

Impact of Fast Food on the Socio-Economic Behavior of the Moroccan Consumer: A Study of the Influencing Factors

Najat Goubraim¹, Abdellatif Chakor²

¹PhD student – Faculty of Law, Economics and Social Sciences Souissi, University Mohammed V –Rabat, Morocco

²Professor authority – Faculty of Law, Economics and Social Sciences Souissi, University Mohammed V–Rabat, Morocco

Abstract: Fast food is one of the contributions of modern life, this new concept whose origin is American has spread worldwide and operated significant changes in food consumption patterns including those of the Moroccan consumer. Our paper explores the impact of fast food on the socio-economic behavior of the Moroccan consumer, we tried to study the main influencing factors that lead Moroccan consumers to opt for this mode of consumption. Thus a study has been conducted amongst 142 individuals. The main results indicate that Moroccan fast food consumers are mainly young, leading a busy life and they opt for fast food to gain time and get a quick service. They want a good value for their money, and they are more and more interested in having various choices in terms of fast food. They patronize both traditional fast food restaurants and branded fast food restaurants and are more and more demanding when it comes to hygiene and food safety standards. Finally, we can add that the Moroccan consumer trusts more the experiences of others (family, friends...) when it comes to choose a fast food restaurant.

Keywords: Fast food, Consumer behavior, attitudes, motivations, consumption habits, Moroccan consumer

I. Introduction

We are all consumers, consumption is a daily act that accompanies us throughout our lives. Each day, the market is invaded by a multitude of products and offers different services which, apart from their indispensability in our lives, fascinate us and attract us and we are often tempted to buy them and test them. From an early age, products and services fall within our universe, ever reminding us that we live in a consumer society and we are devoting more and more of our time and energy to consumption (Solomon, 2003).

The consumer behavior study aims to analyze how products and brands are shaping the personal and social identity of individuals (Solomon, 2003) insofar as they influence our thought process, our perceptions, our lifestyle and therefore our decision economically and socially.

The act of consumption which we can't do without and which we repeat on a daily basis is that of food consumption. It is an act which has important implications not only economically and socially but also in terms of our health. Thus we saw a significant interest in the study of consumer behavior at this level.

Being the sector that experienced the strongest growth in the last two decades and whose concept has greatly disrupted the food consumption patterns of the modern city dweller, fast food will be the subject of our study of consumer behavior.

We will try to address the following issues:

- The impact of fast food, as a new concept imposed by the demands of modern life, on the behavior of Moroccan consumers;
- The socioeconomic variables that illustrate the extent of this impact.

To do so, we have set the following objectives:

- The determination of the profile of consumers opting for fast food;
- Analysis of the impact of time and distance factors on the choice of this catering mode;
- Analysis of expectations and motivations with respect to fast food;
- The definition of consumer preferences in the matter (branded fast food restaurants vs traditional fast food restaurants);
- Analysis of consumer habits regarding fast food;
- Analysis of the purchasing power and its impact on the selection of a fast food restaurant;
- Analysis of the importance of informational factors (media and non-media) in the choice of fast food.

Our article is divided into four sections, the first one gives a small literature review about consumer behavior towards fast food, we have picked studies from different countries/continents of the world to give a general idea about the issue, the second section is dedicated to present the methodology followed in our study, the third section contains the results and the discussion and the last one is a conclusion which sums up the main findings of our study with some more interpretations and future perspectives.

II. Literature Review

Many studies have been conducted in other countries to analyze consumers' behavior towards fast food. In this review we will try to see the main results of some of them without pretending to give an exhaustive inventory of all of them, as there are many more studies addressing the issue from all over the world.

In Turkey, a study investigated the relationship between consumers' fast food consumption frequency and their socio-economic/demographic characteristics and attitudes. The findings of this study indicate that household income, education, age of consumers, household size and presence of children are significantly determinants of the consumers' probability of fast food consumption. The results suggest that higher education and income levels combined to the fact of having children are the characteristics with the highest positive effect on the probability of consumption. In regard to consumers' attitudes, the study suggests that price, health concern and children preferences have a strong impact on consumers' frequency of fast food consumption (Akbay, Yildiz Tiryaki, & Gul, 2006).

