



## An investigation of consumer perceptions and attitude with regard to fast food purchase intention in Batticaloa district

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### Abstract

The Sri Lankan economy may be characterised as a traditional economy, whereby a significant portion of the population exhibits a desire for home-cooked meals that include nutritional value. It was extremely difficult for multinational fast-food companies to establish operations in Sri Lanka. In the contemporary context, fast food has replaced conventional food. The demand for fast food is steadily rising as a result of changes in living patterns. Currently, the fast food business remains a prominent sector in Sri Lanka, regardless of economic downturns. The present research aims to investigate the empirical association between customer perception and consumer attitude on purchase intention of fast food. A convenience sample of 200 consumers in Batticaloa District was used to obtain the data. The participants shared the data using a questionnaire. The hypotheses were tested using Regression Analysis. The analysis of the data was performed with the SPSS software.

In summary, it is evident that the purchase intention of fast food is influenced by both consumer perception and customer attitude, with consumer attitude exerting a greater influence than consumer perception. This indicates that restaurants could enhance customer perception by offering health and hygienic information, promotional elements, brand characteristics, and product quality in order to promote increased consumption of fast food. In order to enhance customer attitude toward fast food consumption, it is essential for the fast food sector to thoroughly evaluate the aspects of awareness, purchase choice, and satisfaction. The findings of this research indicate that the use of optimal customer perception and consumer attitude plays a crucial role in enhancing fast food consumption in Batticaloa restaurants.

**Keywords:** Consumer perception, consumer behavior, purchase intention

### Introduction

The prompt process of urbanisation and the changing lives of individuals has resulted in a significant increase in the number of people dining out, thus leading to a widespread proliferation of fast food restaurants. The accelerated development of the Sri Lankan fast-food restaurant industry can be attributed to various factors, including the rise of nuclear families, exposure to global trends, increased employment of women, and a growing number of dual-income households. Additionally, the entry of large multinational franchises has further contributed to this trend. (Xue *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[11]</sup>. In modern society, fast food has become a universally adored and often mentioned phenomenon, with individuals of all age groups, including children and elderly individuals, expressing an intense desire for it.

Fast foods are convenient, affordably priced, and easily accessible substitutes for homemade meals. According to Deivanai (2013) <sup>[4]</sup>, fast food refers to affordable meal options, such as hamburgers and fried chicken, that are made and supplied in quick time frames. Conversely, fast food is an unhealthy source of calories, fat, saturated lipids, sodium, and sugar.

The presence of food variety in Sri Lanka is an inherent attribute of the country's diverse culture, which encompasses several areas and states. Historically, Sri Lankans have a preference for preparing meals at home, a practice that is both religiously and personally endorsed. Sri Lanka has several unique aspects, and Sri Lankan cuisine stands out as one of them. Nowadays, a wide range of foreign fast food brands, including KFC, McDonald's, Domino's, and Pizza Hut, as well as Sri Lankan fast food companies, are operating across the nation to cater to a

diverse consumer base, including various cultural, economic, and social backgrounds. The journey began with dining in restaurants and progressed to embracing a diverse range of food options from across the globe. (Gunawardana & Rsathika, 2013) <sup>[6]</sup>, Therefore, it is essential to investigate the consumer perception and attitude in relation to fast food purchase intention.

Insufficient empirical research exists in Sri Lanka pertaining to the examination of the influence of customer perception and attitude on fast food purchase intention. Hence, a noticeable empirical gap exists regarding the influence of customer perception and attitude on the purchase intention of fast food. These empirical disparities provide a challenge for fast-food businesses in determining the effectiveness of their service among consumers. The purpose of this research was to examine the influence of customer perception and attitudes on fast food purchase intention in Sri Lanka, specifically focusing on the Batticaloa District.

### Research Objectives

1. Identify the level of consumer perception and consumer attitude toward fast food.
2. Identify the impact of consumer perception on fast food purchase intention
3. Identify the impact of consumer attitude on fast food purchase intention

### Materials

The only means by which organisations may enhance their market share is through their supply of continuous flow goods that effectively react to the evolving and increasing preferences of their consumer base. Customers have the

ability to choose among a variety of goods and services based on their perceptions about the nature, quality, and equity of those items. According to Salami and Ajobo (2012) [9], understanding the perceptual process is crucial for marketers since a customer's purchasing choices are significantly impacted by their perception of the items.

