage increase in the coming years, owing to ease of ordering, quick delivery, cash on delivery options, user friendly mobile applications and increase in number of working mothers.

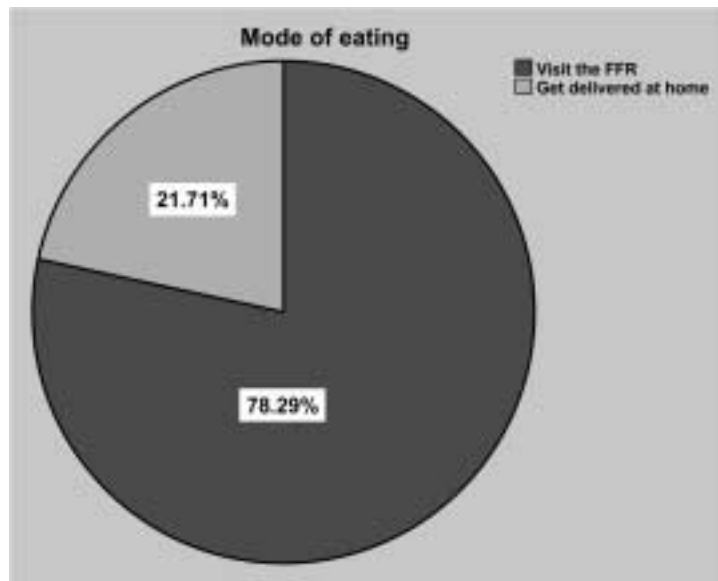


Figure 2: Mode of eating fast food

Most Favourite Multinational Fast Food Restaurant

Children were asked to choose their most favourite fast food restaurants. The options given were KFC, Domino's Pizza, McDonalds, Subway and Pizza Hut. An option 'others' too was listed.

Figure 3 show that 41.71 percent of the children claimed Domino's Pizza as their favourite restaurants while 24.39 percent of the children's choice was McDonalds. This could be due to the large presence of Domino's Pizza in the 5 surveyed cities. Also only 7.56 percent of the children considered KFC as their favourite. This could be due to the fact that in Gujarat, people are mostly vegetarians while the name Kentucky

Fried Chickens, overtly suggests the non-vegetarian variety it offers. Although the questionnaire stated that all questions were for MNC fast food restaurants, children still chose option 6, and mentioned names of local joints present in their cities which were primarily local pizza joints. It can also be inferred that it was difficult for children to differentiate between local and multinational fast food restaurants. Study can be conducted to know whether they actually understood the difference between local, national and multinational fast food joints.

Person with whom Children visit Multinational Fast Food Restaurant

Children were asked who joined them in their visit to

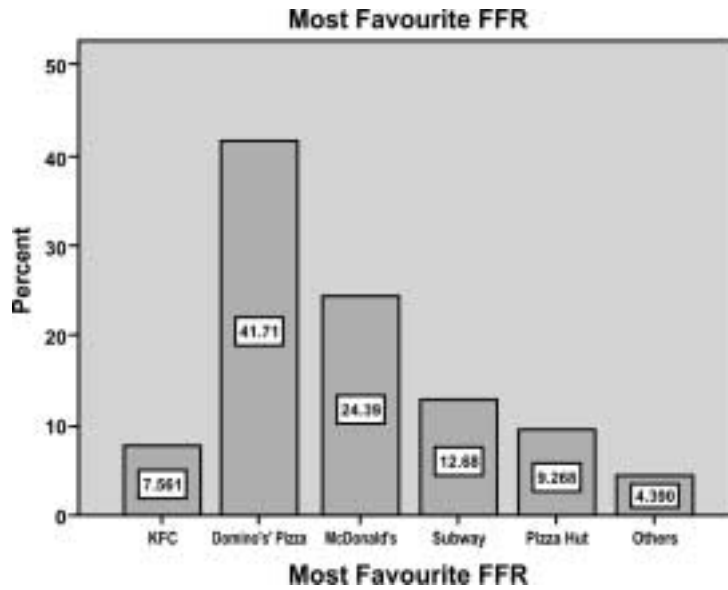


Figure 3: Most Favourite Multinational Fast Food Restaurant

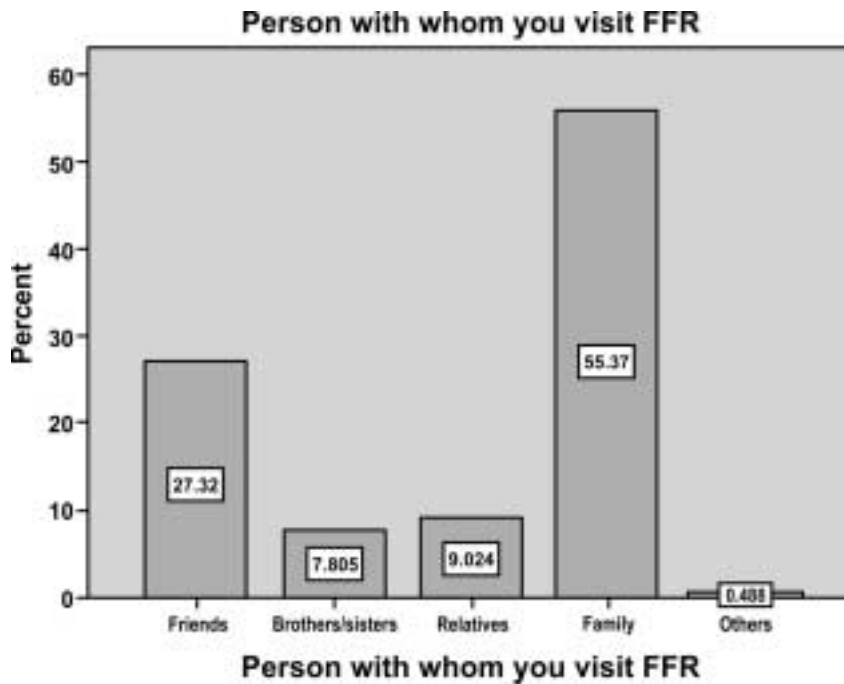


Figure 4: Figure showing with whom Children Visited Multinational Fast Food Restaurants