In Pakistan (Faisalabad), a study was conducted in order to investigate how consumers behave in fast food selection and consumption. The study examined some of the most important socio-economic indicators such as age, education, professional status, income and family size. Majority of respondents were young, well-educated and economically well off. The study also showed that good food taste, cooperative attitude of staff in fast food restaurants and especially the element of time saving are the factors that motivate consumers to prefer fast food over home cooked food, the study also highlighted the importance of maintaining rates (prices) at such a level where majority of people can afford them (Zafar et al., 2002).

In India also, a study aimed to estimate the importance of various factors affecting the choice of fast food outlets by Indian young consumers. One of the most important results of this study indicate that young Indian consumers have passion for visiting fast food outlets for fun and change but homemade food is their first choice. They give the highest importance to taste and quality followed by ambience and hygiene (Goyal & Singh, 2007).

Another Indian study aimed to analyze consumer behavior in branded fast food joints. It compares the impact of changes in purchasing power on segment crossovers, across societies accelerated towards multinational corporations branded fast food joints. The study demonstrates that fast food joints are visited by consumers of all categories of income, it hence confirms that the income isn't a factor influencing the level of satisfaction, whereas occupation, age, gender and accessibility to fast food joints are significant factors (Pratabaraj & Joe, 2013).

In Korea, a study investigated the relationship between consumer values of eating-out and the importance of fast food restaurant attributes. The results suggest that consumer values of eating-out are divided into two factors: hedonic and utilitarian. The hedonic value of eating out had positive correlation with mood, quick service, cleanliness, food taste, employee kindness and facilities while the utilitarian value centered on reasonable price, quick service and promotional incentives. Another interesting result of this study lies in the fact that it's the hedonic value of eating out that is significantly correlated to customer buying frequency at fast food restaurants and not the utilitarian value while, generally, it's the utilitarian value that is related to the buying frequency in a fast food restaurant since the latter is considered as an economical and convenient place to eat out. This insolate finding is the result of a cultural factor rather than a measurement mistake of the hedonic value and it means that fast food restaurants in Korea are regarded not just as eating-places but also as pleasant and social places (Park, 2004).

In Australia, the demand for fast food is driven by taste, low prices and convenience although there has been a recent trend toward healthy options (MacGowan, 2012). Another Australian study has found that personal service and service setting are key dimensions of satisfaction however, Australian consumers also assess whether service providers are delivering on their promises as part of assessing satisfaction (Phau & Ferguson, 2013).

In North America and Latin America, a study has been conducted to compare the determinants of behavioral intentions for United States and Ecuadorian consumers. It has been found that service value (sacrifice vs service quality) and satisfaction drive consumers' behavioral intentions in North America whereas Latin Americans are found to give prominence to satisfaction (emotional satisfaction judgment) in their assessments. American consumers tend to give more importance to the tradeoff between what they receive in the service encounter and what they have to sacrifice to get the benefit, contrariwise, Latin American consumers place more emphasis on the more emotive satisfaction judgment (Brady et al, 2001).

In Czech Republic, a research paper examined the consumer behavior theory and its relevance in the marketing practices of fast food firms, though being mainly focused on the theoretical aspect of things and not only related to the czech context, this paper provides a comprehensive analysis of some conceptual and theoretical tools in consumer behavior that contributes immensely to the development and implementation of viable marketing strategies of fast food firms. The main conclusion of this paper is that although the consumer behavior theory suggests the rationality of consumers, there are other marketing variables that affect this rational proposition of the consumer behavior. Usually the main factors influencing the demand are: the price, the disposable income, the price of close substitutes, taste and preference, but these factors can be influenced through marketing communication (advertising and promotion) (Asamoah & Chovancova, 2011).

