

An exploration of the factors attributing to the consumption of American foods: a case study in Bengaluru city

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ABSTRACT

American Food Restaurants (AFRs) are very popular as they meet the growing demand for flavourful, tasty, high quality and healthy meals with instant satisfaction of the taste buds. This study earnestly aims at analysing the consumers' reasons for preferring AFRs, factors influencing their preference and the degree of preference to the factors attributing for their consumption from AFRs. A survey of 90 consumers consuming American foods in Bengaluru city from AFRs (McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Domino's, KFC, Papa Johns, Subway and Taco Bell) was conducted in 2015 which was analysed using Likert scale, mean, standard deviation and percentage. Findings indicated that consumers preferred AFRs for ten major attributes viz food quality, food safety, restaurant attributes, services offered, marketing aspects, psychological factors, convenience, cost, experience and enjoyment. Convenience was rated the highest factor influencing the consumers in preferring AFRs. Food safety and quality had the highest degree of preference while factors like marketing aspects, services offered, experience, enjoyment, restaurant attributes, cost and psychological factors were attached with medium degree of preference. Convenience factor was attached to a medium level of preference. The outcome of this study would provide a concrete base for setting up an agenda for consumer delight in future.

Keywords: AFRs; clientele; consumer delight; convenience; fillers; portion sizes; psychological factors; social value

INTRODUCTION

A restaurant generally transforms the simplest act of eating in order to satisfy the basic drives/needs of individuals into an elaborate civilized ritual that comprises elements like hospitality, cordiality, friendliness, imagination, contentment, sociability and warmth. Restaurants basically offer a hassle-free alternative for individuals and families.

American Food Restaurants (AFRs) are typically part of a national or regional restaurant chain or franchise or independent operations with drive-through outlets with provisions of standardized ingredients and/or partially prepared foods and supplies to each restaurant through controlled supply channels

from central locations. The main reason attributing for the stupendous success of the multinational chains is their knowhow, expertise and proficiency in product development, sourcing practices, maintaining international quality standards, high service levels and consistent, homogeneous operating procedures in their restaurants, an asset that they have built over several years of experience.

AFRs are becoming more popular as they meet the growing demand for flavourful and tasty foods with instant satisfaction of the taste buds, high quality and healthy meals. They are quick, reasonably priced and readily available alternatives to home cooked food, economical for a busy lifestyle and provide ample pleasure. AFRs have become a 'home away from

home' for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The diverse culinary habits, wide range of cuisines and the diverse cooking techniques are some of the main factors behind the growth of the AFRs in India. Robson (1999) analysed the psychology of the design for high-volume restaurants in USA and stated that some of the ambient factors like colour, sound, lighting and scent would offer a positive guest experience and improve the authenticity of the restaurant.

Emergence of nuclear families, double income group, change in gender roles, large and growing middle class and sub-urban communities, the changing age profile (eighty-five million people expected to enter the 20-34 year age group by 2016) of the consumers, a young population with higher aspirations and aggressive marketing campaigns, a largely untapped domestic market of 1300 million consumers, 350 million strong urban middle class with its growing purchasing power, increasing literacy, increasing mobility, a fast-paced life, value for time and value for money are also other some importnat reasons for the growing number of AFRs in India.

Today's business is all about delighting consumers and so the research will unearth the essential factors required now a days for an eating joint to attract customers in this competitive world, the underlying consumer preferences, customer eating habits, what a consumer wants while eating in a restaurant, customer needs, what all a consumer looks for, what are their expectations as well as towards making the choice of the American food outlets and thereby enable the AFRs to respond to the customer's desires. It is crucial for AFRs to acquire knowledge of customers' expectations and dining satisfaction.

Therefore sound understanding of consumer preference for AFRs over time is the proper foundation for winning and retaining consumers. The study also gives a clear picture about the shifting of consumers from homemade foods to foods away from home/American foods. The topic is generally not well acknowledged especially relating to the customers' point of view. Hence the study was focused on the factors attributing to the consumption of American foods in Bengaluru city, Karnataka.

