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# **"MCDONALDIZATION IN INDIA: A SOCIOCULTURAL ANALYSIS OF FAST FOOD CONSUMPTION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS"**

AUTHORED BY - ASHITA ANUDITY

## **ABSTRACT**

McDonaldization, a term coined by George Ritzer, is a process by which a society adopts the characteristics of a fast food restaurant. The India fast food market size is projected to exhibit a growth rate (CAGR) of 9.72% during 2024-2032.<sup>1</sup> Introduction of McDonald's in a country like India which had a traditional economy with the majority of its consumers preferring home cooked foods to fast food, was a challenge that McDonald's successfully completed.

In 1996, McDonald's unveiled its first Indian restaurant in New Delhi, but it needed a lot of persuasion to draw patrons. McDonald's promoted inexpensive options, including the Happy Price Menu (burgers at Rs 20), and Indianized the burgers with components that were known to the people, like potato patties instead of meat, in an effort to shed its "novelty" reputation. Such advertisements were mostly targeted towards young adults coming from middle class families. McDonalds could successfully gain acceptance from the Indian younger generations and slowly become a part of their daily life.

However, with the increasing influence and preference of these fast food chains, questions of heightening health-related problems arise. It is worthy to reflect on whether it is morally acceptable to place priority on profits and businesses rather than considering whether the proposals are beneficial and safe for the consumers. Indian society has been affected globally by the growing influence of Western culture, especially American culture, which has resulted in the embrace of consumerist attitudes and lifestyles. People's traditional cultural traditions have been impacted by this change as more people adopt Western food. This process has been sped up by the rise of international companies like McDonald's.

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<sup>1</sup> India Fast Food Market Report by Product Type (Pizza/Pasta, Burger/Sandwich, Chicken, Asia/Latin American Food, Seafood, and Others), End User (Food-Service Restaurants, Quick Service Restaurants, Caterings, and Others), and Region 2024-2032. (n.d.). <https://www.imarcgroup.com/india-fast-food-market>

**Keywords:** McDonaldization, Fast Food Age, Health Problems, Western Influence

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of McDonaldization was introduced by George Ritzer in his book, *The McDonaldization of Society*, in 1993. It has gained prominence in the field of Urban Sociology since then.

Ritzer describes the concept of McDonaldization as “re-conceptualization of rationalization, or moving from traditional to rational modes of thought, and scientific management.”<sup>2</sup> McDonaldization occurs when society adapts characteristics similar to a fast-food chain. The five characteristics include efficiency, calculability, predictability, control and standardisation. Ritzer believes that developments in science, economy, and culture have caused society to evolve away from Max Weber's bureaucracy and towards a new system of social organisation and hierarchy that he refers to as McDonaldization.<sup>3</sup>

The introduction of McDonald's in India in the year of 1993, acted as a catalyst in changing the traditional eating practices. McDonald's took various initiatives to successfully penetrate the Indian market. It was a challenge to expand in a country where 40% of the customer base was vegetarian. Moreover, due to the traditional eating habits of Indians, which consists of *daal*, rice and vegetables, it was difficult to appeal for McDonald's. McDonald's was seen as a novelty in India at the time of introduction, so to tackle this McDonald's localised their menu. In 1998, the development team introduced Mc Aloo Tikki burger which became the best-selling burger for the fast-food chain in India.

India's fast-food industry is expanding at the rate of 40% every year. India ranks 10th in the fast food per capita spending figures with 2.1% of expenditure in annual total spending.<sup>4</sup> Fast foods' ubiquity in this era of urbanisation has been attributed to their ease and swiftness in preparation. Excellent taste, a stylish appearance, and promotion have all contributed significantly to drawing customers, especially teenagers, to the selling locations.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, there have been several detrimental effects on health as a result of the world's current adaptation to a fast-food

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<sup>2</sup> Ritzer, G. (2013, January 1). *The McDonaldization of Society*. SAGE.

<sup>3</sup> Crossman, A. (2020, January 28). *McDonaldization: Definition and Overview of the Concept*. ThoughtCo. <https://www.thoughtco.com/mcdonaldization-of-society-3026751>.

<sup>4</sup> Ashakiran, R Deepthi. (2012). *Fast foods and their impact on health*. *Journal of Krishna Institute of Medical Sciences University*.

<sup>5</sup> K Fister. (2005). *Junk food advertising contributes to young American's obesity*. *BMJ*.

consumption system. Research has indicated that fast food has a calorie density that is over twice as high as what is recommended for children on a daily basis.<sup>6</sup> Thus, experts blame fast food for the present childhood obesity epidemic.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### **The McDonaldization of Society<sup>7</sup>**

George Ritzer's theory of "McDonaldization of society" explains the concept of efficiency, calculability, predictability, control, and standardisation found in fast food chains. McDonald's success has prompted standardisation and rationalisation across various industries, effecting societal norms. This concept has revolutionised industries. Its promise of rapid, uniform and easily managed output is what makes it so enticing.