Over the last several decades, the fast food business has emerged as a significant sector in Sri Lanka. In the fast food sector in Sri Lanka, apart from many individual entrepreneurs and small enterprises, there are two primary categories of prominent firms: Domestic Firms and Foreign Franchised Firms. Currently, it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of fast-food establishments in Sri Lanka. There exists a substantial number of branded restaurants, numbering in the thousands, which are spread not only inside the capital city but also throughout several other cities within the nation (Devendra & Kennedy, 2015) [5].

**Purchase Intention:** The demand for a product, which in turn affects a consumer's purchase intention, is influenced by various factors such as changes in demographic pattern, education, income structure, lifestyle, changing aspirations, cultural orientation, increasing awareness, nutritive value, changes in consumer behaviour, introduction of new technologies, and new expectations of consumers. (Xiao *et al.*, 2019) [1].

**Consumer Perception:** A concept of consumer perception in marketing refers to the overall impression, awareness, and consciousness that a customer has about a firm or its products or services. Advertising, reviews, public relations, social media, personal experiences, and other outlets often influence customer perception. The perception of customers while picking fast food restaurants is influenced by many essential aspects, including service, speed, pricing, sanitation, sitting space, food flavour, variety, and ambience. (Anita Goyal and N.P. Singh, 2007) [2]. This study considered self-perception, price perception and benefit perception as sub component of consumer perception. The following hypothesis was formulated.

**H1:** Consumer Perception has a positive effect on fast food purchase intention

**Consumer Attitude:** The word "attitude" refers to the evaluation of a positive or negative characteristic shown by an object or somebody. (Soujden *et al.*, 2019). There is a claim that attitude motives should be given precedence since customers are primarily affected by their behaviours and exhibit consistent behaviour in accordance with their social standing. "Consumer mindset serves as the primary motivator for our business planning." (Elobeid *et al.*, 2019) [10]. The variable of attitude has been extensively examined as a factor that might impact individuals' intentions to purchase fast food. It is crucial for marketers to acknowledge the impact of consumer attitudes towards fast food on their purchasing intention and the extent to which they must accommodate consumers' dietary preferences. (Perez-Villarreal *et al.*, 2019) [7]

**H2:** Consumer attitude has a positive effect on fast food purchase intention

**Methods**

The population of this research consisted of customers of fast-food businesses located in the Batticaloa district. The study used a descriptive research approach. A sample of 200 customers was chosen for this research using the convenience sampling approach. This study used a well-designed questionnaire as a study tool to gather relevant information from the participants. The survey instrument was divided into three distinct sections. Part -1 of the study primarily examines demographic characteristics, including age, occupation, monthly income, and marital status. Part 2 of the study focuses on the realm of consumer perception and attitude. Part 3 focuses on Consumer fast food purchase intention. Every consumer was given a questionnaire and requested to complete it correctly.

**Discussions and findings**

In order to meet the defined research objective, the data presentation and analysis include frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation, as well as correlation and regression analysis with the study variable.

**1. Sample Profile**

Descriptive statistical analysis was run on respondents' demographic variables. The results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Summary of demographic information

Demographic Profile		Frequencies	Percentages (%)
Gender	Male	142	71.0
	Female	58	29.0
Age groups	Below 20 years	19	9.5
	21-30 years	120	60.0
	31-40 years	59	29.5
	41 years & above	2	1.0
Occupation	Student	58	28.0
	Unemployed	24	12.0
	Self employed	54	27.0
	Salaried	66	33.0
Monthly Income	Rs.20000-39999	32	16.0
	Rs. 40000-59999	69	34.5
	Rs. 60000-79999	73	36.5
	Rs. 80000 & Above	26	13.0
Marital Status	Married	26	13
	Single	174	87
Frequency of buying fast food	Daily	34	17
	Weekly	89	44.5
	Very rarely	77	38.5

The above table 1 shows the gender proportion in Batticaloa restaurants. In general male customers were higher than female customers. According to the sample represents 71% and 29% of males and females, respectively. According to occupation data, 33% of the respondents were salaried, while 28% of the respondents were Self-employed. The lowest number of unemployed respondents was 12% of respondents. As per the occasion of buying data, most of the respondents buy fast food weekly, which is 44.5%. 38.5% of respondents buy very rarely, while 17.0% of respondents buy daily.