The study was aimed at fulfilling the objectives pertaining to the consumers reasons for preferring AFRs, factors influencing their preference for AFRs

and the level/degree of preference to the factors attributing for their consumption from AFRs.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire-based survey of 90 consumers consuming American style foods in Bengaluru city from AFRs (McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Domino's, KFC, Papa Johns, Subway and Taco Bell) was conducted in the year 2015. The core of the questionnaire was a list of factors/reasons compiled coupled with Likert scale through which the consumers were invited to rate their ability in relation to each factor/reason. The data collected for the study were processed and analyzed using suitable statistical/analytical tools and techniques like mean, standard deviation and percentage keeping in view the specific objectives of the study to draw meaningful conclusions.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

This study provides valuable insights about the reasons as well as the factors influencing consumer preference for AFRs in Bengaluru city. The main focus was to throw some light on some of the explanations responsible for the major trends observed in the study.

Reasons for preferring AFRs

The reasons for preferring AFRs are indicated in Table 1. The consumers preferred AFRs for various attributes. Accordingly ten major attributes were identified.

In the attribute food quality appearance and other sensory attributes of the food were given utmost importance with a mean score of 3.91 followed by presentation (3.58) and wholesomeness of the food (3.21). Least importance was given to foods free of preservatives, fillers and extenders (2.75). Taste was given the primary basis for the choice of menu items at an AFR by the consumers. The consumers of American foods can thus be deduced to be more focused towards themselves and their family and that they are less sensitive to price.

In the attribute food safety, absence of health risks (2.50) and guaranteed healthy eating (2.44) were given the highest importance. It is surprising to note that culture has never been a consideration for abstaining American food. This indicates that the American food fever is soon catching up even among

Table 1. Reasons for preferring AFRs (n= 90)

Reason	Total	Mean	SD
Food quality			
Appearance and other sensory attributes of the food	352	3.91	0.72
Foods free of preservatives, fillers and extenders	248	2.75	0.99
Presentation of the food	323	3.58	0.87
Larger portion sizes/quantity served	261	2.90	0.71
Wholesomeness of the food	289	3.21	0.94
Food safety			
Absence of health risks	225	2.50	0.81
Guaranteed healthy eating	220	2.44	0.88
Restaurant's attributes			
Enjoyable and relaxing atmosphere	338	3.75	0.85
Spacious environment	317	3.52	0.85
Comfort and seating arrangement	339	3.76	0.87
Amenities available	322	3.57	0.67
Restaurant interiors	327	3.63	0.81
Design of facilities (chairs and tables)	324	3.60	1.02
Air-conditioned outlets with wi-fi facility	289	3.21	1.12
Cultural impact of the restaurant	260	2.88	0.75
Demographic characteristics of the restaurant	306	3.40	0.74
Services offered			
Space for car parking	316	3.51	0.95
Drive-through service	323	3.58	0.63
Take-home facility	335	3.72	0.54
Attentive and friendly staff who give personal care	288	3.20	0.78
Personalization of food products	308	3.42	0.80
Convenience of washroom	320	3.55	0.76
Excellent complaint handling/customer care	298	3.31	0.86
Orders taken over the phone and internet	340	3.77	0.49
Excellent meal portfolio design	314	3.48	0.69
Complimentary (eg sauces, napkins etc) items provided	257	2.85	0.93
Marketing aspects			
Influenced by peer group/reference group	337	3.74	0.57
Attracted by hoardings, billboards, retailers catalogue	299	3.32	0.76
Influenced by social networking sites especially Facebook	259	2.87	0.95
Membership coupons offered	294	3.26	0.92
Free gifts and toys being offered	262	2.91	0.90
Quantity discounts and offers on specific days	293	3.25	0.81
Announcements about new products and offers	279	3.10	0.90
Attractive tagline, logo and catchy slogans	279	3.10	1.04
Loyalty programmes			
Psychological factors			
Feeling of cultural identification	236	2.62	0.77
Sense of social belonging	246	2.73	0.87
Enhancing the quality of life	234	2.60	0.90
Giving a sense of self-dignity, self-fulfillment and self-respect	225	2.50	0.93
Committed to eating from these restaurants (brand loyalty)	257	2.85	1.01
Social values and social class	233	2.58	0.80
Enhancement of relationship with others	210	2.33	0.79
Bringing back memories	278	3.08	1.00
Clientele at the restaurant	244	2.71	0.93
Convenience			
Easy availability of products	324	3.60	0.83
Lack of time for preparation	332	3.68	0.78
Lack of knowledge on recipe preparation	339	3.76	0.73
Cost			
Good value for money/economical	280	3.11	0.94
Appropriate quantity at the appropriate price	285	3.16	0.89
Costly to prepare at home	288	3.20	0.95