The first dimension, efficiency, concentrates on completing tasks as quickly and efficiently as possible. It often pressing the burden of cost and work on consumers. Calculability prioritises quantity over qualities, whereas predictability ensures uniformity across locations, providing customers with familiar experiences. The final dimension, control involves strict rules for employees and standardized processes, achieved through mechanisation.

### **Fast Food Consumption Pattern and Its Association with Overweight Among High School Boys in Mangalore City of Southern India<sup>8</sup>**

A survey done by NCBI in Southern India showcased how 13.7% of the participants, who were mainly high school boys, were overweight and obese. 97.3% were fast food consumers, whereas, 14.4% consumed it on a daily basis. It was also observed that increased frequency of fast food consumption had some degree of association to obesity in these kids. Further, Parental consumption of fast food influenced fast food consumption in children. The survey concludes on the need for awareness drives on the health hazards of fast food.

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<sup>6</sup> AM Printice, SA Jebb. (2003). Fast foods, energy density and obesity: a possible mechanistic link. *Obesity Rev.*

<sup>7</sup> Ritzer, G. (2013, January 1). *The McDonaldization of Society*. SAGE.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph, N., Nelliyanil, M., Rai, S., Y P, R. B., Kotian, S. M., Ghosh, T., & Singh, M. (2015). Fast Food Consumption Pattern and Its Association with Overweight Among High School Boys in Mangalore City of Southern India. *Journal of clinical and diagnostic research : JCDR*, 9(5), LC13–LC17. <https://doi.org/10.7860/JCDR/2015/13103.5969>.



### **‘Buying Salad Is a Lot More Expensive than Going to McDonalds’: Young Adults’ Views about What Influences Their Food Choices<sup>9</sup>**

This study highlighted the vulnerability of young adults to poor food choices. While existing research focuses on university students, this study expanded its research to young adults in general. Through qualitative tools, this study identified key narratives influencing food choices, including the value, appeal and emotional connections with food. Participants in both Sydney and Glasgow reflected a common finding relating to food and young adults: that price significantly influences their food choices.<sup>10</sup> The perceived higher cost of ‘healthier’ foods is often seen by young people as a major barrier to making different decisions around food.<sup>11</sup> Young people understand the need to eat healthy but the cost of ‘healthier’ foods often acts as a barrier.

### **Culinary Imperialism And The Resistance: A Case Study Of Mcdonaldization And Micro-Resistance In Delhi, India<sup>12</sup>**

This study examines the way McDonaldization has influenced young people's dietary preferences, with an emphasis on Indian students. The concept of McDonaldization, as put forward by George Ritzer, is utilised as a framework to comprehend the uniformity and standardisation of food processes. The study highlights narratives about the value, attraction, and emotional connections with food in order to investigate how young adults view and engage with McDonald's. It does this by using a semi-structured questionnaire and thematic analysis. The wider effects of McDonaldization on personal preference, societal norms, and cultural adaptation are also covered. According to the study, McDonaldization may reduce personal autonomy and cultural diversity even while it provides efficiency and predictability. The results highlight the need for a comprehensive understanding of young adults' dietary preferences and support the implementation of policy changes.

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<sup>9</sup> Howse, E., Hankey, C., Allman-Farinelli, M., Bauman, A., & Freeman, B. (2018, July 30). ‘Buying Salad Is a Lot More Expensive than Going to McDonalds’: Young Adults’ Views about What Influences Their Food Choices. *Nutrients*, 10(8), 996. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu10080996>.

<sup>10</sup> Munt A.E., Partridge S.R., Allman-Farinelli M.(2017). The barriers and enablers of healthy eating among young adults: A missing piece of the obesity puzzle: A scoping review. *Obes. Rev.*

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## RESEARCH QUESTION

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the factors influencing the food choices of young adults in India, particularly in relation to the consumption of fast food?
2. How do these factors impact their dietary habits?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this research primary data has been collected through the medium of a questionnaire form. This questionnaire was filled by 78 participants consisting mainly of young adults. Young participants from all over India have participated in this survey through online google forms. A total of 8 questions were asked, out of them 4 binary questions were asked, 1 checkbox question was asked and rest were multiple choice questions. The questionnaire began with introductory questions, followed with focused questions based on the research questions.

The questions asked involved mainly the following topics: consumption rate of fast food, influence of advertisements and peer pressure to consume fast food, and health impact of fast food consumption.

JASP application has been used to conduct Descriptive analysis and Chi-squared tests to check the association between consumption of fast food and health issues.

Further, secondary data have been taken into consideration and mostly collected from books, journals, magazines, the internet, and reports.