**2. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables**

The descriptive data of mean and standard deviation of the study variables was obtained and shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Level of variables

Variable	Dimensions	Mean	S. D	Decision Attribute
Consumer perception	Health and Hygiene	4.21	0.65	High Level
	Brand Features	3.42	0.79	Moderate Level
	Promotional Features	3.96	0.81	High Level
	Quality	3.77	0.80	High Level
Consumer attitude	Consumer Awareness	3.90	0.54	High Level
	Consumer Purchase Decision	3.75	0.58	High Level
	Consumer Satisfaction	3.52	0.64	High Level

The independent variable, consumer perception, has four dimensions including health and hygiene, brand features, promotional features and quality. Health and Hygiene mean value is 4.21 and deviated from 0.65, which shows the high level of Health and Hygiene. The dimension of Brand features has a moderate level at its individual characteristic in influencing the factors (Mean=3.42). The dimension of Promotional features has a high level of its individual characteristics in influencing the factors (Mean=3.96). Similarly, the dimension of quality has a high level of individual characteristics in influencing the factors (Mean=3.77).

The independent variable, consumer attitude, has three dimensions including; Consumer Awareness, Consumer Purchase Decision and Consumer Satisfaction. The dimension of consumer awareness has a high level at its individual characteristic (Mean=3.90). The dimension of consumer purchase decision has a high level at its individual characteristic (Mean=3.75). The dimension of consumer satisfaction has a high level of individual characteristics in influencing the factors (Mean=3.52).

Given the consideration of the above information, it was clear that most of the consumer perception and consumer attitude dimensions have scored higher value for Fast Food Restaurants in Batticaloa district.

**3. Regression Analysis**

The hypotheses stated in the literature review were created to determine whether the selected two variables influenced the purchase intention of fast food. Thus, a Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was performed.

**Table 4:** Regression predicting purchase intention of fast food with selected factors

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Mode		Unstandardised Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error		
1	(Constant)	-.466	.261	-1.558	.021
	Consumer Perception	.569	.045	5.156	.000
	Consumer attitude	.465	.036	5.7578	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase intention of fast food

The coefficient of determination  $R^2 = 0.543$  means that 54.3% of the variability of purchase intention of fast food is explained by the selected factors. Furthermore, the selected two variables have a significant influence ( $p < 0.05$ ) on purchase intention of fast food. This indicates that hypotheses H1 and H2 are accepted.

**Conclusions and recommendation**

This research presents an empirical analysis of consumers in Batticaloa perception and attitude about fast food, and how this impression influences their purchase intention of fast food. The findings derived from the gathering of primary data indicate that customer perception is the key determinant influencing the purchase intention of fast food consumption. Most respondents have a high level of concern toward consumer perception and attitude toward fast food.

As per the regression analysis, consumer perception has a significantly higher impact on purchase intention of fast food compared to consumer attitude. It aligns with the findings of Yaha *et al* (2013), who revealed that customer perception is identified as the primary determinant of consumption. Meantime, the mean value of indicators of consumer perception, including health and hygiene, brand features, promotional features and quality, showed a high level of attributes among the respondents in Batticaloa.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested. The research revealed that the variable of customer perception has a highly significant impact on influencing fast food consumption in the Batticaloa district. Based on the findings of this study and previous research, it is evident that consumers consistently choose healthy foods that provide a balance between quality and affordability. In order to effectively promote their brand, marketers should take into account not just the sensory appeal of food but also the health and sanitary aspects, as well as the overall quality of the meal. Alternatively, they will experience failure in the market. The analysis of customer perception indicates a substantial and noteworthy influence on purchase intention. Hence, it is essential for restaurant management to implement specific measures to enhance customer perception in terms of health and cleanliness, brand attributes, promotional elements, and quality.

Simultaneously, the customer attitude also has a substantial influence on the purchase intention of fast food. It is evident that creating a favourable customer attitude is an additional technique that significantly influences purchase intention. Therefore, it is essential for fast food establishments in Sri Lanka to prioritise customer knowledge of fast food, purchasing decisions, and satisfaction since these aspects significantly influence consumer attitudes.

**Limitations and future directions**

This research is not free of limitations. Batticaloa District received significant representatives, but not for other districts in Sri Lanka. The sample size for this research was restricted to 200 individuals who eat fast food in Batticaloa District. This research examines the influence of customers' perception and attitude towards fast food. Future research endeavours have the potential to expand upon several additional influential aspects.

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