

Consumer Preferences for Fast Food Brands: Evidence from an Emerging Country

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Amid the economic problems and health concerns, there has been a rapid growth in the fast food industry in Turkey, with 3,453 restaurants currently serving the market. Fast food consumption is more popular among children and teenagers making Turkey a very lucrative market, since almost half of the country's 73 million population is under the age of 25. The aim of this research is to explore young consumers' overall behavior toward fast food chains. More specifically, the purpose here is to identify the key factors that influence these young consumers' preferences of local and international brands of fast food restaurants. A total of 400 students were recruited from two public and two private universities. Results of factor analysis suggest five dominant factors that have an impact on young consumers' preferences of different brands of fast food restaurants. These factors include brand name reputation, cost, convenience, consistency and quality. Moreover, it is observed that these five factors are significantly related to several demographic variables such as age, gender, income level. Results of this study emphasize the importance of the dominant factors that young consumers consider as critical when they compare various fast food brands and make a final purchase decision.

INTRODUCTION

Fast food has gone global, with McDonald's alone serving 46 million people worldwide each day (Spurlock 2005). Of the five new McDonald's opened each day, four of those restaurants open outside of the United States (Schlosser 2001). The increasing consumption of fast food is an international trend influenced by changing lifestyles (Belasco and Scranton 2002).

Fast food restaurants are typically distinguished by several major characteristics. There is a standardized menu, portions and ingredients are tightly controlled, and the food is for immediate consumption. In addition, there is a young and unskilled labor force serving at the counter and for chain fast food restaurants, chained and franchised operations operate under a uniform structure and corporate identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From the beginning of the 1980's, a huge number of publications have been published on fast food industry in general. The early publications on fast food focused more on the positive and negative aspects of fast food and the overall attitudes of the customers demanding fast food. The most frequent consumers of fast foods are reported to be people in their teens and twenties (Lee 2007).

In two separate studies by Driskell et al. (2005) and Nickolas et al. (2001), it has been stated that college students frequently consume fast foods. Eating at fast food restaurants appears to be part of the normal routine during the daily lives of college students (Driskell et al. 2006). Several studies have been conducted on reasons why college students prefer to eat at fast-food restaurants. These reasons include menu choices, cost, convenience (Sneed and Holdt 1991), taste, socializing with friends, a chance to get out (Hertzler and Frary 1996), advertisement, and location (Driskell et al 2006). It has also been mentioned that some of the major reasons given by college men for their eating patterns are somewhat different than those of college women (Driskell et al. 2006). Lee and Kim (2005) investigated college students' fast food consumption and preference in Korea, and reported that their selection of fast food was affected mostly by friends and then by mass communication. They preferred hamburgers and pizza among the menus. Kim and Kim (2004) examined college students' behaviors on the fast food restaurants within the Taejon area of Korea, and reported that college students eat fast food one to three times a month with female students showing a higher frequency of visiting fast food restaurants than males.

Driskell et al (2006) reported that college students eat meals at fast food restaurants 6 to 8 times on a weekly basis. Therefore, it is possible to claim that foods eaten at fast-food restaurants do substantially contribute to the nutrient intakes of college students. Unfortunately, dietary intakes of most college students fail to meet recommendations for most of the food groups (Dinger and Waigandt 1997). The typical college student diet is high in fat and sodium and low in fruits and vegetables (Dinger 1999). In addition, a study by Liedman et al. (2001) confirmed that college men consume more high-energy and high-fat foods than women.

Obesity has been associated with fast-food consumption as well (Satia et al. 2004). The proliferation of fast food restaurants is a predominant factor in sharp increases in obesity rates among children and teenagers. The irony is that in most western countries, people are becoming increasingly more concerned about health and fitness issues such as weight management, obesity prevention. Consumers seem to be quite careful about the choices they make regarding their food purchases. However, in two separate studies carried out by McCarthy et al. (2007) and Röhr et al. (2005), it has been stated that young consumers in particular, still have inadequate food safety knowledge and may end up making poor choices. Most of these young consumers, teenagers, college students still frequent the fast food restaurants on a regular basis.

