

Review Article

# A Conjoint Analysis of the Determinants of Preference Towards Fast Food Restaurants Among the Expatriates in UAE- An Empirical Study

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**Abstract** - This article attempts to throw light on the determinants of preference towards fast-food restaurants among the expatriates in UAE. The main objective of the study is to unearth the factors that influence customers in the choice of a particular fast-food restaurant. The study was conducted based on both primary and secondary data. The data collected were analyzed using Adaptive Conjoint Analysis. The primary data were collected from respondents using structured questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered to the customers of fast-food restaurants based in Dubai, Sharjah, and Ajman. One of the important pieces of information that would foster the marketing efforts in studying the customer preferences towards fast-food restaurants would be the empirical investigation of the factors that determine the preferences towards the choice of a restaurant. To facilitate this, Adaptive Conjoint Analysis was used to investigate the relative importance of various attributes of a fast food restaurant preference. Descriptive research using a stratified random sampling method was undertaken. Results indicated that the major determinants of preference towards fast-food restaurants were quality of food, location, service quality, the reputation of the restaurant, privacy, preferential treatment, family get-together, party halls, parking facility, proximity from home, opinion of friends, and cleanliness. The empirical results showed that the combination of factors like “quality of food, service quality, ambiance, reputation, cleanliness, and parking facility” was ranked the highest and combination of factors like “proximity from home, party halls, opinion of friends, and location” was ranked the least.

This study is a double-edged sword in importance and significance because it offers opinions about the customer preferences and customer behavior towards fast food restaurants, and from the management perspective, it provides information on how restaurateurs can further segment, target, differentiate and position the restaurant in future for creating, capturing and enhancing customer lifetime value.

**Keywords** - Fast Food Restaurant, Conjoint Analysis, Preference, Expatriates, Attributes, Level

## I. INTRODUCTION

The customers of fast-food restaurants generally hail from different cultural, ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds, and most of them have conflicting choices and preferences towards fast-food restaurants, as a result of which they have different tastes, preferences, and characteristics. UAE hosts more than 180 nationalities from various corners of the globe. Hence, these customers have a tendency to use different criteria in selecting fast-food restaurants.<sup>1</sup> A profound understanding of this customer cohort's preference criteria will facilitate restaurateurs in getting invaluable pieces of information and insights, which will facilitate them to woo and retain a good number of customers in their stride.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the probing question for restaurant owners and restaurateurs is: What are the major attributes that influence customers' preference towards a fast food restaurant?

A fast-food restaurant is also called a quick-service restaurant (QSR) within the industry. This is a specific type of restaurant that serves fast food cuisine and has minimal table service. The food served in fast-food restaurants is typically offered from a limited menu, cooked in bulk in advance and kept hot, finished and packaged to order, and usually available for taking away, though seating may be provided. Fast food restaurants are typically part of a restaurant chain or franchise operation that provides standardized ingredients and/or partially prepared foods and supplies to each restaurant through controlled supply channels. The term "fast food" was coined in 1951. Various pieces of literature opine that menu price is one of the major factors determining consumer decision-making and subsequent behaviors. Some assert that restaurant consumers use price as a measure for the quality of the restaurant, assuming that an expensive restaurant serves better food and offers better quality. Therefore, the relative importance of the



restaurant choice factors differs considerably by restaurant price<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, there is a need to understand the choice factors and their relative importance that influence restaurant patrons' decisions so that restaurateurs can supply their offerings and develop strategies accordingly<sup>4</sup>.

Customers with different individual characteristics have different reasons to choose a restaurant. Thus, the paper seeks to contribute a new body of knowledge to the restaurant industry in the UAE, given the advancing phenomenon of eating out.

It fosters the process of understanding why a customer or a family makes a choice or a purchase decision. Without such an understanding, the restaurant sector will find it very difficult to respond to the needs and wants of the customers or decision-makers. It is challenging to understand how customers respond to the plethora of choices made by fast-food restaurants. If the restaurateurs could understand these customer preferences, choices, and perceptions better than their competitors, then it is potentially a significant source of competitive advantage for each fast-food restaurant.