In Morocco, as far as we know, there are no proper studies about Moroccan consumer behavior towards fast food, few casual interviews were conducted but no structured questionnaires were administered to address the issue, the main focus in the Moroccan studies, especially the ones made by the Ministry of Industry and Trade, was on the growth of the fast food industry (number of new outlets, chained brands, market share...). The following sections are dedicated to our study of the Moroccan consumer behavior towards fast food.

III. Methodology

The survey was conducted using a questionnaire that was administered to 142 people from the regions of Casablanca and Rabat as two representative regions of a modern lifestyle where people work and lead an accelerated life that explains the emergence and the development of certain habits in particular those related to fast food.

We limited our study to these two regions for reasons of geographical mobility, however, the results can be generalized to the big cities whose inhabitants lead more or less similar lifestyles to those of Rabat and Casablanca's.

At the beginning, a sample of 146 respondents was selected to conduct the study, it was reduced to 142 as we dismissed four incomplete questionnaires.

Questionnaires contained mainly structured questions but also some few unstructured questions to get a better idea of what respondents think.

The questions were classified into four sections to allow us an easier interpretation of results:

- Consumer Profile: It aims to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of fast food consumers;
- Consumption habits: It concerns the elements related to the choice of a catering mode and the different consumption habits that are related to the fast food one;
- Expectations, motivations and preferences: It addresses the criterions involved in the construction of consumer perceptions regarding fast food and therefore the translation of these into expectations and preferences.
- Purchasing power and the sources of information: At this level, all revolves around determining the price consumers are willing to spend on fast food and the information sources (media and non-media) that influence them most in their choice in terms of fast food.

The sampling method we used is convenience sampling, it's a non-probability sampling method which is simple as it doesn't take much time, it is effective cost wise, and sampling units are easy to access. Although the error level in convenience sampling is higher than in probability sampling, we opted for it as the target of our study is large, any city dweller from the regions of Casablanca or Rabat can make part of our target population, our objective is to explore the impact of fast food catering on the Moroccan consumer behavior, people from all age and socio-professional categories were approached as we needed to explore the reasons that lead each of them to consume fast food and patronize fast food restaurants.

We used two modes of administration for our questionnaire, the face to face mode and through e-mail mode, the face to face mode was the prevailing one, we opted for it to have direct contact with respondents and clear any ambiguity in real time. Respondents were approached to fill in the questionnaire at their home, workplace, school, university or in fast food restaurants. Out of the 146 questionnaires initially administered, 142 were valid.

Data was processed using Sphinx Plus 2, version 4.5, frequency (percentages) distribution and descriptive statistics were used to explore the objectives of our study and analyze the results.

IV. Results And Discussion

In this section, we will present and analyze the main results of our survey that was conducted to determine the impact of fast food on the socio-economic behavior of Moroccan consumers. The sub-sections under which the results will be analyzed and interpreted, as mentioned in the methodology section, are:

- Consumers profile;
- Consumption habits;
- Expectations, motivations and preferences;
- The purchasing power and sources of information.

4.1 Consumers profile

Before presenting the profile of fast food consumers (their socio-demographic characteristics), it should be noted that a filter question was asked to the sample surveyed to determine the percentage of people who patronize fast food restaurants and thus are influenced by this mode of catering.

The consumer profile that we will introduce at this level, concerns only consumers of fast food, consequently, the percentage of non response automatically indicates the other part of population who does not patronize fast food restaurants (11.3%).