Similar to the rest of the developed world, Turkish fast food market continues its accelerated growth. Major changes in the life styles, income levels, social structure and consumption patterns of Turks in the last decade means they are increasingly prone to eat meals and socialize over food outside of the home. The rapid increase in the number of shopping malls and hypermarkets across the country has led to an emerging demand for the growing number of fast food chains and restaurants. There are currently 3,453 fast food outlets present in Turkey (Euro Monitor International 2010). 75% of them are located in big cities like Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. A new and faster pace of life in these urban areas has led people to find quicker meal solutions for their daily needs. In addition, the western influence in the country enables branded foreign products do well in the Turkish market.

Fast food was the only category in Turkish consumer foodservice that registered positive growth in 2009, following the economic crisis. The general view of market experts is that fast food will continue to be a dynamic category due to lower prices when compared to other foodservice outlets and the speed of service offered. The fast food market segmentation primarily includes chicken, burger, bakery products and Middle Eastern fast food. It has been stated by many research studies, mentioned above in the literature review, that fast food consumption is more popular among children and young consumers. This

makes Turkey a very lucrative market since nearly half of the country's 73 million population is under the age of 25.

The present study had two objectives. First, to identify the key factors that influence young consumers' preferences of local and international brands of fast food restaurants. Respondents were asked to rank in importance the factors that have an impact on their preference of a fast food restaurant. We asked the respondents whether they prefer fast food, why they prefer fast food, whether they are loyal to a particular domestic/ international fast food restaurant, which restaurant they like most, and what they like most about it.

In a similar vein, a number of studies have examined the demographic characteristics of those who eat at fast-food restaurants (French et al. 2000; Bowman and Vinyard 2004). Results from these studies indicate that those who are younger, employed and living in larger households are more likely to report consuming fast food. In the second part of the study, we tested to see whether there is an association between the demographic characteristics and the frequency of fast food consumption for our sample.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample for this study was 400 students that were recruited from two public and two private universities in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey. Out of the twelve universities in Ankara, these four in particular were selected by random sampling. Due to potential variations in income levels, stratified random sampling was adopted and universities were classified as public and private. The study was conducted during the spring months of 2016. The study's surveys were distributed during lunch hours at the university cafeterias, and were conducted face-to-face. The students were asked to rank the major attributes as decision criteria when choosing fast food restaurants.

Survey Instrument

The survey used in this study consisted of 4 parts, and a total of 43 questions. In the first part, students were asked about their average fast food consumption frequency, their preferences for domestic and/or international fast food brands. The second part of the survey included semantic differential scale questions to determine the students' overall attitude toward fast foods and different fast food restaurants. In the third part, five-point Likert scale questions were used to measure the key factors that influence college students' preferences of local and international brands of fast food restaurants. The scale goes from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Finally, in the last part, questions were posed to determine the demographic profile of the young consumers in the sample. The survey took about 10 minutes to complete. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to test the reliability of the scale used in the research. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.840 (sign: 0.000) indicated the scale to be highly reliable.

The study was two-fold by purpose. In the first part, factor analysis was carried out to identify the independent variables of the research. Furthermore, semantic differential scales were adopted to obtain the students' overall attitude toward fast foods and different fast food restaurants. Pearson Coefficient of Skewness formula was utilized to measure the SK value and the data obtained by the application of the semantic differential scale was interpreted accordingly (Freund and Simon 1997).

To determine young consumers' overall attitudes towards fast food consumption and fast food restaurants, a 7-point semantic differential scale with 6 pairs of adjectives was used in the study. These adjectives were in line with the main objective of the research and included; "positive- negative", "good - bad", "strong - weak", "successful - unsuccessful", "unreliable - reliable" and "indispensable-dispensable".

Hypotheses

On the basis of the objectives and after reviewing the extensive literature, the following research hypotheses were framed.

H1: Convenience, brand name reputation, cost, consistency and quality have a great influence on college students' brand preference among fast food restaurants.