## II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

UAE hosts more than 180 nationalities from various parts of the globe. These expatriates who visit fast-food restaurants in the country generally hail from different cultural, ethnic, social, demographic, and economic backgrounds, and most of them have conflicting choices and preferences towards fast food restaurants, due to which, they have different tastes, preferences, and characteristics. Preference or choice towards a fast food restaurant is influenced by several determinants like 'quality of food', 'location', 'service quality', 'reputation of the restaurant', 'privacy', 'preferential treatment', 'family get together', 'availability of party halls', 'parking facility', 'theme on which the restaurant is based', 'distance from home', 'opinion of family and friends and 'cleanliness'.

Fast food restaurants like KFC, McDonald's, Burger King, and Subway are vying with one another in attracting customers to their strides. Therefore the research problem that the researcher encounters here is to find out the factors that determine the preference towards fast-food restaurants among the expatriates in UAE.

### A. Research Question

- What are the determinants (factors) of preference towards fast-food restaurants among the expatriates in India?
- What is the relative importance they attach to these determinants (factors) of preference towards fast-food restaurants?

### B. Objectives of the Study

- To identify various factors that influence the preference towards fast-food restaurants in UAE.
- To find out the most effective attribute of the highest relative importance that influenced the preference towards a fast food restaurant.
- To test if there is any significant relationship between the attributes of a fast-food restaurant and the choice made by a customer.

### C. Review of Literature

- Ashram Azim, Noor Ali Shah, Zeeshan Mehmood, Sajid Mehmood, and Mohammad Majid (2014), in their article titled 'Factors Affecting the Customer's Selection of Restaurants in Pakistan' attempted to explore the most important and influential factors that affect the customers' selection of the restaurants. The paper attempts to help the restaurants' management to make their policies according to the need and preferences of the customers to get the maximum profit, loyalty, and attraction of the customers. They attempted to find out factors that have not yet been identified through interviews. Three new factors – privacy, preferential treatment, and a suitable environment for a family gathering – were identified, and then a descriptive analysis method was used to find the most influential factors. The results showed that five out of various factors have the greater effect on this selection—food quality & taste, cleanliness, physical environment, staff cooperation, and suitable environment for family gatherings.
- Oswald Mhlanga and Tenby Maloney (2015), in their article titled "Current factors Affecting Consumer Selection Criteria in Formal Full-Service Restaurants in South Africa," throw light on the main objective of this study which was to determine the factors that affect consumer selection criteria in formal full-service restaurants. The study is based on primary data collected from respondents with the help of structured questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered at selected formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth. In total, 400 valid responses were included in the statistical analysis. In order to meet the study goals, a factor analysis was conducted. Such analysis considered various impact-related variables as convenience, to relax, being there before, celebration, business need, social occasion, quality food, good service, good ambiance, quietness, and recommendations on the selection of formal full-service restaurants. The Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to analyze the data. The empirical results show that good service, quality of food, recommendations by others, and good ambiance, mostly influence the selection of formal full-service restaurants. how restaurateurs can capture, segment, and communicate with consumers and meet consumer's.

