

# The Rise of health conscious customer: The Fast –Food at stockade

*\*Mr. Prashant Sarothiya, Research Scholar, Oriental University, prashant01n@gmail.com,*

*\*\*Dr. Ankesh R. Mundra, HOD-OSBM&C, Oriental University*

## Abstract

Many of the most heated debates in the food and drink industry circle around fast food, a segment which, alongside fast casual, accounts for more than 50% of sales in the entire restaurant sector. Fast food continues to grow in popularity due to the accelerating pace of life in urban areas and the need for quicker and cheaper meals but as consumers are becoming increasingly health-conscious, fast food brands are launching new products and drafting health-related communications strategies. Because they are entering a public discourse inherently hostile to their industry, they are getting prepared by analysing the debate through sophisticated media analytics and measurement. In this article, the researcher has tried to discuss the central topics in the fast food coverage and the brands at the forefront of the conversation. The study is completely based on the blogs published, interviews published in magazines and secondary data available. The article concludes that various steps are being planned and implemented by the fastfood owners to overcome the health issues related to their food products.

Keywords: Fast food, Health-related communication strategies etc

## Conceptual Article

With the success of global chains such as McDonald's and Subway, there's no undermining the influence fast food businesses have had on the franchising industry. However, a rising trend for specialist diet offerings and healthy options is strengthening a new sector of the market.

Consumer demand has dictated a move towards health-conscious menu items, further backed by legislation that requires nutrition transparency.

While big name players still dominate the fast food market, the specialised nature of certain paleo, keto and low-fat franchise brands is helping to carve out a healthy lunch-time hub for Indian Metropolitans.

Though many researchers and media report about the unhealthy nature of fast foods, Indian youngsters have developed a taste for fast foods. People also have an increased interest for nutrition in fast food, as they have become more health conscious. These studies claimed that the trend was that consumers wanted low calorie and light and low fat menu items. In this situation, marketers who manage fast food restaurants need to understand how their customers think of their menu items. Thus, the first step marketers should go through is to investigate consumers' perceptions of fast food menu items served by their restaurants. This is an important step to respond to consumers' new demands with respect to the increased health consciousness. The present article highlights the major changes which fast food outlets are planning are to incorporate to meet consumer requirement for healthy food and low calorie diet..

Many of the most heated debates in the food and drink industry circle around fast food, a segment which, alongside fast casual, accounts for more than 50% of sales in the entire restaurant sector. Fast food continues to grow in popularity due to the accelerating pace of life in urban areas and the need for quicker and cheaper meals. The market is likely to be worth more than \$690.80 billion in 2022, developing at a compound annual growth rate of more than 4.20%, according to Zion Market Research. Additional boosts are provided by the increase in online ordering and the multiplication of app-based companies offering delivery services.

But the development of the market in the forecast period might be obstructed by the ever-increasing health awareness among customers. While consumer tastes shift to healthier meals, fast food maintains its long-standing reputation for being unhealthy, to the extent that researchers draw comparisons with the tobacco sector. The opening address of the sixtieth session of the World Health Organisation's Assembly stated: "Tobacco and junk food—here's how they're the same: we all know that both are bad. It's a universally-accepted truth that tobacco and junk food are implicated among the leading causes of premature death and chronic disease. Both are incredibly addictive."

An empirical and historical analysis, published in healthcare journal Milbank Quarterly, claimed that there are similarities between the tobacco and food industry in terms of the practices, messages and strategies to influence public opinion, legislation and regulation. In particular, there are significant similarities in the actions that these two industries have taken in response to the concerns that their products cause harm.

In the 1950s, when several retrospective studies showed a link between cigarette smoking and lung cancer, the tobacco sector tried to avert shifts in public opinion that would harm profits. The researchers claim that the messages conveyed by Big Tobacco resemble the messages by the fast food industry. Spokespeople have focused on personal consumer tastes as the cause of unhealthy lifestyles while raising fears that stricter government regulations undermine freedom of choice.

### **A recipe for controversy**

Fast food spokespeople have often stated that there are no good or bad foods, but there are good or bad diets instead, underlining that consumers are entirely responsible for what they eat. Such messages are most effective in the US, where personal responsibility and freedom are historically central values.

But in India, a growing number of journalists, scholars, health campaigners and celebrity chefs blame fast food companies for contributing to global obesity. Other allegations include unethical treatment of animals, worker exploitation and deceitful marketing.