H2: There is a significant difference between the frequency of fast food consumption and gender.

H3: There is a significant relationship between the frequency of fast food consumption and age.

H4: There is a significant relationship between the frequency of fast food consumption and income level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 displays the demographics of the research sample. As depicted below, the sample was evenly dispersed between males (51.2 percent) and females (48.8 percent). The majority of the students in the sample (79.2 percent) were between the ages of 17-24.

**TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE**

Age Groups	Frequency	%
17-20	116	29.0
21-24	201	50.2
25-28	83	20.8
Total	400	100.0
Gender		
Female	195	48.8
Male	205	51.2
Total	400	100.0
Monthly Income Level		
500-999 TL	45	11.2
1000-1499TL	54	13.5
1500-1999TL	172	43.0
2000-2499TL	56	14.0
2500 and over	73	18.2
Total	400	100.0

Table 2 shows the students' average monthly frequency of fast food consumption. Nearly 40 percent of the subjects indicated that they go out to eat at fast food restaurants at an average of 5-10 times a month. 26.8 percent reported their average monthly fast food consumption as more than ten times a month. Only 14.8 percent of the students in the study mentioned that they prefer to eat fast food once a month.

TABLE 2
AVERAGE MONTHLY FREQUENCY OF FAST FOOD CONSUMPTION

Average monthly Fast food consumption	Frequency	Percent
Once a month	59	14.8
2-4 times a month	75	18.8
5-10 times a month	159	39.8
More than 10 times a month	107	26.8
Total	400	100.0

When fast food consumption patterns of these young consumers are examined, almost one out of seven respondents stated that they prefer to eat at fast food restaurants when they go out. The remaining 31.8 percent said they opt to eat at other traditional/theme cuisine restaurants (Table 3).

TABLE 3
FREQUENCY OF PREFERENCE FOR FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS

When I opt to eat out;	Frequency	Percent
I prefer fast food restaurants	273	68.2
I prefer other food service outlets	127	31.8
Total	400	100.0

In a similar vein, Table 4 lists the frequency of preference for domestic and/or international branded fast food restaurants. Results shown here suggest a majority of young consumers (70.5 percent) prefer to patronage international brand fast food restaurants. This finding is consistent with the fact that there is a western influence in Turkey, enabling foreign brands/ products to perform well in the Turkish market.

TABLE 4
**FREQUENCY OF PREFERENCE FOR DOMESTIC/ INTERNATIONAL BRANDED FAST
FOOD RESTAURANTS**

When I opt to eat fast food;	Frequency	Percent
I prefer domestic brand restaurants	118	29.5
I prefer international brand restaurants	282	70.5
Total	400	100.0

Another noteworthy consumption pattern is portrayed in Table 5. 60 percent of the young consumers in the sample claimed that they consume fast food as a complete meal whereas 39.2 percent classify it as a snack.

TABLE 5
CATEGORIZATION OF FAST FOOD CONSUMPTION

I consume fast food as a;	Frequency	Percent
Meal	243	60.8
Snack	157	39.2
Total	400	100.0

Table 6 presents the various location alternatives where respondents prefer to consume fast food products. More than half of the subjects (64,5%) have identified food courts of malls as the place where they mostly consume fast food.

TABLE 6
LOCATION OF FAST FOOD CONSUMPTION

I consume fast food at;	Frequency	Percent
School Cafeteria	80	20.0
Home	61	15.2
Food Courts of Malls/ Stores	259	64.8
Total	400	100.0

TABLE 7
MOST POPULAR AND PREFERRED FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS

Brand Name	Frequency	Percent
Burger King	178	44.5
McDonald's	172	43.0
Hosta	166	41.5
SimitSarayı	155	38.8
Domino's Pizza	148	37.0
OtantikKumpir	132	33.0
KFC	124	31.0
Pizza Hut	122	30.5
Aba Piknik	98	24.5
Popeyes	68	17.0

Table 7 and Table 8 list the top ten fast food restaurants and categories that were reported to be highly popular and mostly preferred by the young consumers in the sample. The top two spots were shared by global fast food giants Burger King and McDonald's. The third place belonged to Hosta, which is a Turkish fast food restaurant chain specializing in meat and chicken döner (meat rotating on a grill). Simit, a salty, sesame doughnut, is another highly popular fast food among Turkish consumers and came in fourth position in the ranking. Also included in the top ten were OtantikKumpir (a fast food restaurant specializing in baked potato dishes), and KFC & Popeye along with pizza chains Domino's & Pizza Hut.