- Koo, L.C., Frederick Tao, and John Yeung (2009), in their manuscript titled “Preferential Segmentation of Restaurant Attributes through Conjoint Analysis,” attempted to illustrate the usefulness of conjoint analysis in determining the utility values of restaurant attributes. The utility is subjective measures to each respondent, who, without the assistance of conjoint analysis, would not know them. Yet, in reality, consumers make decisions based on the implicit utilities they attach to each factor. The study demonstrates how marketers can use this powerful research technique to reveal and measure the hidden needs of the customers. It also shows that utilities can vary for the same factor under different circumstances (i.e., the purpose of going to a restaurant) for the same individual customer. In other words, utility scores are situational. The concept of decentring was discussed and applied in this study. With the use of decentring, respondents flex their views from a different perspective. This approach has important implications for future marketing researches.
- Anderson, James, and Sofia Buttencourt (2010), in their work titled “A Conjoint Approach to Model Product Preferences-The New England Market for Fresh and frozen Salmon,” illustrates how conjoint analysis can be used to model preference for food products and applies the technique to the study of fresh and frozen salmon preference among buyers from two intermediary wholesale levels in New England. The degree of preference for specific attributes and levels of the products is compared. The paper also evaluates the performance and predictive validity of a traditional additive conjoint model, a hybrid model estimated using both ordinary least squares and a maximum likelihood hybrid two-limit Tobit model.
- Hosung Timothy Rhee, Sung-Byung Yang, Chulmo Kooc, and Namho Chung(2011) highlighted in their work titled “How Does Restaurant Attribute Importance Differ by the Type of Customer and Restaurant? an exploratory study which chooses three restaurants to compare restaurant attributes (value, service, atmosphere, and food). By applying a conjoint analysis, the comparative salience of the four key attributes are evaluated according to (1) an overall travelers group; (2) two different country-of-residence groups (foreign and domestic); (3) three different types of restaurants (low-priced food stance, low-priced indoor, and high-priced indoor); and (4) two different country-of-residence groups for each of three different restaurant type, with the collected reviews from TripAdvisor. The study findings may help restaurant managers develop specific strategies that fit the needs and expectations of different customer groups with respect to their different restaurant types.
- Basak Gillet, Rob Law, and Deniz Kucukutsa (2017), in their article titled ‘How Do Restaurant Customers make Trade-Offs among Rate Fences made an attempt to know how restaurant customers make trade-offs. This study examines how restaurant customers make trade-offs among several restaurant rate fences using a sample of mainland Chinese travelers to Hong Kong. A total of six restaurant rate fences (i.e., lunch/dinner pricing, weekday/weekend pricing, table location pricing, restricted coupon pricing, meal period, and reservation and seating policy) and menu price were selected, and a conjoint analysis was performed. Findings reveal that price, restricted coupon pricing, and meal period are the most important attributes when restaurant customers select a restaurant. This study is the first attempt to examine the relative importance of different types of restaurant rate fences. The findings will help restaurant operators to better understand the decision-making process of Chinese travelers and design appropriate rate fences accordingly.
- David Njite, Greg Dun, and Lisa Kim (2008), in their article titled “Beyond Good Food: What Other Attributes Influence Consumer Preference and Selection of Fine Dining Restaurants?” opined that the relative importance of product attributes is critical in identifying the consumer's expectations in a product class and in building appropriate marketing management strategies. The focus of this study was to investigate nonfood attributes specifically associated with fine dining restaurants and also to examine the extent to which these restaurant attributes are prioritized during the selection and preference of fine dining restaurants. Through in-depth interviews and conjoint analysis, the results indicated that in fine dining restaurants, customer relations is the most important, and the price is the least important attribute.
- Franklin Fernando Vaca Moran (2012), in his article titled “Application of Choice-based Conjoint Analysis to Determine Consumer Preference and Willingness to Pay for Grass Fed Beef in the United States,” highlighted that U.S. consumption of beef has declined during the last three decades. Consumer preferences have shifted toward products that are considered healthy, environmentally friendly, and obtained through sustainable production methods. A choice-based experiment was used to assess consumers’ preferences for grass-fed beef. A national online survey was conducted in May 2012, and the information from 4000 respondents was collected from the entire U.S. The respondents were divided into two groups of similar size: grass-fed beef eaters, comprised of the respondents who had eaten grass-fed beef in the last year, and 2000 respondents from the general population.