multinational fast food restaurants. The options given were friends, brothers/sister, relative, family and others.

The figure 4 shows that 55.37 percent of children reported that they went with their family members, 27.32 percent children reported that they went with

their friends, 7.8 percent reported that they went with their brothers/sisters while 9.024 percent said that they went with their relatives. Thus, marketers can work towards catering to young and old both, as children are accompanied by their family members too.

Analysis of Factors Influencing Perception of MNC Fast Food Restaurants: Restaurant Image Parameters

The variables which framed images of the MNC fast food restaurant in the minds of the children were studied through literature review. Kara et al (1995) identified 11 attributes that revealed consumer's perception of the fast food restaurants like price, friendliness of personnel, variety of menu, service speed, etc. The perception of these restaurant image variables on the young minds would stay for a longer period and thus

marketers need to identify and study the variables. The variables chosen for this study were Quick service, Overall cleanliness, Taste of food, Low price, Variety in menu, convenient location, Quality of food, Interior design, Professional staff and Quantity of food. Children were asked to give their preference of various restaurant image parameters of multinational fast food restaurants, based on its importance. Factor analysis was done to understand the importance of the mentioned factors. The following tables were studied.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.653
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	295.086
	df	45
	Sig.	.000

The result (table 2) shows 0.653 KMO sampling adequacy rates which was sufficient for doing factor analysis for all variables.

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Table 3: Total variance explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	Percent of Variance	Cumulative percent	Total	Percent of Variance	Cumulative percent	Total	Percent of Variance	Cumulative percent
1	2.099	20.989	20.989	2.099	20.989	20.989	1.588	15.881	15.881
2	1.288	12.882	33.871	1.288	12.882	33.871	1.402	14.024	29.904
3	1.161	11.611	45.482	1.161	11.611	45.482	1.355	13.553	43.458
4	1.047	10.472	55.954	1.047	10.472	55.954	1.250	12.496	55.954
5	.929	9.287	65.241						
6	.795	7.947	73.188						
7	.750	7.502	80.690						
8	.678	6.775	87.465						
9	.667	6.669	94.135						
10	.587	5.865	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Service				
Cleanliness				.716
Taste	.740			
Price				.626
Variety	.664			
Location		.591		
Quality	.658			
Interior			.685	
Staff			.792	
Quantity		.772		

*Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 8 iterations.*

Four factors were extracted and they explained 55.954 percent of variance. In terms of priority the first factor comprises of taste, variety and quality. The second factor comprises of location and quantity, the third

factor comprises of interior and staff while the fourth factor comprises of cleanliness and price. Figure 4 shows the four factors which were renamed by the author.



Figure 5: Factors renamed by researcher post factor analysis

It was observed that value proposition (Taste, Variety and Quality) is the most important factor stimulating the perception of children for MNC Fast food Restaurant.

The second most important factor having a significant implication on the perception of children for MNC

Fast Food Restaurant was place and benefits (Location and Quantity)

The third important factor influencing the perception of children comprised of ambience and service (Interior and Staff) in fast food restaurants.

The fourth underlying factor behind the perception

building was hygiene maintained in restaurants & the affordable price of food items.

Conclusion

This study conducted to understand the perception of children for multinational fast food restaurants showed that children considered the restaurant image parameters of taste, variety and quality as the most important restaurant image factors. This was followed by the importance of the parameters convenient location of the restaurant and the quantity of food served at the restaurant. Marketers need to work on improving the benchmarks of the factors considered important by the children. It is believed by the marketers that children, who become their customers at a very young age, have more chances of becoming life-long customers. This is because consumer behaviour learnt at a young age stays persistent till adulthood (Deriemaeker et al., 2007). As children are the future market too, hence the perception that they carry of restaurants might impact their choices in the future too.

Limitations of the study:

One of the limitations of this study was the

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comprehension level of children which varies in different age groups. Hence, it may have been difficult for them to correctly understand the questions given in the questionnaire. Also, the study was conducted only in 5 major cities in Gujarat, namely – Ahmedabad, Anand, Vadodara, Rajkot and Surat so as to generalise the findings for the state of Gujarat. The study was limited to multinationals fast food restaurants only. Also the age group chosen was 13 to 17 years only. Children of age group 18 and 19 years were not included

Future scope for researchers

This study was only done in Gujarat and it can be extended to other states in India. Studies can be conducted to evaluate the influence of various demographic factors like income, age, education on the perception for MNC fast food restaurants. Also this study was limited to multinational fast food restaurants. Researchers can study local and national fast food restaurants too. Teens of age group 18 and 19 were not considered in the study. Thus, future studies can incorporate children of age group 18 and 19 years too.

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