

# Kids Influence Their Parental Decision Making in Purchasing Fast Foods

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## Abstract

*This study investigates how Pakistani children influence parental decisions in the fast-food sector despite awareness of its adverse effects amidst a rising trend of fast-food consumption due to time constraints and parental concerns about nutrition. It aims to explore this relationship and assess parental roles in mitigating children's influence. Addressing a research gap, the study examines children's impact on fast-food purchases in Pakistan, considering parental responses and the industry's adaptation to local preferences. Qualitative data collection identifies factors such as time availability and advertising that shape parental decisions. Recommendations include healthier offerings from fast-food companies and parental guidance for balanced eating habits. This research contributes to understanding the dynamics of children's influence on parental decision-making in fast-food consumption, potentially promoting healthier choices among Pakistani children, while also suggesting areas for further investigation.*

**Keywords:** Parental Decisions, Fast Food Consumption, Consumption Patterns.

## Introduction

Kids influence parents' decision-making in fast food. This research is conducted for Pakistani kids who influence their parents to purchase fast food even though their parents are aware of the unhealthy conditions of fast food. Markets are growing daily in terms of fast food because they have less time to make food and eat what they have to fulfill their hunger needs. Educated parents are strictly in purchasing fast food, and they believe in healthy nutrition for their children. There is also a concern that fast food marketing may negatively impact children's well-being by leading to unhealthy food choices. (Murugesan & Mahendraprabu, 2024).

Kids influence parents' decision-making, especially in the fast food industry. This research is conducted for the Pakistani kids who influence parents to buy fast foods even though they know they are unhealthy for their kids (Adnan et al., 2023). Kids are more aware of fast food, and they convince their parents to purchase and change their decisions regarding fast food (Afzal & Rafiq, 2021).

In Pakistan, kids are more informative than parents because they are inspired by family, friends, and other influencers, like ad-watching, and they insist that their parents buy those foods. Many things in Pakistan are relatively different from other countries because of their norms, values, and beliefs regarding kids (Afzal et al., 2023; Arshad et al., 2022). Parents influence, but kids

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also know about certain limitations regarding their decisions. In Pakistan, kids never make their decisions on their behalf because of the hierarchy system of family.

Children exhibit a biological predilection towards sweet and salty foods, a phenomenon well-documented in the literature (Moffat, 2022). Consequently, they often show a preference for "indulgent" over "healthy" food choices, as the former is perceived as more palatable (Hagen, 2021; Menting, 2021; Motoki et al., 2022; Nijs, 2020). In the Pakistani context, children are notably influenced by familial dynamics, peer interactions, and exposure to media such as television, social platforms, and cinematic productions. Parents play a pivotal role in shaping children's dietary behaviors through various means, including their control over food choices, provision of meals, and modeling of nutritional preferences (Halicka et al., 2021; Mahmood et al., 2021; Xu, 2022).

### **Literature Gap**

This study is conducted in Pakistan, where prior research examines the children's influence on their parents' decision-making in apparel, toys, and other things related to children tangibly. In this research, fast food consumption by the children's influence on parents' decision-making is to be examined (Khan et al., 2019).

In this research, the main focus is on kids' decisions that influence their parents and parents in terms of what numbers kids accept or reject from the perspective of Pakistan. Parents never seriously bother kids' fast food decisions for many reasons. Their control remains, but they receive it when they are in a good mood and think that after one week or month, it's okay to take their influence (Mustafa et al., 2022). In Pakistan, it is part of the culture that if parents reject some restaurants for fast food, kids change their opinion because they know better than their parents, who are the heads of their families.

In Pakistan, there needs to be more research regarding kids' influence to reject or accept in what circumstances. Parents are willing to take it when they also influence a little bit, and then they receive their kids' influence in fast food.

### **Study Rationale**

Research is necessary for the parents and the fast food industries, which will keep in view that children's Health is the top priority for their success. The fast food industries in Pakistan focus on increasing sales and profitability by attracting children to influence their parents to make decisions. This research is conducted to understand better how to influence children to increase and decrease their consumption of healthy foods. Kostecka (2022) discussed that healthy food consumption can be increased within the context of providing nutrition education and nutritious food to their children and their parents.

The findings of this research may be helpful for parents, fast food industries, and the people involved in making decisions for children's products. This research benefits marketers because they market their products by describing them as healthier for children rather than making money by ignoring children's Health and growth.