- The results revealed that, on average, grass-fed beef with USDA certification was preferred over grain-fed beef. Consumers valued steaks produced in the U.S. more than imported. The interactions between the consumers' demographic characteristics and the product attribute revealed that female consumers preferred grass-fed beef with USDA certification and were willing to pay more for this product. The analysis also showed that sustainability, novelty, and convenience are consumers' attitudinal and behavioral characteristics that affect their choice of grass-fed beef products.
- Cheri Becker, Pamela Weaver, and Simon Crawford conducted a study titled "A Pilot Study Utilizing Conjoint Analysis in the Comparison of Age-Based Segmentation Strategies in the Full-Service Restaurant Market" This pilot study utilizes an empirical framework based upon conjoint analysis to explore the dimensions of market segmentation. A comparative analysis is conducted between a group of senior citizens and a group of non-senior citizens regarding benefits sought in full-service restaurant dining. Although the results of the study supported the research hypotheses: that differences do exist between older and younger consumer groups, this relationship did not hold across all variables examined by the conjoint preference model. The implications of this study are twofold. First, the use of conjoint analysis in hospitality market segmentation is a viable technique for future research in this area. Second, the results of this study suggest that the use of conjoint analysis in hospitality market segmentation could provide increased effectiveness in the design of hospitality services for the future.
- Jo, Mina of Jeonju University worked on an article titled "Conjoint Analysis of Restaurant attributes on Customer Intentions to Choose Restaurant (2017)". The purpose of this study is to determine the relative importance of restaurant attributes, preference in choosing a restaurant and to find out differences between segments. The web survey was conducted among 400 customers (aged from 20~39 years old) who lived in Seoul and Kyunggi. The results of the conjoint analysis indicated that customers preferred a restaurant with 'tasty food & various menu items', 'food priced 10,000~20,000 won', 'calm atmosphere' and 'the type of family restaurant'. The

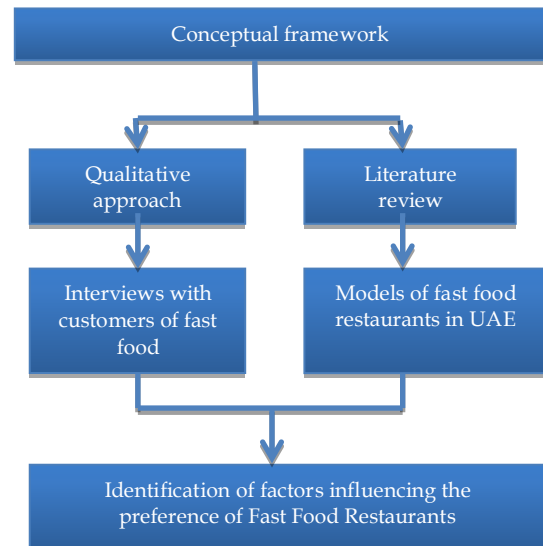
customers in segment 1 preferred a restaurant with 'hot tasty food & simple menu', 'food priced more than 20,000 won', 'calm atmosphere' and 'the type of fine-dining restaurant'. The customers in segments 2 preferred a restaurant with 'tasty food & various menu items', 'food priced less than 10,000 won', 'exciting atmosphere' and 'the type of fine-dining restaurant' and the customers in segments 3 preferred a restaurant with 'tasty food & various menu items', 'food priced 10,000~20,000 won', 'calm atmosphere' and 'the type of family restaurant'.

#### D. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework has been developed with the help of major factors that have been derived from the review of the literature and qualitative data. The framework consists of dependent and independent variables. The research aims to identify the most important factors influencing the choice of a fast-food restaurant in the UAE. The above conceptual framework summarizes the aim of this research in which it intends to study the factors that influence the choice of a fast-food restaurant in the UAE.

The above conceptual framework summarizes the aim of this research in which it intends to study the factors that influence the preference of a fast food restaurant among the expatriates in the UAE.

The fast-food restaurants are the outlets of KFC, McDonald's, Burger King, and Subway selected at random from the three Emirates viz. Dubai, Sharjah, and Ajman.



At this stage of research, the research hypothesis is evolved and clearly stated. The following research hypothesis was formulated and was subject to testing.