TABLE 8
CONSUMPTION FREQUENCY OF FAST FOOD CATEGORIES

Fast Food Categories	Frequency	Percent
Hamburger- French Fries	199	49.8
Döner (Meat rotating on a stick)	180	45.0
Simit (Sesame doughnut)	150	35.5
Pizza	136	34.0
Kumpir (Baked Potato)	125	31.2
Köfte (Meatballs)	99	24.8

Table 9 indicates the results of the semantic differential scale that was applied to determine young consumers' overall attitudes towards fast food consumption and fast food restaurants. The means and standard-deviation values for each of the 6 pairs of adjectives (A1: positive- negative, A2: good - bad, A3: strong - weak, A4: successful - unsuccessful, A5: reliable - unreliable and A6: dispensable – indispensable) are presented.

TABLE 9
YOUNG CONSUMERS' OVERALL ATTITUDE TOWARDS FAST FOOD AND FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS

	Consumer Attitudes											
	A1		A2		A3		A4		A5		A6	
	\bar{X}	δ	\bar{X}	δ	\bar{X}	δ	\bar{X}	δ	\bar{X}	δ	\bar{X}	δ
Fastfood	6.03	1.479	5.18	1.619	5.01	1.667	5.86	1.496	5.24	1.683	1.35	1.373
Fastfood Restaurants	5.34	1.910	5.26	1.958	5.12	1.923	5.36	1.695	4.30	1.978	2.93	2.446

Attitudes: A1:Positive/Negative, A2:Good/Bad, A3:Strong/Weak, A4:Successful/Unsuccessful, A5:Reliable/Unreliable, A6:Dispensable/Indispensable

The scale analysis revealed young consumers possessed an overall positive attitude toward different fast food categories ($\bar{X}=5.18$). In a similar vein, a mean value of 5.01 signified young consumers' belief that fast food is strong compared to other traditional food types/dishes. Moreover, young consumers stated that fast food is reliable and successful in general. Perhaps the most prominent finding in attitudes is, young consumers' statement that fast food is indispensable for them ($\bar{X}=6.35$).

TABLE 10
YOUNG CONSUMERS' OVERALL ATTITUDE TOWARDS FAST FOOD CATEGORIES AND
FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS

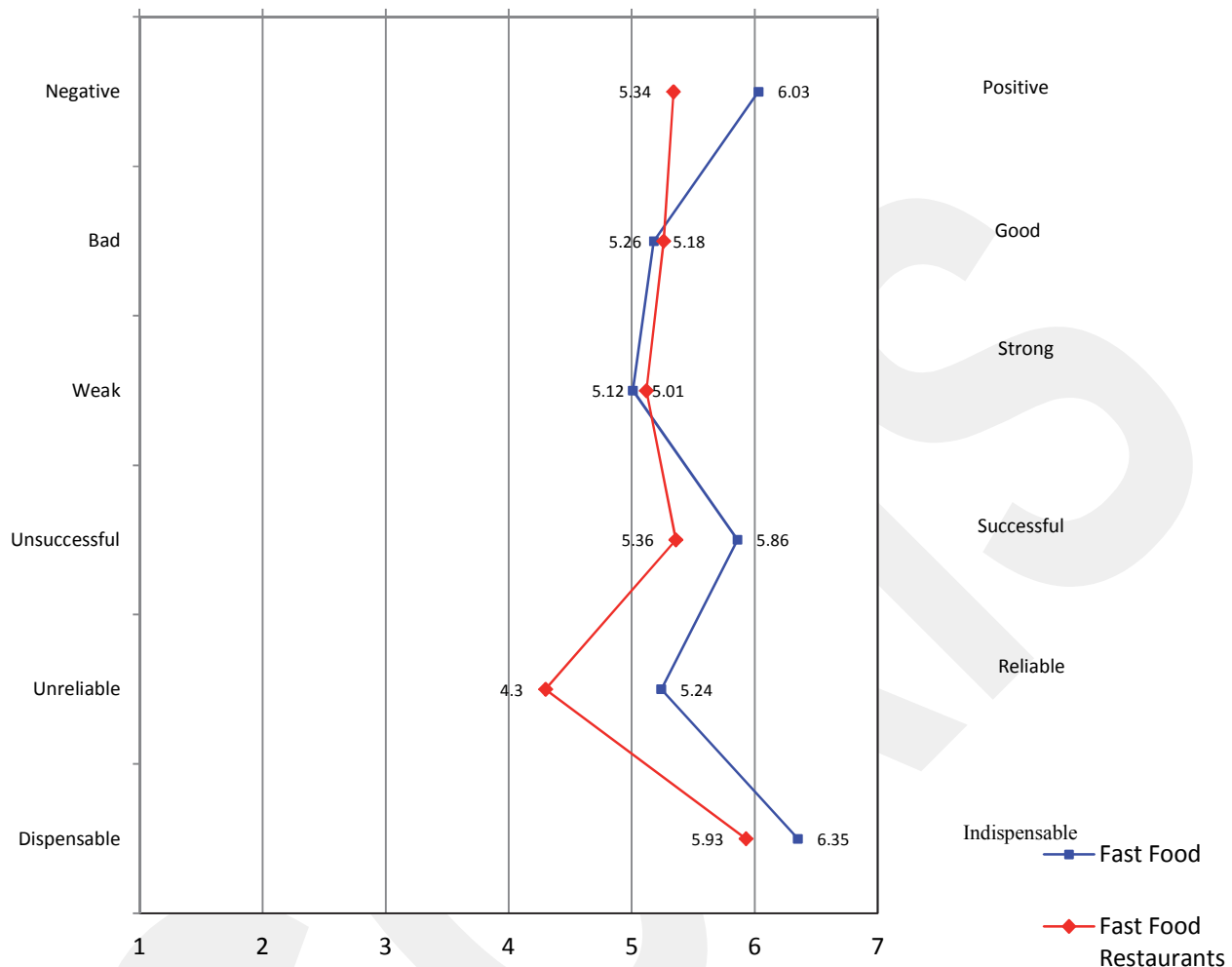


Table 10 also depicts young consumers overall attitude towards fast food restaurants. Parallel to attitude towards fast food categories, consumers in the sample declared a positive attitude to fast food restaurants as well ($\bar{X} = 5.34$). In addition, fast food restaurants were deemed to be good, strong and successful. However, respondents in the study were indecisive about the reliability of the fast food restaurants ($\bar{X} = 4.30$). Nonetheless, the overall attitude signified fast food restaurants to be indispensable ($\bar{X} = 5.93$).

Data Analysis

In this empirical study, an application of factor analysis will be explored to identify the major factors that influence young consumers' brand preferences of fast food restaurants. Prior to factor analysis, construct validity analysis was done to determine the relationship among the variables and to check whether the sample was suitable for factor analysis. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was measured as 0.911. Based on this value, it can be concluded that the sample has a good fit for factor analysis. Bartlett's test of Sphericity (chi square: 3.557 sig: 0.000) has proven the existence of a general relationship between the variables.

Factor analysis is a set of techniques for determining the extent to which variables that are related can be grouped together so that they can be treated as one combined variable or factor rather than as a series of separate variables. Factor analysis is often used in the empirical research in social sciences (Hatcher, 1994). The most common use of factor analysis in the social and behavioral sciences is to determine whether the responses to a set of items used to measure a particular concept can be grouped together to form an overall index of that concept (Duncan, 2003).