Table I. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Gender distribution	No. cit.	% cit
Non response	16	11.3%
M	65	45.8%
F	61	43.0%
TOTAL CIT.	142	100%
Age distribution	No. cit.	% cit
Non response	16	11.3%
15 to 25	42	29,6%
26 to 35	49	34,5%
36 to 45	23	16,2%
46 to 55	9	6,3%
More than 55	3	2,1%
TOTAL CIT.	142	100%
Socio-professional category	No. cit.	% cit
Non response	16	11.3%
Liberal profession	13	9,2%
Public official or employee	54	38,0%
Merchant	17	12,0%
Student	29	20,4%
Other	13	9,2%
TOTAL CIT.	142	100%

Both females and males patronize fast food restaurants, in our sample, the percentages are very close (43% females and 45.8% males), this result indicates that women and men resort to fast food with no predominance of one gender over the other. The remaining 11.3% that we did not seek to determine is related to people who do not consume fast food.

We also found that the dominant age group amongst the consumers of fast food is the one between 26 and 35 years old (34.5%) followed by the one between 15 and 25 years old (29.6%). These results indicate that people who resort to fast food are mostly young, a typical example of the modern consumer who is open to new lifestyles and to the western consumer culture.

According to table I, people who resort most to fast food catering belong to the socio-professional categories of "public official or employee" (38%) and "student" (20.4%), so more than the half of respondents (58.4%) belong to these two categories.

This can be explained by the characteristics of these two categories whose constraints (studies, continuous work schedule, the relatively low purchasing power...) lead them towards choosing a practical and inexpensive catering mode.

4.2 Consumption habits

In this sub-section, we will try to see the place that fast food holds amongst other food consumption patterns in the Moroccan context as well as the habits related to it.

To make it easier to address the issue of the Moroccan consumer behavior towards fast food, we needed first to know where do our respondents usually eat and then see if they have already had an experience of eating in a fast food restaurant.

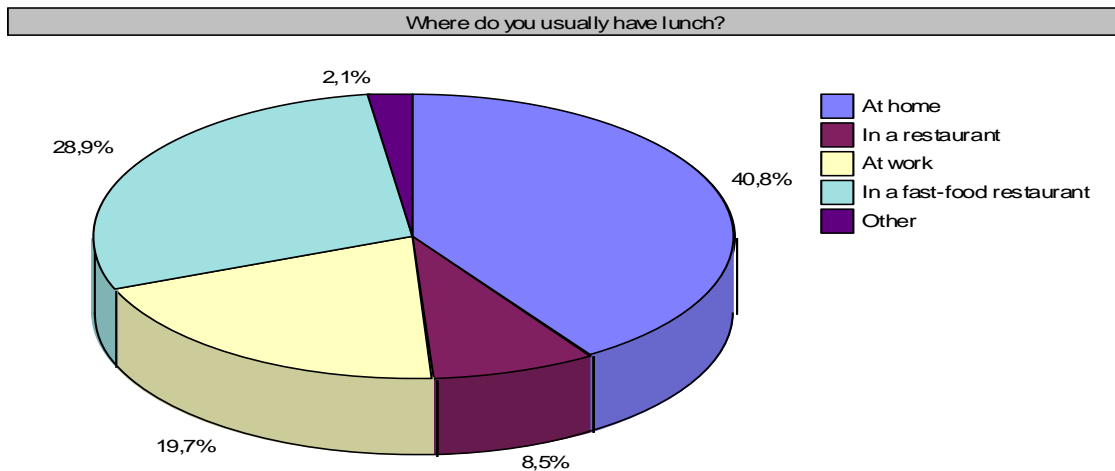


Figure I. Where do you usually have lunch ?

According to Fig.I, 40.8% of respondents have their lunch at home, 28.9% in a fast food restaurant, 19.7% at work and 8.5% in a restaurant.

These results show that even if a large number of respondents still prefer having lunch at home, eating in fast food restaurants is becoming part of the Moroccan consumption habits, the percentage of meals eaten outside home especially in fast food restaurants is growing.

It is also important to note that many of the people who reported having their lunch at work, do actually order it from a fast food restaurant to have it at their workplace.