#### **E. The hypothesis of the Study**

**HO:** There is no significant relationship between the attributes of a fast-food restaurant and the choice of a fast-food restaurant among the expatriates in the UAE

**H1:** There is no significant relationship between the attributes of a fast-food restaurant and the choice of a fast-food restaurant among the expatriates in the UAE.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

This is a descriptive study of the determinants of preference towards fast-food restaurants among expatriates in the UAE. The study is based on both primary and secondary data, which are analyzed using statistical tools like Percentage analysis, Chi-square analysis, and Conjoint analysis to draw conclusions. The research design adopted in this study is a descriptive research design.

#### **A. Sources of primary and secondary data**

Since most of the information necessary to fulfill the objective of the study was not available from secondary sources, the researcher mainly based his study on relevant primary data, which were collected by conducting a field survey from the selected fast-food restaurants in the UAE through a structured interview schedule. The secondary data necessary for the study were compiled from published and unpublished sources like journals, periodicals, magazines, newspapers, bibliographic databases, and syndicated services. The primary data were collected from 200 customers who were expatriates from various countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, Sri Lanka, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, and other GCC countries.

#### **B. Sample Frame**

The sample frame of the study comprises those customers who dine at the fast-food restaurants in the emirates of Dubai, Sharjah, and Ajman in the UAE.

#### **C. Sample Design**

The study adopts a stratified random sampling method for sample selection. The UAE was stratified into seven Emirates viz., Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, RasAlKhaima, Umm-ul-Quwain, and Fujairah. Out of the seven Emirates in the UAE, the researcher chose three emirates, viz., Dubai, Sharjah, and Ajman, by way of the simple random sampling method. The researcher then selects 200 sample units (fast food restaurant customers) who dine from the fast-food restaurants like KFC, McDonald's, Burger King, and Subway in each of these three emirates viz., Dubai, Sharjah, and Ajman by way of simple random sampling technique. Thus altogether, 200 sample units (fast

food restaurant customers) were selected for the study. The type of study undertaken by the researcher is a descriptive study.

#### **D. Area of the Study**

The randomly selected three Emirates in the UAE viz. Dubai, Sharjah, and Ajman had been chosen by the researcher as his area of study. The customers who dine in the outlets of KFC, McDonald's, Burger King, and Subway located in these three Emirates were chosen as the sample units for the study.

#### **E. Pre-testing of Interview Schedule**

The interview schedule was pre-tested among 20 respondents to check the variability in the preferences of the respondents and to ensure the validity and reliability of the questions in the interview schedule. Based on the pre-test information and in response to the pilot study, a few irrelevant questions were dropped from the interview schedule.

#### **F. Tools used for Analysis**

The primary data collected were finally analyzed by classifying, tabulating, and applying statistical tools such as percentage analysis, Chi-square test, and conjoint analysis. A Chi-square test was used for testing hypotheses. The Chi-square test is used as a test for statistical significance and also to know the significant difference among the variables used in the study.

#### **G. Variables used for the Study**

To fulfill the objectives of the study, the researcher has used 40 variables in the study. Ten variables pertain to the personal profile of the respondents, and the rest 30 variables pertain to the determinants of fast food restaurant preference among the expatriates in UAE.

#### **H. Limitations of the Study**

The study is not free from limitations. A few limitations encountered by the researcher are as follows:

- The study could not unearth the inner psychological characteristics that determined the cause for the opinions given by the respondents.
- The study could not quantify the opinions given by the customers.
- A few customers did not reveal the true reasons why they opted for one fast-food restaurant to another.

#### **I. Scope for Further Research**

The study has brought out several behavioral characteristics of customers in choosing fast-food restaurants. However, there could be further research in the areas of projecting the true and genuine inner motives of customers while choosing fast-food restaurants. Advanced projective techniques could be used for this purpose in the future.

**J. Sample Profile**

The sample of 200 customers of fast-food restaurants residing in Dubai, Sharjah, and Ajman had the following background characteristics:

64% of the sample was males, and 36% were females. 65% of the sample was in the age group from 18 to 30, and 35% of the customers were above 30 years of age.