Experience

Good/pleasant eating experience	323	3.58	0.83
Self-service satisfaction	306	3.40	0.64
Past experience	301	3.34	0.65
Maintaining good customer relations	312	3.46	0.75
Making customers feel valued throughout their experience	287	3.18	0.76

Enjoyment

Family preference especially kids	294	3.26	0.81
Changing lifestyle/sedentary lifestyle	279	3.10	0.71
Fun place to hang out (pleasure and enjoyment)	306	3.40	0.83
Provisions for conducting special events like birthday parties, college fresher's day, reunions etc	325	3.61	0.85
Good source of live entertainment (drama, band, fusion show)	271	3.01	0.96
Background music	294	3.26	0.79
Family/friends gathering facility	310	3.44	0.78
Foods enjoyed by the whole family especially kids	337	3.74	0.66
Fascination of eating out	328	3.64	0.72

its opponents too. But for all the negative talk and publicity on American food its effects on health and food habits of the customers two-third of the sample consumers intended to continue having such food items in the future too. American food consumption thus seems to be a habitual behavior as most of the consumers having American food at present would like to continue having the same even in the near future.

With respect to restaurant attributes, consumers opined that comfort and seating arrangement (3.76) were the major reasons for preferring AFRs followed by enjoyable and relaxing atmosphere (3.75). This shows a high significant typical culture characteristic of a collectivistic society and as Hofstede (2011) pointed out; societal culture influences consumers buying behaviour. However this also implies high level of satisfaction as consumers will only recommend a product or service to others only when their expectations are met.

With regard to the services offered by AFRs, consumers gave utmost importance to taking orders over the phone and internet (3.77) followed by take-home facility (3.72).

Among the marketing aspects, highest rating was given to influence of peer group/reference group with a mean score of 3.74 followed by attracted by hoardings, billboards, retailers catalog (3.32) and least to free gifts and toys being offered (2.91) and influence by social networking sites especially Facebook (2.87).

As far as the psychological factors were concerned consumers expressed that AFRs brought

back memories (3.08) followed by committed to eating from these restaurants (brand loyalty) (2.85).

With regard to convenience, consumers attributed lack of knowledge on recipe preparation (3.76) as the major reason for patronizing AFRs followed by lack of time for preparation (3.68). The American food diet also suits the consumers chaotic work routines, job stress and time limitations. The cheap and inexpensive alternatives that the AFRs offer to the customers have hit the right chord. They eat at AFRs to step away from their routine and to enjoy the meal with friends and family and for the convenience of fast service.

With respect to cost, consumers were of the opinion that American foods were costly to prepare at home (3.20) followed by appropriate quantity at the appropriate price (3.16). Change, quick meals, proximity of the restaurant and spending time with their near and dear ones especially during special occasions were the motives behind going to an AFR for the consumers. Consumers also felt that AFRs provided adequate food at inexpensive prices.

Among the reasons given for experience, good/pleasant eating experience was rated the top most factor with a mean of 3.58 followed by maintaining good customer relations (3.46) and self-service satisfaction (3.40). It is surprising to note that tight work schedules also influenced the weekend fast food munching behavior. As per the usual expectations and ideology the teens considered having American food as a way of taking time out with their friends as well as family and eating something different. Quick service

attribute truly suits their restless attitude and on the move lifestyles. The social and lifestyle influences, changes in the economy coupled with the long working hours of the consumers led them to the AFRs.

With regard to enjoyment, consumers expressed that foods served at AFRs were enjoyed by the whole family especially kids and so it was given the highest rating (3.74) followed by fascination of eating out (3.64). Visiting an AFR is a way of reconnecting with friends and family for majority of the consumers. Latha (2014) and Shoyemi (2014) also reported similar findings.