## MCDONALDIZATION- A GLOBAL CULTURE

Global cultural phenomena known as "McDonaldization" is changing traditional eating habits especially in India. This fits in with Edward T. Hall's theory that behaviour is shaped and interpreted by culture. In his book "The McDonaldization of Society," sociologist George Ritzer defines McDonaldization as a reinterpretation of rationalisation that involves a move away from old forms of thought and towards rational, scientific management. Given India's sizable population and reputation as a prime market, McDonald's influence in today's world of branding seems all but inevitable.

However, as the article "Western Fast Food, Waistlines Surge in India" points out, the effects of

McDonaldization in India goes beyond simple marketing. McDonald's wants to grow from 200 to 1000 locations in five years, with a focus on those under thirty who are primarily middle class and affected by Western cultural standards.

This growth meets the demand for quick meals and is consistent with India's history of dining on-the-go. The aspirational link between consuming fast food and achieving high social standing has been successfully established by the marketing technique.

Despite its appeal, McDonaldization raises concerns about mounting income and social inequality in India, where the World Bank estimates that 41% of the population lives in poverty. The increase in fast food consumption could exacerbate health-related problems if counter-advertising encouraging healthy eating habits isn't done, especially since many people in India can't afford public health care or prescription drugs. In addition, focusing on young adults has quietly promoted a collectivist mindset in which people are shaped and subjugated by outside forces—in this case, McDonald's.

In conclusion, while McDonaldization provides efficiency and symbols of power, it also raises ethical concerns about putting profits ahead of consumer well-being. Finding a balance that allows people to comprehend the consequences of their decisions and accept responsibility is critical in navigating the repercussions of McDonaldization in India's changing cultural landscape.

## DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

### Frequencies for What is your age?

What is your age?	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
10-15	8	10.256	10.256	10.256
16-25	60	76.923	76.923	87.179
25+	10	12.821	12.821	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	78	100.000		

*Note.* Do you have any of these health conditions? has more than 10 distinct values and is omitted.

A vast majority (77%) of the participants are 16-25 years old. This survey is focused study of

young adults.

#### Frequencies for Do you consume fast food?

Do you consume fast food?	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	9	11.538	11.538	11.538
Yes	69	88.462	88.462	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	78	100.000		

An overwhelming number, 88% of the participants consume fast food on the regular. Many young adults aspire to consume healthier, but the cost of consuming healthier foods is often a barrier for university students and young adults on time crunch.

#### Frequencies for How often do you consume fast food on a weekly basis?

How often do you consume fast food on a weekly basis?	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-2 times	35	44.872	44.872	44.872
3-4 times	9	11.538	11.538	56.410
5-6 times	31	39.744	39.744	96.154
7 times or more	3	3.846	3.846	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	78	100.000		

Around 44% of the participants consume fast food around 1-2 times weekly, whereas, 31 out of 78 participants i.e., 39% consume fast food around 5-6 times weekly. It has been observed that advertisements, offers and coupons often play a huge role in increased consumption of fast food. Especially in young adults, due to no other available cheaper alternative, consumption of fast food increases when away from home.

**Frequencies for How often do you consume fast food on a weekly basis?**

How often do you consume fast food on a weekly basis?	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	19	24.359	24.359	24.359
Yes	59	75.641	75.641	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		

Around 75% of the participants consume canned food, instant noodles, frozen food and other instant food at home in addition to consuming fast food.

**Frequencies for Does fast food being a cheaper alternative to healthier food options play a role in your increased consumption?**

Does your family members consuming fast food influence you?	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	32	41.026	41.026	41.026
Yes	46	58.974	58.974	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	78	100.000		

More than half of the participants feel that consuming fast food is a cheaper alternative for them. The survey consistently found that cost plays a significant role in the food choices of young people. However, participants also engaged in "value negotiations" when it came to food, considering the worth of different options based on factors like price, convenience, taste, and healthiness.<sup>13</sup> This required those who participated to bargain over how much they thought certain items were worth in terms of price, convenience and time, and the taste of food. Many young

<sup>13</sup> Sobal J., Bisogni C.A. (2015). Constructing Food Choice Decisions. *Ann. Behav. Med.*



adults see the higher cost of healthier food as a major barrier to choosing healthier options.<sup>14</sup>

### Frequencies for Has your purchasing habit ever been influenced by promotions of fast food chains on social media?

Has your purchasing habit ever been influenced by promotions of fast food chains on social media?	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	29	37.179	37.179	37.179
Yes	49	62.821	62.821	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	78	100.000		

Again around 63% of the participants have been influenced by social media promotions of fast food chains to buy more. Such social media advertisements of food often promote unhealthy eating habits, targeting teens and young adults. This can influence people's food choices and result in health complications like obesity, hypertension and type 2 diabetes.