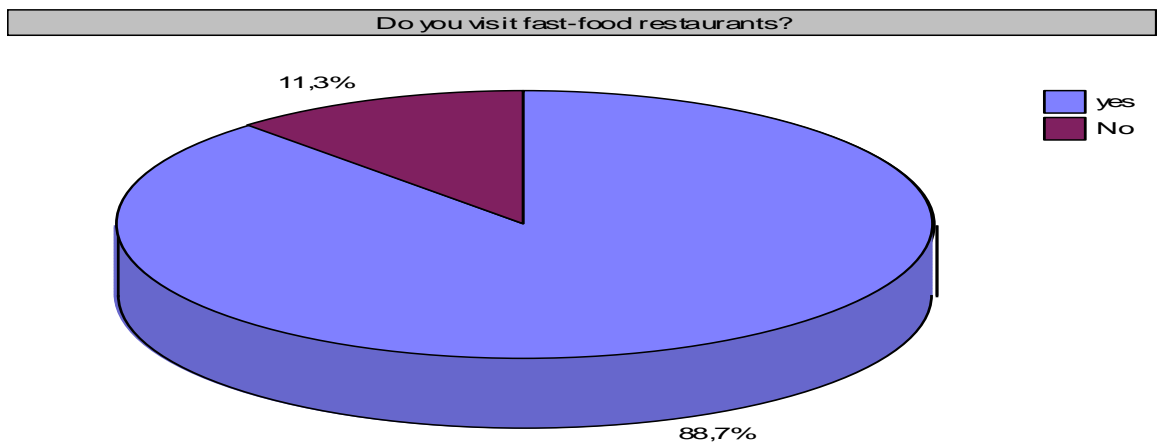


Figure II. Interest in fast food restaurants

As we can see from the graph above (Fig.II), 88.7% of the respondents patronize fast food restaurants, and only 11.3% of them don't. This result clearly indicates the importance held by fast food in the Moroccan consumption habits. This consumption pattern has become part of the Moroccan consumer's lifestyle.

Patronized fast food restaurants

Table II. Patronized fast food restaurants

Patronized restaurants	No. cit.	% cit
Non response	16	11,3%
McDonald's	48	33,8%
KFC	19	13,4%
Pizza Hut	27	19,0%
Dominos Pizza	12	8,5%
Traditional fast-food restaurant	73	51,4%
Other	16	11,3%
TOTAL OBS.	142	

Note : The number of citations is higher than the number of observations because of multiple answers (5 at the most).

According to Table II, Moroccan consumers do patronize both branded fast food restaurants and traditional fast food restaurants. In another section we will see whether they have a preference for one of these two types of restaurants or not, here we can't judge properly as the answers are multiple, the question was which are the fast food restaurants that you frequently visit ?, a consumer can pick as an answer both a branded fast food restaurant (one or plus) and traditional fast food restaurant, but the preference can't be judged.

Amongst the branded fast food restaurants, McDonald's is the most frequented one (33.8%), followed by Pizza Hut (19%) and KFC (13.4%).

Frequency and proximity

Table III. Frequency and proximity

Frequency of visits	No. cit.	% cit
Every day	19	13,4%
2 to 3 times a week	42	29,6%
Once a week	35	24,6%
Once a month or less	30	21,1%
Never	16	11,3%
TOTAL OBS.	142	100%
Proximity	No. cit.	% cit
Non response	16	11,3%
Less than 5min	13	9,2%
5 to 10min	37	26,1%
11 to 20min	42	29,6%
More than 20min	34	23,9%
TOTAL OBS.	142	100%

In our study, we tried to see how often does a consumer visit a fast food restaurant and how much time does it take him to get there. The main reason is to analyze the factors of frequency and proximity. These two factors can give us an idea about the impact of fast food on the consumer behavior in the Moroccan context.

According to Table III, 29.6% of the respondents visit fast food restaurants 2 to 3 times a week, 24.6% once a week and 21.1% once a month, only 13.4% do frequent fast food restaurants on a daily basis.