### **Study Objectives**

- To examine the relationship between children's influence and their parent's decision-making in fast food purchases.
- To examine the parental role in making decisions work efficiently, children influence fast food purchases.

### **Literature Review**

The genesis of the fast food industry can be traced back to its inception in Southern California during the 1940s. This transformative period not only reshaped Americans' dietary patterns but

also significantly influenced global culinary norms, including those in Asian nations (Asif et al., 2022). The evolution of dining out and the proliferation of food establishments catering to the difficulties of contemporary time-constrained societies reflect a broader transition in consumer preferences towards convenience. This trend underscores a paradigm shift in dietary practices, particularly in households where spouses are engaged in professional pursuits (Fernandez & Raine, 2021). Elucidated that the burgeoning participation of women in the workforce during the latter half of the 20th century precipitated a notable decrease in the availability of time for home-cooked meals, accentuating the reliance on fast food options in emerging economies. The historical antecedents of fast food culture can be discerned in the culinary landscapes of antiquity, ranging from the bread stands of Ancient Rome to the noodle bars prevalent in Asian civilizations. Moreover, the medieval epoch witnessed the advent of street vendors peddling pies, pastries, and cakes in urban centers such as London and Paris. The emergence of coffeehouses and taverns in the 18th-century Western milieu provided social arenas conducive to leisurely gatherings, thereby contributing to the normalization of eating outside the confines of the domestic sphere (Curtin, 2021).

The genesis and proliferation of the fast food industry can be attributed to a confluence of historical, economic, and socio-cultural factors. The Industrial Revolution, World Wars, and the subsequent economic ascendancy of the United States fostered an environment conducive to the growth of fast food enterprises, characterized by the diversification of products and the proliferation of outlets (Pingali & Abraham, 2022) and the 20th century heralded the emergence of formalized fast food restaurants, catalyzed by technological innovations such as food vending machines and the establishment of iconic brands like McDonald's in the 1940s, Burger King in 1950, Wendy's in 1969, and Starbucks in 1971 (Roy & Pagaldiviti, 2023). Subsequently, these pioneering establishments embarked on a trajectory of global expansion, catalyzing a wave of emulation by local and international competitors. Fast food restaurants, also known as quick service restaurants (QSRs), have garnered widespread popularity among diverse demographic segments. Teenagers are drawn to their dynamic menu offerings and friendly ambiance, while professionals value convenience and efficient service provision. Despite their appeal, fast food establishments have been scrutinized regarding their employment practices, often characterized by low wages and repetitive job roles, predominantly attracting younger, economically disadvantaged individuals (Zuzul, 2021).

Fast food establishments serve as communal spaces where individuals gather to foster connections with family and friends. The proliferation of fast food culture, epitomized by industry giants such as McDonald's, KFC, Subway, and Burger King, has entrenched dining out as a social norm. Operating within a franchising model enables these entities to mitigate expansion risks. Franchising entails the franchisor granting the franchisee access to proprietary materials and operational protocols, ensuring adherence to standardized quality while granting the parent company a share of revenue, expanded market presence, and brand proliferation. Franchisees, in turn, assume responsibility for staffing and infusing localized elements into the menu offerings. The fast food industry in Pakistan serves as a locus of innovation and cultural adaptation, with many international chains establishing a significant presence in the country. Major multinational brands such as McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Express, Pizza Hut, and Subway have strategically positioned themselves to cater to the higher-income demographic, cultivating an image as upscale fast food providers. Recognizing the importance of catering to local tastes, these corporations often tailor their menus to accommodate Pakistani preferences.

Furthermore, most overseas outlets are operated by indigenous franchisees, ensuring that cultural sensitivities and community values are upheld. Notably, the advent of fast food in Pakistan can be traced back to the late 1990s, with KFC opening its first outlet in 1997, followed by McDonald's in 1998 (Jia et al., 2021). The robust financial performance of fast food

enterprises in Pakistan underscores their status as lucrative investment ventures, substantiating continued interest and investment in the sector (Bagaria, 2021).

Fast food establishments have become ubiquitous in contemporary urban landscapes, spanning street corners, highway rest stops, airports, shopping malls, educational institutions, gas stations, local shopping centers, and medical facilities. The proliferation of the fast food industry in Pakistan can be attributed to various underlying factors. A comprehensive examination of the determinants influencing consumer food choices, as demonstrated in a comparative analysis between the United States and Japan, underscores the multifaceted nature of decision-making processes (Chen & Antonelli, 2020). Highlights the significance of cultural values, dietary customs, familial structures, and individual taste preferences in shaping consumer preferences for food products across nations and within domestic contexts.