## ASSOCIATION BETWEEN FAST FOOD CONSUMPTION AND COST OF FOOD- USING CHI-SQUARE TEST

### Contingency Tables

Do you consume fast food?	Has your purchasing habit ever been influenced by promotions of fast food chains on social media?		
	No	Yes	Total
No	5	4	9
Yes	24	45	69
Total	29	49	78

<sup>14</sup> Davison J., Share M., Hennessy M., Bunting B., Markovina J., Stewart-Knox B. (2015). Correlates of food choice in unemployed young people: The role of demographic factors, self-efficacy, food involvement, food poverty and physical activity. *Food Q. Prefer.*

**H0 – There is no significant association between fast food consumption and cost of food.**

**H1 – there is a significant association between fast food consumption and cost of food.**

**Chi-Squared Tests**

	Value	df	p
X <sup>2</sup>	1.471	1	0.225
N	78		

The p-value for the current data can be interpreted there is a 78% chance of collecting data under the conditions described by the null hypothesis i.e., H0. Though this data is not significant enough to reject null hypothesis, we can interpret that purchasing fast food increases due to the promotions of fast food chains on social media sites. Promotions like the current running Zomato gold carnival often incite consumers to consume more fast food. These promotions create a feeling of missing out on a great offer among its customers. Seeing much cheaper prices on fast food chains like McDonald’s, Dominos, Pizza Hut, etc, customers feel obliged to order. This leads to an increased consumption rate of fast food.

**Contingency Tables**

Do you consume fast food?	Do you have any of these health conditions?												
	Asthma	Asthma, wheezing, allergies	Cancer	Diabetes	Diabetes, None	Heart Disease	No Obesity	Obesity	Obesity, Diabetes	Obesity, Diabetes, Heart Disease	Obesity, Heart Disease, PCOS	Total	
No	0	1	0	1	0	1	5	0	1	0	0	0	9
Yes	1	0	1	7	1	2	34	17	1	2	2	1	69
Total	1	1	1	8	1	3	39	17	2	2	2	1	78

**H0 – There is no significant association between fast food consumption and health conditions.**

**H1 – there is a significant association between fast food consumption and health conditions.**

### Chi-Squared Tests

Value	df	p
X <sup>2</sup> 15.292	11	0.170
N	78	

The p-value for the current data can be interpreted there is a 83% chance of collecting data under the conditions described by the null hypothesis i.e., H0. Though this data is not significant enough to reject null hypothesis, we can interpret that there is 83% chance of suffering from some health complication if an individual consumes fast food on a daily basis.

## LIMITATIONS

There are a number of limitations in this study. The socioeconomic status of the participants were reasonably advantaged, living in major cities of the country. The sample size of the survey was reasonably small, which may generate biased results. Therefore, the generality of these findings are limited as it is difficult to say whether these results reflect the broader population of India.

## RECOMMENDATION

- 1. Conduct Intensive Research:** Survey on larger scale is the need of the hour to analyse the underpinning socio-ecological narratives that impact the youth's current diet. These research analyses would help curate policies which would improve public health by restricting the influence of fast food chains in India.
- 2. Public Opinion:** The opinion of the youth regarding such policies is also important. As observed in this study, high cost is a major deterrence for youths, from buying healthier food alternatives. Therefore, effort should be made to formulate policies and regulations which would empower young adults into making healthier choices.
- 3. Use Statistical Analysis:** Various statistical tools like mean, median, mode, frequency analysis and chi- squared test can help provided insights into how different population samples are impacted from various variables like food, diet, diseases, etc.

## CONCLUSION

The impact of McDonaldization on the traditional eating habits and societal norms in India, especially among the younger generations is profound. McDonald's successful debut into the Indian market in 1996 resulted in a substantial shift in consumer preferences and behaviour. Factors such as the implementation of reasonable pricing tactics and Indianized menu items were critical in attracting a wider demographic, specifically younger generations from middle-class families.

However, the rapid proliferation of fast food restaurants such as McDonald's has sparked worries about health risks and the impact of Western culture on Indian society. Increased use of fast food has been related with health concerns such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, emphasising the need for improved knowledge about the health dangers associated with fast food consumption.

Notwithstanding these obstacles, McDonaldization has improved India's culinary scene by bringing cost and convenience. Important conversations regarding public health and the necessity of legislative and policy measures to encourage young adults to make healthier dietary choices have also been triggered by it. Young adults' dietary preferences are greatly influenced by peer pressure and social media advertisements, which highlights the need for focused interventions to support a balanced diet.

In conclusion, McDonaldization has brought up serious public health issues in addition to changing customary eating patterns and social mores in India. Further study is required to identify the underlying causes influencing young adults' dietary preferences and to create practical plans for encouraging better eating practices. Policy and regulatory actions can have a crucial role in empowering young adults to make informed food choices and lead healthier lives.

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