The objective here was to obtain fewer dimensions that reflected the relationships among the inter-related variables. The eigenvalue greater than one rule was applied in identifying the number of factors. The variables that had large loadings on the same factors were grouped. Initially there were eight scaled variables that were measured. After factor analysis, three of these variables were deleted, and five factors were created. These factors are: F1: Convenience, F2: Brand Name Reputation, F3: Cost, F4: Consistency, F5: Quality. The cumulative percent of variance explained was 67.795. Convenience had the highest impact on fast food store preference ($\beta = 0.293$) and the factor with the lowest impact was quality ($\beta = 0.143$). These five-factors with respective loading levels are presented in Table 11 below.

Factor 1: Convenience

The primary factor that has been identified is “convenience”. This factor accounts for 18.161 percent of the total variance and consists of seven statements. (Q9: Fast food saves a lot of time for me, Q11: I prefer going to fast food restaurants due to their proximity, Q12: Fast food simplifies my life, Q23: Fast food is easy to get to, Q28: Fast food restaurants are open until late at night, Q6: Fast food is quickly prepared, Q1: Fast food is very practical). An assessment of factor loadings reveals that the major factor influencing the consumption is “time”. Young consumers stated that fast food saves a lot of time for them since they are always in a hurry, with a lack of time. Taste used to be the traditional element to influence consumers’ eating choices (Glanz, Basil & Mailbach 1998). However, with the fundamental changes in the lifestyles, the emphasis on convenience has greatly increased. Consumers prefer fast food restaurants due to their easy to access locations, speed of service, flexibility. In the daily routine of juggling hectic schedules, fast food reduces the amount of work consumers have to do and saves time.

Factor 2: Brand Name Reputation

The second extracted factor that is able to explain % 15.852 of the total variation is “brand name reputation”. This factor indicates that young consumers place an emphasis on the brand name and its associations. For many respondents, strong, popular global brands of fast food restaurants were favored more in certain aspects such as quality, trust. There are five variables in the composition of this particular factor. (Q2: A global fast food brand is trustworthy in every aspect, Q27: I prefer not to eat at unfamiliar brands of fast food restaurants, Q26: A global fast food brand provides better quality food, Q10: A popular branded fast food restaurant has a positive effect on my consumption, Q14: It is important to be a strong, well-known brand in the fast food industry). It is evident that strong brand name recognition is a major advantage for fast food restaurants.

Factor 3: Cost

The third factor signifies the “cost” element. This factor accounts for 15.013 percent of the total variation. The cost factor is reflected via these four statements. (Q15: Fast food is inexpensive, Q16: Fast food is a cheaper option compared to alternative food outlets, Q20: I get good value for my money, Q24: “Get two meals for the price of one” promotions increase my fast food consumption). Young consumers, being students on a limited budget, state that the cost of a meal is an important factor that influences their fast food restaurant preference. Going out for cheap eats is an obvious way for young consumers to keep their spending in check. That is why fast-food restaurants are seen as a good investment from their perspective. Those restaurants that provide bigger and better options at low prices are considered as attractive alternatives.

TABLE 11
FACTOR LOADINGS AND TOTAL VARIANCE LEVELS

	Factor Loads	% of Variance
Factor 1: Convenience		18.161
▪ Fast food saves a lot of time for me.	0.684	
▪ I prefer going to fast food restaurants due to their proximity.	0.678	
▪ Fast food simplifies my life.	0.663	
▪ Fast food is easy to get to.	0.574	
▪ Fast food restaurants are open until late at night.	0.543	
▪ Fast food is quickly prepared.	0.512	
▪ Fast food is very practical.	0.510	
		15.852
Factor 2: Brand Name Reputation		
	0.816	
▪ A global fast food brand is trustworthy in every aspect	0.777	
▪ I prefer not to eat at unfamiliar brands of fast food restaurants	0.724	
▪ A global fast food brand provides better quality food	0.673	
▪ A popular branded fast food restaurant has a positive effect on my consumption	0.602	
▪ It is important to be a strong, well-known brand in the fast food industry		
		15.013
Factor 3: Cost		
	0.896	
▪ Fast food is inexpensive.	0.881	
▪ Fast food is a cheaper option compared to alternative food outlets.	0.793	
▪ I get good value for my money.	0.754	
▪ “Get two meals for the price of one” promotions increase my fast food consumption.		
		9.908
Factor 4: Consistency		
	0.841	
▪ I feel safe knowing that a global fast food restaurant serves a consistent menu with a consistent taste in every branch it operates.	0.727	
▪ I prefer global fast food restaurants due to the standard, consistent menus they serve.	0.462	
▪ The standard, consistent menus at global fast food restaurants increase my overall fast food consumption.	0.406	
▪ Every branch of global branded fast food restaurant has consistent service ability.		
		8.861
Factor 5: Quality		
	0.756	
▪ Global branded fast food restaurants are higher in quality.	0.713	
▪ Global branded fast food restaurants use high quality ingredients in their meals.	0.634	
▪ Global branded fast food restaurants are more reliable.		