In Pakistan, fast food industries are increasing daily, affecting the influence of kids on parents' purchase decision-making.

**Table 1: Fast food industry trends as per earlier studies**

Sr.	Author	Title	Journal	Method	Year
1.	Bridget Leonard, Margaret C. Campbell, and Kenneth C. Manning	Kids, Caregivers, and cartoons: the impact of Licensed Charters on food choices and consumptions	Journal of public policy and marketing	Experiment	2019
2.	Rachel J. Batty, Sarah Gee	Fast food, fizz, and funding: Balancing the scales of regional sports organization sponsorship	Journal of Sports Management	Interviews	2018
3.	Elizabeth L. Budd, Raoul S.Lievanos and Brigitte Amidon	How built, food, social, and organizational environments matter for student health	International journal of environmental research and public health	Case study	2020
4.	Fabrizio Baldasarre Raffaele Campo & Amedeo falcone	Food for kids: How children influence their parent's purchasing decisions	Journal of Food Products Marketing	Quantitative	2016
5.	Muhamad Kashif, Mubashir Ayyaz, and Sara Bashart	TV food advertising aimed at children	Journal of marketing and logistics	Qualitative	2014
6.	Vivica I Kraak and David L. Pelletier	The influence of commercialism on the food purchasing behavior of children and teenage	Journal of family economics and nutrition review	qualitative	1998
7.	Tjidde Tempels, Vincent Blok and Mercel verweij	Food Vendor Beware of Ordinary Morality and Unhealthy Marketing	Food Ethics	Qualitative	2020
8.	Elizabeth I. Budd, Rauol S. Lievanos	How Built, Social, Food, and Organizational Environment Matters	International Journal of Environment	Quantitative	2020

	and Brigette Amidon		Research and Public Health		
9.	Deepthi Kiran	Fast food and their impact on Health	JKMISU	Qualitative	2012
10.	Faheem Bukhari, Saima Hussain, and their Co-Author	Motives and role of religiosity towards consumer purchase behavior in Western imported food products	Journal of Sustainability	Quantitative	2020
11.	Prof. Dr. Abdull Gafoor Awaan Dean, Muhammad Nawaz	Socio-Economic Determinants of Fast Food Industry Growth in Pakistan	Food Science and Quality Management	Quantitative	2015
12.	Erin Hobin, Heather Lillico, Fei Zuo, Joceylon Saucio, Laura Rassole, and David Hammond	Estimating the impact of various menu labeling formats on parents' demand for fast food kids' meals for their children	Appetite Eating and Drinking	Experiment	2016

## Methodology

The strategy used for the data collection is qualitative which examines the relationship with their parent's purchase decision in fast food. Research is conducted to judge the purchasing behavior of kid's parents for their kids in fast food.

To explore this research, in-depth interviews were conducted with the selected respondents who were willing to participate in this research. The respondents are selected based on different criteria. Some are young parents, and some are too old to judge the view regarding purchasing fast food for their kids.

In this research, an interview guide is used to collect parents' data. In this interview guide, different questions are asked of the parents to judge their viewpoints about fast food purchasing. The sample for an interview is ten respondents from other locations; some interviews are conducted in respondents' homes, and some are performed in restaurants (Rehman et al., 2023). Respondents selected for the interview are busy with their duties and have less time for their kids. Some respondents are also part of the interview, which takes the best care of their kids and allows their kids only homemade foods to explain research objectives better. Content analysis was used for the data analysis different types of themes were identified for the research objective (Wang et al., 2023).

In content analysis, transcribing interview data helps explore the kid's influence on their parent's decision-making. From which different types of themes are identified like:

- Time Factor
- Perception of kids
- Taste factor
- Attractiveness
- Ad Factor
- Parental Role

## Time Factor

In the time factor, the parent's viewpoint is that they never allow their children not to eat fast food. When their parents have no time to make food, they offer them conveniently and quickly but not in a permanent way. One respondent said, "Me sirf bchon ko tb fast food deti hn jb kbi

bht busy hn r bachon ko ye btaya jata h k unki wish puri ki ja rhi h" "This view of respondent makes their kids happy but not at the permanent need for them. But this time only exists once in a month, not daily.