Factors influencing consumer' preference for AFRs

The factors influencing the consumers preferring AFRs are presented in Table 2. Ten factors were considered for the purpose. Low mean per cent indicates least preference and high mean per cent indicates most preference. The mean per cent for convenience was 73.70 which was the highest indicating that a large proportion of the consumers preferred AFRs for their convenience factor followed by restaurant attributes (69.68) (Fig 1).

Convenience was generally related to the service promptness, the at hand location of AFRs and

the absence of the need to carry out culinary tasks by the consumers. The time spent at homes has dwindled due to changing lifestyles with absolutely little or no time left for the preparation of home-based meals. People do not want to spend a lot of time preparing meals, travelling to pick up meals or waiting for meals in restaurants. This coupled with the availability of AFRs at every nook and cranny has further reduced the consumers intention to cook meals at home. The expansion of AFRs is a reflection of consumer demand for convenience and fast food. Cunha et al (2010), Arulogun and Owolabi (2011) and Shoyemi (2014) reported similar findings.

Level/degree of preference to the factors attributing for consumers consumption from AFRs

The level or degree of preference to the factors attributing for consumers consumption from AFRs is indicated in Table 3. Food safety and quality had the highest degree or level of preference (47.78 and 42.22% respectively) followed by medium (32.22% and 36.67% respectively) and low preferences (20.00% and 21.11% respectively).

Given the fact that the study was conducted on an elite group of consumers who were the residents of Bengaluru city, safety and quality of the food products

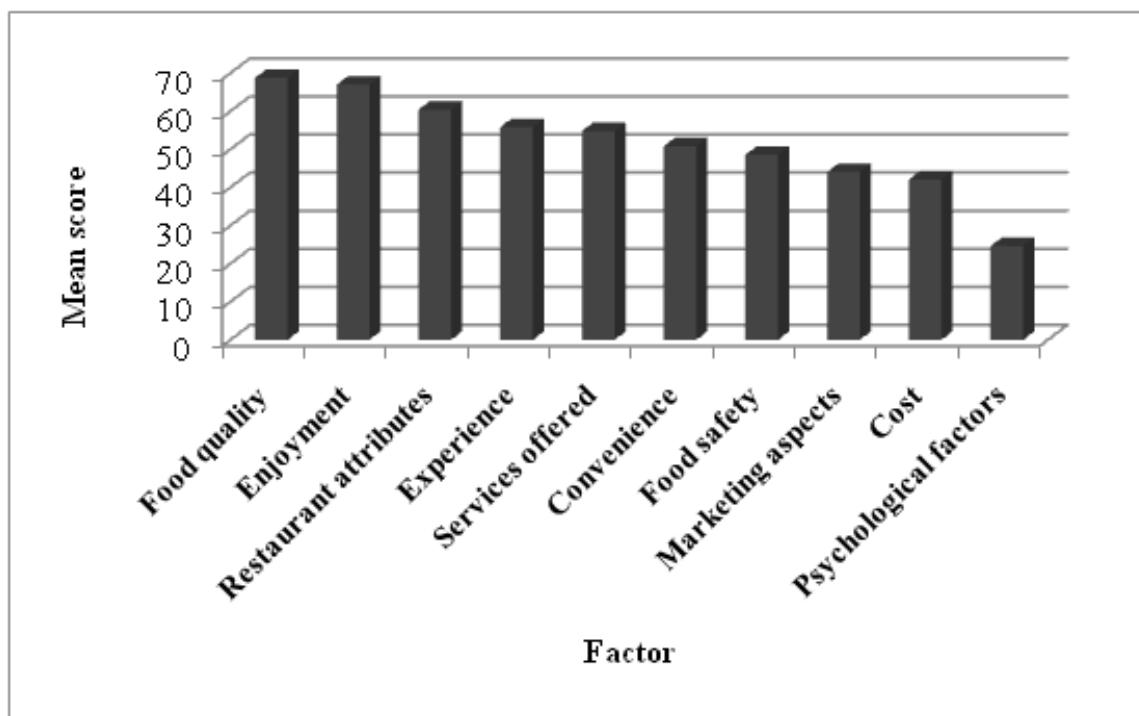


Fig 1. Factors influencing consumers' preference for AFRs

Table 2. Factors influencing consumers' preference for AFRs (n= 90)