Factor 4: Consistency

The fourth extracted factor pays attention to “consistency” and is able to explain 9.908 percent of the cumulative variance. Fast food restaurants accomplish their consistency by creating a formula for their products. That formula is expressed as the ingredients that are used, the assembly line created to put those ingredients together, and the training given to the individuals to work the assembly line. The availability of standardized menus, fast and courteous service in different locations of global branded fast food chain restaurants signifies consistency for the consumers. This increases the predictability and satisfaction for their fast food consumption experience. No matter what part of the world they travel, they are familiar with the fast, reliable and efficient service and the type of food that is offered at these fast food outlets. Service consistency is an expectation of all customers at all times; they want peace of mind and no unpleasant surprises. Young consumers, in particular, are willing to give up the possibility of some higher quality foods in favor of knowing they will get a consistent experience. They are on the lookout for something that is quick and predictable so that they can get on with their day. This is the fundamental thinking of fast food, fast and consistent.

Factor 5: Quality

The factor with the lowest impact is “quality”. It accounts for 8.861 percent of the cumulative variance. There are three variables in the composition of this last factor. (Q17: Global branded fast food restaurants are higher in quality, Q21: Global branded fast food restaurants use high quality ingredients in their meals, Q7: Global branded fast food restaurants are more reliable). The operations of global fast food chains follow a host of dietary and marketing rules set by various cultures and governments around the world. Young consumers seem to possess this information and it affects their fast food restaurant preferences. They believe that these global brands have higher quality standards, do more research, use high quality ingredients and work more on delivering healthier meals.

Hypothesis Testing

With the main hypothesis H1, we explored the influence of five factors (convenience, brand name reputation, cost, consistency and quality) on young consumers’ brand preferences among fast food restaurants. Multi-regression analysis was conducted to assess the effect of these five particular factors. The analysis signified that these five factors’ effect on the brand preferences for fast food restaurants was statistically significant ($\text{sig} = 0.000$). Thus, H₁ was accepted.

The regression value ($R = 0.826$) indicated that there is a strong, positive relationship among the five variables. It was concluded that convenience, brand name reputation, cost, consistency and quality account for 68 percent of the variation in young consumers’ preference for different brands of fast food restaurants ($R^2 = 0.68$). According to standardized beta coefficients, the five independent variables can be listed as convenience ($\beta = 0.293$); brand name reputation ($\beta = 0.249$); cost ($\beta = 0.213$), consistency ($\beta = 0.180$), and quality ($\beta = 0.143$).

The second hypothesis of this study investigated a possible relationship between the frequency of young consumers’ fast food consumption and gender factor. To evaluate this hypothesis, t-test analysis was carried out. Based on Levene’s test result, variances among groups were observed equal ($F = 2.064$, $p = 0.152$). Equal variances assumed value holds ($\text{sign } 0.001 < 0.05$) therefore, H₂ is accepted. It is found that gender does have an impact on the frequency of fast food consumption. The group statistics presented below on Table 13 signifies that boys ($\bar{X} = 3.93$) consume more fast food than girls ($\bar{X} = 3.16$).