These results show that almost 70% of the respondents do frequent fast food restaurants every week, when at work or in the university, but when they get a chance to have their lunch at home, they do take it and at times they prefer to have their meal at a gourmet restaurant instead of a fast food one.

Some people do also frequent fast food restaurants only once a month (21.1%), this result might indicate that they do it only for change and not for necessity. In regards to proximity, we noticed that the fact of having a fast food restaurant so near (less than 5min from the workplace, university...) isn't always necessary (9.2%), people do frequent fast food restaurants which are at 10min (26.1%) or 20min (29.6%) away from where they work or study. 23.9% of the respondents do patronize fast food restaurants which are at more than 20min away from their workplace or university, these people might either have cars/motocycles or more time for lunch.

Eat in or take away ?

Table IV. Eat in or take away

Eat in or take away ?	No. cit.	% cit
Non response	16	11,3%
Yes, otherwise, I would eat elsewhere	56	39,4%
Yes, if it's possible, if not it doesn't matter	47	33,1%
No, I prefer to eat while strolling, doing shopping	4	2,8%
No, I take my lunch to my workplace, home, university...	18	12,7%
Other	1	0,7%
TOTAL OBS.	142	100%

To better know about the consumption habits of Moroccan fast food consumers, we asked them whether it's important to eat in when they go to a fast food restaurant?

As shown in table IV, 39.4% of respondents prefer to eat in, otherwise they will go elsewhere, and 33.1% prefer to eat in without that being a prerequisite. Thus, more than 70% of respondents seek to eat in the same place where they are served. Nevertheless, in some cases, and as this is one of the advantages and possibilities that fast food restaurants offer, people can bring their lunch to their workplace or school (12.7% of the respondents).

4.3 Expectations, motivations and preferences

In this sub-section, our main objective is to determine the motivations that drive Moroccan people to consume fast food but also their expectations with respect to this type of catering. We will also see whether people have preference for branded fast food restaurants over traditional ones or not.

Table V. Motivations and expectations with regards to fast food

Motivations and expectations	No. cit.	% cit
Non response	16	11,3%
Quick service	62	43,7%
Constraints of the continuous work schedule	33	23,2%
Proximity	14	9,9%
Price	27	19,0%
Freshness	23	16,2%
Hygiene	26	18,3%
Choice/variety	33	23,2%
Other	3	2,1%
TOTAL OBS.	142	

Note : The number of citations is higher than the number of observations because of multiple answers (8 at the most).

When asked about their motivations for eating in fast-food restaurants, respondents picked the quick service (43.7%) as their first motivation. In fact, the accelerated pace of life, the shortening of lunch breaks and the need for an effective and efficient service lead people to place the quick service as the main criterion and requirement for choosing fast food over any other food consumption patterns.

Continuous work schedule (23.2%) was one of the important reasons behind respondents opting for fast food. People do not have much time to go home and have lunch, hence fast food service is a way to adapt to the new changes in lifestyle and to the requirements of the modern world of work.

Choice and variety is another criterion that interested fast food consumers (23.2% of respondents). The ability to test varied dishes which at the same time meet the conditions of fast service is a luxury that many people like to enjoy.

Price was considered as a motivation and a choice criterion by 19% of the respondents. If it's not the most important criterion selected by respondents, a relatively low price can be in favor of fast food when it comes to making a choice.

The remaining criteria are those of hygiene (18.3%), freshness (16.2%) and proximity (9.9%). These criteria are important insofar that people might prefer the catering near their place of work or study and that they are concerned with hygiene and food safety.

People are more health conscious and are more interested in patronizing fast food restaurants whose food safety meets the food safety standards such as the HACCP¹ standards.