Factor	Response		Response (%)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Food quality	16.37	2.41	65.47	9.62
Food safety	4.94	1.60	49.44	15.96
Restaurant attributes	31.36	4.95	69.68	11.01
Services offered	34.43	3.49	68.87	6.99
Marketing aspects	28.90	4.27	64.22	9.48
Psychological factors	24.03	5.40	53.41	11.99
Convenience	11.06	1.90	73.70	12.66
Cost	9.48	1.94	63.19	12.92
Experience	16.99	2.54	67.96	10.15
Enjoyment	30.49	3.93	67.75	8.73

Table 3. Level/degree of preference to the factors attributing for consumers' consumption from AFRs (n=90)

Factor	Preference level					
	Low		Medium		High	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Food quality	19	21.11	33	36.67	38	42.22
Food safety	18	20.00	29	32.22	43	47.78
Restaurant's attributes	16	17.78	41	45.56	33	36.67
Services offered	18	20.00	51	56.67	21	23.33
Marketing aspects	11	12.22	54	60.00	25	27.78
Psychological factors	19	21.11	37	41.11	34	37.78
Convenience	17	18.89	62	68.89	11	12.22
Cost	17	18.89	41	45.56	32	35.56
Experience	15	16.67	49	54.44	26	28.89
Enjoyment	16	17.78	43	47.78	31	34.44

were definitely the crucial elements for preference to a particular brand and price would thereby become secondary. Marketers should consider this trend that interests in the nutrition of American foods are increasing and consumers are becoming more health conscious. Thus marketers should make an effort to develop new menu items that are proportionately weighed with these diverse consumer needs in order to attract consumers in the future. This provides strong signals to the entrepreneurs that quality aspects and marketing management strategies are the pivotal factors which decide the loyalty aspect of the brands.

Sheeja (1998) in Coimbatore district inferred that consumers considered the quality aspects like aroma, taste, freshness and purity as the major factors deciding the preference for a particular brand of processed spice.

Nandagopal and Chinnaiyan (2003) revealed that the product quality followed by retail price were the deciding factors for brand preference of soft drinks in rural Tamil Nadu. It did not mean that all other factors like brand image, advertisements, packing decision, offers etc would not have any influence on the brand preference. These components together with the above three principal aspects would impact the brand preference. Hirekenchanagoudar (2008) and Hwang and Cranage (2010) also reported similar findings.

CONCLUSION

Factors like appearance and other sensory attributes of the food, absence of health risks and guaranteed healthy eating, comfort and seating arrangement, taking orders over the phone and internet, influence of peer group/reference group bringing back

memories, lack of knowledge on recipe preparation American foods being costly to prepare at home, good/pleasant eating experience, foods at AFRs being enjoyed by the whole family especially kids and convenience factor were given utmost importance by the consumers for eating from AFRs. The other factors attributing to the consumer preference were restaurant attributes followed by services offered, experience, enjoyment, food quality, marketing aspects and cost.

Food safety and food quality had the highest degree or level of preference followed by medium and low preferences respectively. Factors like marketing aspects, services offered, experience, enjoyment, restaurant attributes, cost and psychological factors were attached with medium degree of preference followed by high degree of preference and low level of preference. Convenience factor was attached a medium level of preference followed by low and high levels of preference. Thus the AFRs can reposition themselves as affordable food points rather than the misconception as costly restaurants.

The study identifies that for a restaurant to shine in the market, dining experience that includes the likes of cultural learning, restaurant atmosphere and authentic restaurant design play a major role in enticing consumers towards AFRs. These factors can be controlled to a large extent by the restaurant management. AFRs have the advantage of offering exotic dining experiences which can satisfy consumers who want to escape from their ordinary routines. AFRs also design their restaurants to reflect and maintain their authenticity in order to give diners the impression that they have been exposed to different dining experiences. The whole restaurant experience including settings, atmosphere and restaurant staff can be designed to boost the American foods theme. Simple yet practical and realistic measures like the incorporation of traditional artwork, music, staff uniform and/or other ethnic features are ways to interconnect ethnic and cultural identity which may also provide the additional value of making diners feel as if they were transmuted into another exotic land.

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