The third hypothesis explored the relationship between the frequency of fast food consumption and age. The correlation analysis suggested that age factor had no significance over a consumer’s fast food consumption frequency ($\text{sign } 0.156 > 0.05$), thus H₃ was not supported. The last hypothesis of the study was developed to test for the effect of income level on fast food consumption frequency. By contrast to H₃, the correlation analysis on H₄ signified a strong, positive relationship between these two variables ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). It was concluded that higher income consumers patronize fast food restaurants more frequently. This finding tends to disagree with some research studies conducted in the United States that

lower income consumers consume more fast food. However, a possible explanation could be that in relative economic terms, meals at fast food restaurants cost more in Turkey.

CONCLUSION

The changes prompted by fast food have taken place very quickly and have been so all-encompassing for consumers around the globe. The same can be said for Turkish consumers and the rapid penetration of fast food industry in the country. The objective of this research was to explore the main factors that influence young consumers' preferences of local and international brands of fast food restaurants in Turkey. Factor analysis and semantic differential scales were used for this investigation. Five underlying factors were identified as being influential in the brand preferences of these young consumers' fast food consumption. These factors were convenience, brand name reputation, cost, consistency and quality.

The findings of the study revealed that the most important attribute in fast food restaurant selection was convenience. Furthermore, the study indicated that young consumers were heavily influenced by the convenience and consistency elements of fast food restaurants. The brand's reputation was also reported to be a prominent factor in their restaurant selection. All categories of fast food restaurants were mentioned in the top ten, including McDonald's & Burger King (burger & fries) to Hosta & Aba Piknik (döner-meat on a stick grill), to Domino's & Pizza Hut (pizza) and KFC & Popeye's (chicken). Even though these young consumers reported to be fond of the burger and French fries at well-known global brands such as Burger King, they also demanded traditional Turkish fast food providers such as Hosta for döner, Simit Sarayı for sesame doughnuts and Otantik Kumpir for baked potatoes. Cost and quality attributes were also signified in the results of the study. College students are money-sensitive since they live on limited budgets, and do not have full-time jobs. They would like to get quick, high quality fast food meals at affordable prices with a consistent taste and service level. The results from this study also suggested even though gender had an impact on the frequency of fast food consumption, age had no significance. Lastly, income level was reported to be significantly correlated with fast food consumption frequency.

The results provide useful information not only to domestic and but also to foreign fast food retailers. International fast food restaurant chains coming to Turkey and planning to target youth segments will better understand their consumers' perceptions and preferences.

LIMITATIONS

Several factors limit the generalizability of results from this study. First, the study took place in the three biggest cities of Turkey. The young consumers in the sample, college students in particular, live in these urban, well-developed cities. It is highly likely that these consumers have a different social, cultural and/or economic profile when compared to their peers from smaller cities, towns in rural parts of Anatolia. The proliferation of fast food restaurants, especially global branded chains, is much greater in urban cities throughout the country. It remains to be seen whether there are sharp similarities and differences in the fast food restaurant preferences of young consumers from other parts of Turkey. In many smaller cities and towns, global branded chains are not available, therefore major national/local fast food outlets are preferred. Further research is needed regarding this subject matter. Second, in this study, we could not consider all of the social, economic and cultural variables that might affect the relationship between young consumers and their fast food restaurant preferences. Other than the reported five main determinant factors here, there may be additional motivators that cause young consumers to favor specific fast food restaurants. Third, the study involved the viewpoint of young consumers attending college. The research issue could be expanded to see the view of a general population to determine if these findings are confined to the college student group, or if they may be common to the general public in Turkey.

For these reasons, extreme caution in generalizing these results to any population beyond the study sample is warranted. Future research employing different sampling techniques and involving a larger sample size might yield results that are significantly distinct from those reported in this study. Despite

these limitations, our research contributes an overview of the main factors that play critical role in shaping young, urban Turkish consumers' fast food restaurant choices. Consistent with the previous research studies, our findings highlighted overlapping areas between fast food preferences of young consumers in Turkey to those of their peers around the world.

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