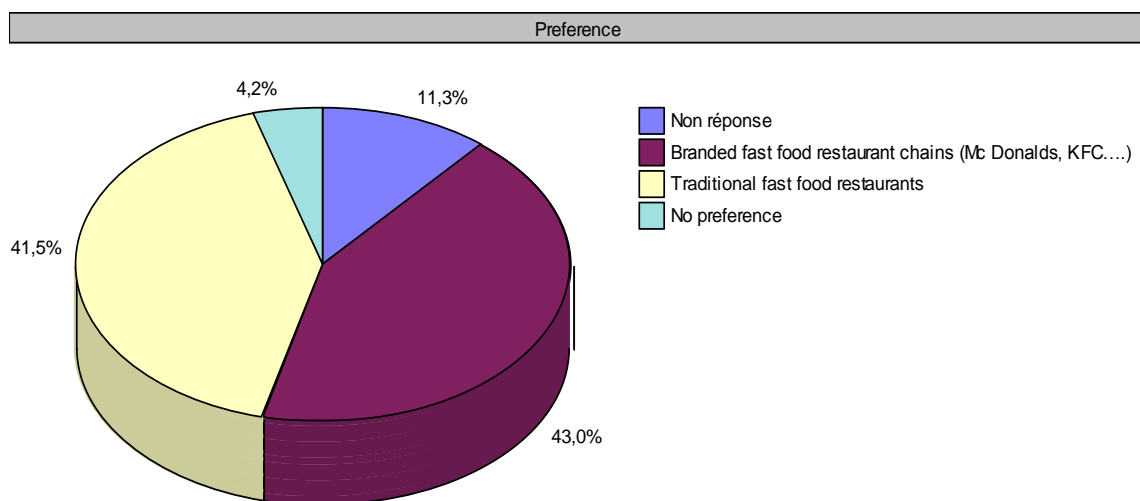


Figure III. Preference in terms of fast food restaurants

¹Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP)

According to Fig.III. We can see that 43% of respondents prefer branded fast food restaurants (McDonald's, KFC...). We asked them for the reasons behind this preference and they justified their choice by the fact that branded fast food restaurants meet hygiene standards, offer a fast service, have a good reputation, their advertisements are irresistible and they offer the advantage of home delivery.

On the other hand, 41.5% of the respondents prefer traditional fast food restaurants because these offer good value for money, they are available everywhere, they serve Moroccan fast food, halal meals and they are less crowded during lunch time.

Few respondents (4.2%) reported not having any preference for a type of fast food restaurants over the other.

4.4 The purchasing power and sources of information

At this level, we will see the price consumers are willing to spend on fast food and the information sources (media and non-media) that influence them most in their choice in terms of fast food.

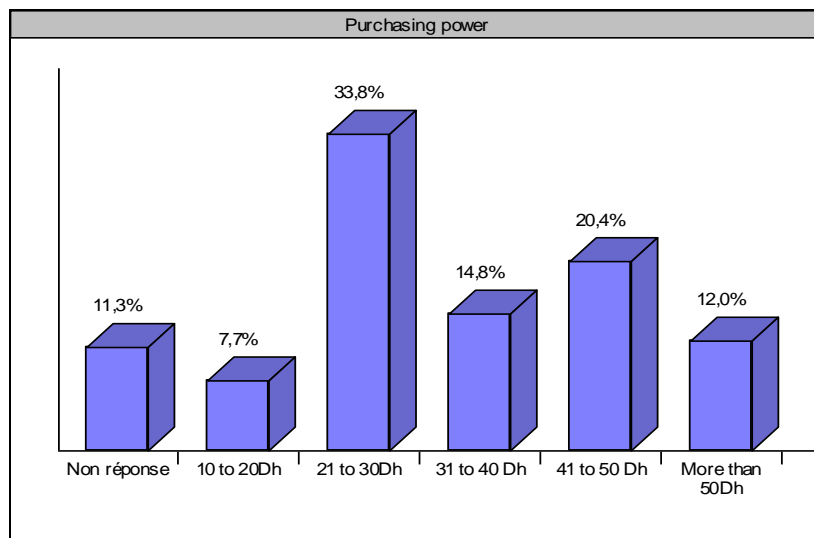


Figure IV. Purchasing power

We asked the respondents how much money do they spend on lunch in a fast food restaurant on average, the price ranged between 21Dh and 50Dh for the majority of respondents, this shows that people generally consider the price range between 10 and 20Dh as a range whose products are unsatisfactory in terms of quality and they consider the price range of over 50Dh as a range whose products are expensive compared to their purchasing power. The price range that was most accepted by respondents is the one between 21Dh and 30Dh (33.8% of respondents). We can infer that this one coincides with the psychological price.