Kids influence their parents' decision-making in fast food when they judge the time factor when they demand it, and the parents also fulfill it. They force their parents to buy fast food at any time of celebration; they know now that their parents never say "No."

Like one respondent said, "fully against fast food now and never. I do not allow my children to eat fast food, but...when the time of their birthday, I feel that okay if they demand."

Some respondents also say "Yes" to the question of kids craving fast food. They are useless when kids are at that point where they eat fast food only and never other than that. Like one respondent said, "jb by bht zyda insist kin to me unhy purchase to kr deta hun but with one healthy condition jersey next full month ap homemade r milk-made eating things use kro gay." Then, the next sub-question from the respondent was how many times do kids accept your view? They said kids prefer eating things offered at home rather than fast food, which is unhealthy.

From the interviews, the time factor is also essential for deciding on fast food purchasing by parents. Kid demand more when they are willing to pay attention to fast food at that time, which they know is not said by their parents. At the time of arrival in the market, they also never in hand and demand fast food for eating; they see their parents fulfill their demand at that time.

### Perception of Kids

Nowadays, kids prefer fast food to homemade food because their awareness of it is more significant than that of kids from earlier times. They are demanding more and feeling proud to eat fast food. As a respondent said, "When I enter at home, my first impression of my kids is baba. Where is our burger? Our friends are eating burgers daily".

Kid perception regarding fast food is more challenging, like they think when they do not eat fast food in a day what they tell their friends.

However, a second view of some aged parents is that if they eat fast food, their kids are weaker than they are. Their kids also ignore fast food and avoid eating fast food. Their kid's perception is diverted from their parents that what things parents said wrong are wrong. They never argue and never demand next time for that thing.

One respondent said, "I'm lucky I have that type of family." From the perspective of fast food, when these parents say "No," their kids never demand it again.

But it is also a view that kids' perception is widely changed due to friend circle and the environment in which they live. They change their parent's decisions by their views regarding fast food purchasing. Kids assure their parents by justifying fast food. One answer from a respondent was, "Abu delayed ingredients me kitna healthy menu ha," from which parents stuck and fulfilled the kids' demand.

### Taste Factor

The taste factor also plays a vital role in craving fast food. When kids eat fast food, they are accustomed to that taste and remain in touch with that product's taste. Some respondents have the same view that we first provide fast food items to our kids. Now we realize that is not good, but kids are never ready to accept and become habitual of those fast food items.

One respondent said that he sleeps when my child eats a burger, but if we do not provide it, they are awake all night. The taste of fast foods makes kids habitual and demand it regularly. Some restaurants offer different product lines in fast foods and unhealthy deals for kids, but today, kids have easy access to information due to the internet. They see new things in fast foods and want to taste them as early as possible. The taste preferences of the parents differ from those of their kids, and they never eat homemade foods daily. They demand something unique and tasty.

### **Attractiveness**

Packaging is also an important factor that attracts kids toward fast food. Fast food industries use lavish and influential packaging to attract kids. When a new fast food product with a new package enters the market, kids are more interested in buying and tasting it. Fast food packaging is more attractive rather than the fast food in it. Glossy packaging is used for fast foods to attract kids, but kids need to know whether fresh food is available.

Packaging is an essential marketing function, but unhealthy packaging marketing affects the lousy image in markets. In this research, many respondents agree that packaging is fresh, but fast food that is in it is not fresh, leading to a bad image of the fast food industry.

In the market, different modes are used for attractiveness. Retailers of fast foods present various types of foods at the front of the shop. Whenever kids cross this retail shop, they want to buy, and parents also fulfill their demands.

### **Ad Factor**

Advertising is a vital promotion mix used to attract more customers rather than a person attracting a customer. Ads with a strong message are widely spread broadly in very little time. In advertisements for fast food, different things are used, such as kids' favorite cartoon characters, to increase kids' influence. Kids are more attached to their favorite cartoon characters when they see these foods, influencing parents' decision-making when purchasing fast food. In ads, kids see and demand fast foods and think that what they watch in ads is compulsory to eat that type of fast food.

Three respondents believe that whatever kids watch in McDonald's ads, they demand them to taste.

### **Parental Roles**

In Pakistan, this role is most important in every family. Parents are always the decision-makers of their kids, deciding what they eat and how and when they eat. Families have a vital role as leaders, fathers, or grandfathers who make all the decisions in Pakistan.