**Table 2. Gender of the Respondents**

No.	Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Male	128	64
2.	Female	72	36
<b>Total</b>		200	100%

Source: Primary Data

**IV. Data Analysis & Interpretation**

**A. The Conjoint Analysis**

Conjoint analysis is a method of examining how a person 'trades-off' one attribute for another in making a 'purchase' decision. In my study, the 'purchase' is the choice of a fast-food restaurant, and the sample consists of customers of fast-food restaurants like KFC, McDonald's, Burger King, and Subway outlets selected at random from Dubai, Sharjah, and Ajman.

The relative utilities for each attribute level were estimated using the Adaptive Conjoint Analysis software and were then extracted from the ACA software package and analyzed further using the SPSS statistical software.

Table 3 shows the obtained relative utilities and the relative importance of each of the attributes.

The average utility scores, shown in column five of Table 3, describe the desirability of the various aspects of an attribute, with higher scores suggesting that the respondents had a greater preference for that aspect. For example, respondents (customers) preferred a 'High preferential treatment (utility of 64) rather than a 'Moderate preferential treatment (utility of 25). The utility scores not only show the preference 'ranking' but also the degree of preference.

The obtained utility scores indicated that customers preferred to dine in a fast food restaurant that:

- Offers good quality of food.
- Provides good 'service quality with the motto of 'quick service'.
- Has a conducive, lively, and pleasant ambiance to dine in.
- Has a strong reputation in the fast-food restaurant industry.
- Has a good sense of cleanliness-from orderliness to being spic and span.
- Has a convenient and secure parking facility.
- Has affordable prices.
- Has 'privacy'.
- Provides 'preferential treatment' to its customers
- Facilitates 'family get together.'
- Provides 'party halls' for entertainment.
- Has proximity to home.
- They Are favored by their friends.
- It Has a convenient location.

**Table 3. Results of Conjoint Analysis: Relative Utilities and Importance**

No.	Attributes	Relative Importance	Level	Average Utility
1.	Quality of Food	10%	Good	87
			Average	44
			Poor	2
2.	Service Quality	9%	Good	73
			Average	37
			Poor	1
3.	Privacy	9%	Good	76
			Average	42
			Poor	0
4.	Preferential Treatment	8%	High	64
			Moderate	25
			Low	1
5.	Facility for Family Get together	7%	Very Good	63
			Average	3
			Poor	1
6.	Cleanliness	7%	Spic and span	58
			Average	5
			Dirty	0

7.	Ambiance	7%	Lively	55
			Moderately lively	2
			Dull	1
8.	Parking Facility	7%	Spacious	56
			Moderately spacious	8
			Less spacious	1
9.	Reputation	7%	High	62
			Moderate	14
			Low	0
10.	Price	7%	Affordable	36
			Moderately affordable	11
			Less affordable	2
11.	Party Halls for Entertainment	6%	Large and Technology equipped	41
			Moderately spacious with less equipped technology	11
			Less spacious with no technology	3
12.	Distance from Home	6%	Far	2
			Moderate	24
			Close	39
13.	Opinion of Friends	5%	Good	36
			No opinion	10
			Poor	1
14.	Location	5%	Convenient	38
			Moderately Convenient	5
			Inconvenient	2

Source: Primary Data

**B. Chi-Square Analysis**

**Hypothesis:**

**H0:** There is no significant relationship between the attributes of a fast-food restaurant and the choice of a fast-food restaurant among the expatriates in the UAE.

**H1:** There is a significant relationship between the attributes of a fast-food restaurant and the choice of a fast-food restaurant among the expatriates in the UAE.

**The formula for Chi-Square Analysis**

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where:  $\chi^2$  is the chi square statistic.  
 $\Sigma$  = summation symbol.  
 O = Number observed.  
 E = Number expected.