In response, some food and drink players are keen to promote themselves as "part of the solution". In 2011, the International Food & Beverage Alliance (IFBA) – a coalition between giants such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Nestlé, Mars, Unilever and others – wrote to the World Health Organisation (WHO): "We all recognise that non-communicable diseases and childhood obesity are major public health problems that require multi-stakeholder solutions. As a member of the private sector, we firmly believe that the food industry has a role to play as part of the solution, and have committed our time, expertise and resources to do our part."

## New tastes

The most powerful approach to dealing with criticism has proved to be the introduction of more health-friendly menu items. For fast food chains, this is not only a response to critics but also a way of catching up with a trend, which sees people under 40 preferring organic or free-range food. A report by Nielsen showed that 41% of Generation Z and 32% of Millennials would “pay a premium for sustainably sourced ingredients”.

“Traditional fast food companies look stale and old to millennials, especially as compared to the ones selling choose-your-own fresh salads. They are desperate to get customers into the stores,” Marion Nestle, a professor of nutrition, food studies and public health at New York University, told BBC.

This has led to the popularity of the ‘better for you’ brands such as Subway, which try to rival corporations such as McDonald’s, KFC etc. Health-centred quick service firms are creating their own niche by concentrating on organic, locally sourced meals.

There is new content on health and fast food almost every month, not least because researchers publish new studies on the subject relatively frequently. The most commonly quoted research in the media of late was conducted by the Indian Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Center for Health Statistics, which found that more than 1 in 3 adults eat fast food on a given day. Another recent widely reported research concluded that sit-down restaurants in the country are actually unhealthier than fast-food chains as they use stale oil and vegetables.

Critics of fast food tend to focus on children’s health. In the past few years, consumer advocacy groups have pressed restaurant chains to offer healthier kids’ meals, and many fast food restaurants, including McDonald’s, KFC, Dominos, Pizza hut and Subway, responded by introducing healthier menus.

Childhood obesity is also what makes marketing a prominent topic in the coverage. The Indian Psychological Association claims that there are strong associations between increases in advertising for non-nutritious foods and rates of childhood obesity. The Institute for Fiscal Studies found that half of food and drink advertisements children see on television are for junk food and sugary drinks.

## Fast market

In addition to the shifts in consumer preferences, journalists and analysts note that there are several major market trends shaping the future of the industry. Some of the top trending articles report that fast food brands have started introducing regional specific franchises, while big chains such as McDonald’s have implemented order-ahead services and self-service kiosks. This comes at a time when consumers are more willing to leverage technology in their day-to-day life.

Expansion is a key topic in business news. Plant-based menus are also widely discussed in reports on product launches, since many brands capitalise on the vegetarian and vegan trend. For example, KFC has introduced vegetarian menu in India seeing the inclination of Indian consumer towards veges and health debates..

## Brands on the media menu

Apart from health, working conditions is the most controversial topic in the fast food coverage. The most widely covered news on this subject recently was the strike organised by McDonald's employees targeting sexual harassment at work. The protest aligned with the global 'Me Too' movement and helped make McDonald's the most often mentioned brand:

McDonald's, the symbol of fast food, is constantly under fire. In a recent interview, Steve Hill, a senior director of global brand at the company, said: "The one truism of our brand, and one of the reasons I wanted to work for the company, is that people have an opinion about it — whether it's a good opinion, a bad opinion or an indifferent opinion, we're a culturally significant brand. Sometimes that works against us, but it can also work in our favour."

KFC was branded "irresponsible" after it opened a restaurant metres away from a primary school in an area where nearly one in four reception age children in the area is overweight. In the meantime, it has emerged that KFC is perceived as the most popular amongst kids: it's the most popular chain in the country's emerging fast food market, and its dominance has been boosted by appealing to local tastes. The company also became one of the first big fast-food chains in the country to take step towards reducing plastic use by ditching plastic straws and drink lids for dine-in customers in India.

McDonald's main competitor, Burger King, intensified one of the most prominent rivalries in Indian business by offering customers a jumbo burger for just a penny. This marketing effort was well-documented by the media, with journalist and media promoting its cost and affordability.

**The rise of the health-conscious consumer means that fast food brands will increasingly try to promote their new product ranges as the healthiest in the market. Companies will also aim to distinguish themselves by highlighting their sourcing practices and child-friendly options. As we've already noted, the best way to reach a health-conscious audience is through a clear idea about the values that define your brand – these consumers are not simply buying products, they are making certain lifestyle statements.**

**The analysis of the article shows that fast food players are ditching communication tactics focusing on consumer responsibility and are starting to convey new health-related messages. In this way, they are entering a public discourse inherently hostile to their industry. With this in mind, fast food corporations should start a gradual shift in public opinion by analysing the conversations in the media through sophisticated media analytics and measurement.**