Table VI. Information sources

Information sources	No. cit.	% cit
Non response	16	11,3%
Word of mouth	82	57,7%
Hordings- banners - billboards...	57	40,1%
Internet	13	9,2%
Television	12	8,5%
Radio	3	2,1%
TOTAL OBS.	142	

Note : The number of citations is higher than the number of observations because of multiple answers (5 at the most).

We asked our respondents how they get to know about the fast food restaurants they usually visit, according to Table VI, we can see that the word of mouth is the source of information most used and trusted by respondents while choosing a fast food place (57.7%).

When it comes to food or anything related to health, people usually trust the experiences of other reliable people around them, thus family, relatives and friends are the first source of awareness about fast food.

The second source of information that determines the choice of a place where to eat is the display of hordings, banners or billboards ... (40.1% of respondents).

V. Conclusion And Perspectives

The impact of fast food on the behavior of Moroccan consumers can be felt at many levels. This is a new mode of consumption imposed by the demands of modern life but also by the spread of Western consumer culture. We are witnessing a movement of standardization in food consumption habits in the same way we witnessed in other economic and social fields within the evergreen phenomenon of globalization. The main findings and interpretations of our study about the impact of fast food on the Moroccan consumer behavior, both on the economic and social levels, can be summed up below.

5.1 On the economic level

According to our study, we found that the purchasing power remains an important factor when it comes to make a choice by Moroccan consumers. They are always looking for products and services that are likely to offer a good value for money.

Fast food catering has been a solution since one of the major characteristics of the latter is to offer products whose prices are low compared to other forms of catering. Sophisticated and finely prepared menus by renowned chefs in fine dining restaurants partly explain the difference in price compared to fast food restaurants which offer simple and practical menus to consumers.

We have seen that the price the Moroccan consumer is willing to pay in a fast food restaurant ranges between 20 and 50Dh with a predominance of the price range 21 to 30Dh.

Although we didn't address the fast food from a macro-economic angle in our study, we would like to point that the fast food industry offers big opportunities for investment, international and national franchises are involved in the realization of the tendency by multiplying the openings without forgetting the proliferation of small and medium enterprises. Although the price in general remains low, consumers can have a wide range of choices to arbitrate between their budget and their preferences.

5.2 On the socio-cultural level

The arrival of fast food was seen as a solution that goes with the changing lifestyle of the modern Moroccan consumer. Several factors have, in fact, participated in giving magnitude to this new mode of consumption. The accelerated pace of life, the work of women, the reduction of time spent on meals, the development of mobility and the non-stop search for time saving are all elements that have favored the popularity of fast food. It is also appropriate to mention the search for practicality by consumers who are more interested in having simple and less structured meals in fast food restaurants that are close to their workplace, university... Moroccans are thus increasingly interested in the offers of fast food restaurants, all this gives a significant growth potential to the fast food market.

According to our study, Moroccan consumers patronize both traditional fast food restaurants and branded fast food restaurants, without a particular predominance of one type of restaurants over the other.

The main motivations that lead Moroccan consumers to opt for fast food are the quick service, the gain of time because of the continuous work schedule and short lunchtime breaks and the variety of choices that some fast food restaurants offer, the main requirement is hygiene and food safety.

Given the fact that Moroccan consumers are becoming more and more health conscious, a new trend might emerge in the Moroccan market: the organic fast food that meets the food safety standards and help to safeguard long-time health.

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