**Table 4.**

Chi-Square Analysis				
Sl. No	O (Observed)	E (Expected)	(O-E) <sup>2</sup>	(O-E) <sup>2</sup> / E
1	128	100	784	7.84
2	72	100	784	7.84
$\chi^2 =$				<b>15.68</b>

Source: Primary Data

**So, Calculated value = 15.68**

**Calculation of Table value**

Degrees of Freedom = (n-1)

Where n = 2 = (2-1)

= 1

Level of Significance = 0.05

Table Value = **3.841**

**Interpretation:**

Since the Calculated Value is greater than the Table Value, we **REJECT** the Null Hypothesis, which is **H0**: There is no significant relationship between the attributes of a fast-food restaurant and the choice of a fast-food restaurant among the expatriates in the UAE.

Therefore we **ACCEPT** the alternative hypothesis that “There is a significant relationship between the attributes of a fast-food restaurant and choice of a fast-food restaurant.

**B. Correlation analysis**

The correlation analysis intends to find out the strength of the linear relationship between two variables. For example, how strong is the relationship between attributes of a fast-food restaurant (*Independent variable*) and choice of a fast-food restaurant (*dependent variable*)? The SPSS results of Pearson’s coefficient of correlation ‘r’ were calculated between the variables, and the result showed the following: Attributes of a fast-food restaurant (A) and Choice of a fast-food restaurant (C) are significantly correlated with  $r = .751$  ( $p < 0.01$ ).

The results also can be interpreted based on Guildford’s rule of thumb, which states that attributes of a fast-food restaurant and choice of a fast-food restaurant ‘r-value fall between 0.7 to 0.9 (.751) and therefore, attributes of a fast-food restaurant and choice of a fast-food restaurant are highly correlated. Therefore, evidence of a true relationship has been found, and the null hypothesis H0, which stated that “there is no relationship between attributes of a fast-food restaurant and choice of a fast-food restaurant”, is rejected. Thereby, the research hypothesis has been validated.

**C. Findings**

- The determinants (factors) of preference towards fast-food restaurants in the order of their relative importance among the expatriates in the UAE are:

Attributes
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- Quality of food
- Service quality
- Privacy
- Preferential treatment
- Family get-together
- Cleanliness
- Ambiance
- Parking facility
- Reputation
- Price
- Party hall

- Proximity to home
- Opinion of friends
- Location

- It was found that the five most important determinants of preference towards fast-food restaurants among the expatriates were ‘quality of food’, ‘service quality’, ‘privacy’, ‘preferential treatment’, and ‘family get-together.’
- Interestingly, while these five attributes rated highest in importance, there was a relatively small gap between the highest and lowest rating attributes. The highest rating attribute (quality of food) had a relative importance score of 10% compared to the lowest rating attribute (‘opinion of friends’), which had a relative importance score of 5%. This suggests that the development of preference towards a fast food restaurant is a complex process and, while customers’ final preferences may be determined by the most important attributes, they do consider the other factors in making judgments.

**V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

The present study examined the determinants of preference towards fast food restaurants processes of a sample of customers who were expatriates in the UAE. The fast-food restaurant choice was examined using a conjoint analysis method known as Adaptive Conjoint Analysis (ACA). This required respondents to complete a computer disk-based questionnaire, in which bundles of attributes were presented to respondents for consideration. The sample included 200 customers of KFC, McDonald’s, Burger King, and Subway who were residing in Dubai, Sharjah, and Ajman of UAE.

It was concluded that the five most important determinants of preference towards fast-food restaurants among the expatriates were ‘quality of food’, ‘service quality’, ‘privacy’, ‘preferential treatment’, and ‘family get-together’. Interestingly, while these five attributes rated highest in importance, there was a relatively small gap between the highest and lowest rating attributes. The highest rating attribute (quality of food) had a relative importance score of 10% compared to the lowest rating attribute (‘opinion of friends’), which had a relative importance score of 5%. This suggests that the development of preference towards a fast food restaurant is a complex process and, while customers’ final preferences may be determined by the most important attributes, they do consider the other factors in making judgments.



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