Parents are always bound to their children's decisions; they never feel free from their children even when they are young, but they always play a parental role in their choices. In fast food, parents reject or accept their kid's influence. It is only dependent on them, never on kids. They take it when they feel suitable for their kids and reject it when they do not feel best for them. A respondent said, "When I was a child, my parents said no to Burger. Now, 30 years old with two children, I have never tasted a Burger". Respondents described that the parental role is most important in making decisions, even in a portion of fast food or every field of life.

### **Results and Findings**

Fast food allows people to eat without planning, and unhealthy eating is becoming part of our daily lives. Excessive use of fast food leads to many problems, like making kids ill and unhealthy.

The key objective of this research is to examine the relationship between children's influence on their parent's decision-making in purchasing fast foods. Also, explore the parental role in accepting and rejecting works for children's influence.

### Content Analysis

In content analysis, the following key themes are identified to explore research objectives

**Table 2: Research objectives**

Research Objective	Themes
Kids influence their parents' decision-making in fast-food purchasing	Time factor, Taste factor, Attractiveness, and Ad Factor
Parental role in making fast food decisions	Kids Perception and Parental Decision Role

Fast food cravings are becoming more addictive whenever you feel free you need some fast food product to eat. In this study, kids influence their parent's decision-making in purchasing fast food, especially in Pakistan. Research is conducted from the selected respondents in which some are from lavish lifestyles and some are from moderator lifestyles. An information-processing model of a specific purchase decision

**Figure 1: Information processing model**

Environment	Initial Processing	Central Processing			Outcome
Family	Information search →	Interpretation →	Comprehension →		purchase decision
Television	Attention →	Structuring information →	Information selection →	Evaluation →	Use of information

*Source:* Ward et al., 1977, *How Children Learn to Buy: The Development of Consumer Information Processing Skills*, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, CA.e.

Children feel more confident and more knowledgeable regarding fast food, and they are supposed to eat every fast food item that is part of their lifestyle. Today, they watch ads and increase their influence regarding fast food. Their friends circle, and family friends influence them. When they talk about fast foods, they feel proud and happy to discuss new fast food products. Kids are more demanding fast food because today they are addicted to those foods; they bother homemade products. In the interview, many critical points are highlighted regarding kids' influence, such as kids' influences increasing from time to time, taste addictive factors, attractiveness, and ad factors. Parents also play a dominant role by judging the kid's perception, and their caregivers play a parental role in accepting or rejecting the kid's influence in fast food purchasing.

Parents accept the kid's influence when they demand not on a daily basis but once a month or at special events. Parents reject their kids' influence regarding fast food when their kids demand daily, which is unhealthy for kids.

### Discussions

In this research, kids' preferences change due to different factors. Because of different prior researchers, they find a relationship between fast food industries and kids' behavior. This research examines how kids influence their parents' decision-making when purchasing fast food. This research adds some work for the fast food industry, from which it explores the nature of the food it offers to make it healthy and safe for kids. The fast food industry must change the viewpoint in the minds of customers that not every time it is unhealthy, but these industries also



make food fast and safe for the customers. Parents should also use some techniques to avoid fast food. They encourage their kids to stop fast food, and they give them incentives to their kids. In data analysis, healthy conditions change kids' preferences because when they acquire more than they demand, they stop demanding fast foods.

This research is also helpful for parents to prevent their kids from eating fast foods and give them healthy and nutritious food for their health. Parents examine their kids' performance and provide them with what they need, but not everything they demand. For example, if kids are demanding fast food daily, then the parental role is helpful rather than making it compulsory for the children. Kids are demanding fast food from different sources like false ads, friends, and other social media platforms, which leads to unhealthy eating. This unhealthy eating makes them ill and weak at their age. This research contributes to companies that make fast foods, as well as parents and caregivers.

## Conclusion

In this study, research examines the relationship between kids' influences and parents' decision-making in fast food purchasing. Parents accept or reject the kid's influences on certain conditions regarding fast food purchasing. My recommendation to the fast food industry is that they change their perception in the minds of customers that fast food does not always mean junk or unhealthy foods. They also make healthy and valuable foods for the customers as well as for the kids. This research is conducted in a smaller area of Multan (Pakistan). The respondents who are selected for the interviews are limited in nature. Many respondents from different regions of Pakistan will be interviewed to address this research fully.

In the future, research can be conducted in the broader area of Pakistan to explore the objective, and many respondents will be interviewed to explore the research's aim further. The method used for the study is in-depth interviews. For further research, a mixed method can be used to sprinkle the research.

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