RESEARCH PAPER

An analysis of the consumers perception about American style foods in Bengaluru city

■ **Pooja S. Bhat, T. N. Venkata Reddy and P. K. Mandanna**

ABSTRACT

Foods that are a fusion of the western influence with Indian tastes have become the USP of American Food Restaurants (AFR). American food/ fast food was perceived expensive besides being out-of-way meals in Indian culture earlier. Though many reports highlight the unhealthy nature of American foods, yet Indians have developed a taste for American fast foods. Accordingly the present study was taken up with the following objectives namely the factors influencing the consumers perceptions about American foods, perceptions about AFR's and factors influencing consumers perceptions about AFR's in Bengaluru City. A total sample size of 90 respondent consumers and seven AFR's were chosen for the study. Health and affordability, classy sensory attribute, nutrition, psychological dimension, menu aspects, prices and westernization were the perceptions about American foods by the consumers. Sensory attributes of foods is the major factor influencing consumers perceptions about American foods followed by nutrition and health and psychological factors. Psychological experience, social values, authentic culture, marketing orientation/ dimension, service and location orientation were the perceptions about American Food Restaurants by the consumers. Enjoyment is the major factor influencing consumers perceptions about AFR's followed by restaurant attributes and services and experience.

KEY WORDS : Perception, American style foods, Fast foods, Nutrition, Authenticity

Food has become a significant culture and social identity marker due to various lifestyle changes such as greater media penetration, increase in the number of people travelling abroad, increasing number of globe-trotting consumers with an experimental palate, immigrations and intermingling of different people, more eating out, wider exposure to foreign or international cuisines and a desire to imitate or copy the West; all being favourable factors influencing the adoption of International cuisine at the national level.

American foods more commonly known as fast foods have stormed the Indian markets after the multinational Quick Service Restaurants (QSR's) or American Food Restaurants (AFR's) or Limited Service Restaurants (LSR's) or fast food players modified their

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delicacies and cuisines to cater to Indians traditional and ethnic food needs *viz.,* vegetarian meals (40% vegetarian menu to suit to Indian tastes, eggless soft serves and shakes, re-formulation of products using spices favoured by Indians and only vegetable oil being used as a cooking medium) and selected non-vegetarian options excluding beef and pork totally from their menu thereby showing their respect for the local culture. Foods that are a fusion of the western influence with Indian tastes have become the unique selling proposition of AFR's. American food/ fast food was perceived expensive besides being out-of-way meals in Indian culture earlier. Indian consumers generally perceive the foods served by AFR's as greasy, fatty, containing high calories, that are fried and those that have menus offering very few healthy choices.

AFR's in particular present a challenge because of the constantly changing consumer trends and the unique nature of their products. Though many researchers and media report about the unhealthy nature of American foods, Indians have developed a taste for American foods. Indians also have an increased interest for nutrition in American food, as they have become more health conscious. The current trend is that consumers want low calorie, light and low fat menu items. In this situation, marketers who manage AFR's need to understand how their customers think of their menu items. Thus, it is essential that marketers thoroughly investigate consumers' perceptions of American food menu items served by their restaurants. In this context, a study that would help in identifying the consumer behaviour towards the food dishes of AFR's which in turn can lead to consumer satisfaction to help boost the sales was deemed to be relevant.

Bryant and Dundes (2008) compared the survey data of college students from Spain and the United States and provided insight into how perceptions about fast food are culture and gender-specific.A statistically significantly relation has been observed between food-consumption and purchasing attitude among food consumers in Turkey (Ucar *et al.,* 2011). Children's perceptions of sweets differs significantly between the cultures of England and Germany and these differences in attitude and perception of sweets, particularly chocolate, between the two cultures imply differences in educational and other influences on the children in their early (primary) years (Neale *et al.,* 1994). Participants from a high-income neighbourhood of Chandigarh, India were more likely to perceive Western style fast food as fast food, while people from the lower-income neighbourhood were more likely to identify food sold by street vendors as fast food (Aloia *et al.,* 2013).

Accordingly the study was carried out with the following objectives in mind namely the factors influencing the consumers perceptions about American foods, perceptions about AFR's and factors influencing consumers perceptions about AFR's.

METHODOLOGY

Primary data was collected from 90 consumers of American style foods in Bengaluru citywhich was purposively chosen for being a major platform for many AFR's to establish themselves. Data was collected using a pretested and structured schedule by personally interviewing the respondent consumers during the year 2014-15. The data was collected from the targeted consumers by convenient and purposeful sampling either during their outings at malls or when they were found to be consuming one or the other dish in the AFR's at different times of the day. Accordingly seven AFR's were chosen from the study areanamely; McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Domino's, KFC, Papa Johns, Subway and Taco Bell.The analysis of data was done using Likert Scale technique, Factor Analysisand Garret's ranking technique in order to draw meaningful interpretations.

Likert scale technique:

The Likert scale was employed for studying the perceptions about American style foods. The summated scales consisted of numerous statements which required the respondent to react/ express with either a favourable or an unfavourable attitude towards the given object. The respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement on a five-point scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree) to a particular statement and scores of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 were given to the above scales after which the scores were totalled and the mean scores calculated.

Factor analysis:

Factor analysis is an interdependence technique wherein a large number of interrelated variables that are selected are reduced and represented to a few underlying factors.This technique has been used in the study for determining the perceptions about American foods and perceptions about AFR's.

Garrett's ranking technique :

Garrett's ranking technique was adopted for ranking the factors influencing consumers perceptions about American foods and factors influencing consumers perceptions about AFR's. As per this method, respondents were asked to assign the rank for all the factors, after which the assigned ranks were counted into per cent position value by using the Garrett's formula after which it was converted into scores and mean score was calculated.

Garrett's formula for converting the ranks into per cent is given by the per cent position = **100 x (Rij-0.50)/Nj**
where,

Rij = Rank given for the ith item by the jth individual
Nj = Number of items ranked by the jth individual.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study as well as relevant discussion have been summarized under the following heads :

Consumers perception about American style foods:

Factor analysis was used to identify the perceptions about American foods by the consumers. The adequacy of the factor analysis was first checked with the help of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure and Bartlett's Test (Table 1). The KMO measure was 0.504 which reveals that the factors extracted account for a fair amount of variance. The Chi-square value for Bartlett's .... Null hypothesis of independence among the variables. Although, it is possible to have as many factors as the number of variables, those factors with Eigen values greater than one were considered for determining the number of factors. Therefore, with the help of Cattell's scree plot, the number of factors was determined (Fig.1) and a total of six factors were retained.

Table 1: Kaiser-meyer-olkin measure and bartlett's test for adequacy of factor analysis (Perceptions about American foods)		
Kaiser-meyer-olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.504
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approximate Chi-square	435.920
	Difference	105
	Significance	0.000

The correlation matrix of rotated factor loadings is presented in Table 2. Factor 1 labelled as "health and affordability", collects variables with higher loadings relating to the consumers general attitude with respect to expensiveness of dining at AFR's, or AFR's being uneconomical without any value for money and the artificial additives (eg., antibiotics and hormones) and adulterants that it contains. Similarly, factor 2 collects variables that relate to the sensory attributes of American foods and their being classy, tasty and appetizing on account of their colour, flavour, freshness and mouthfeel.
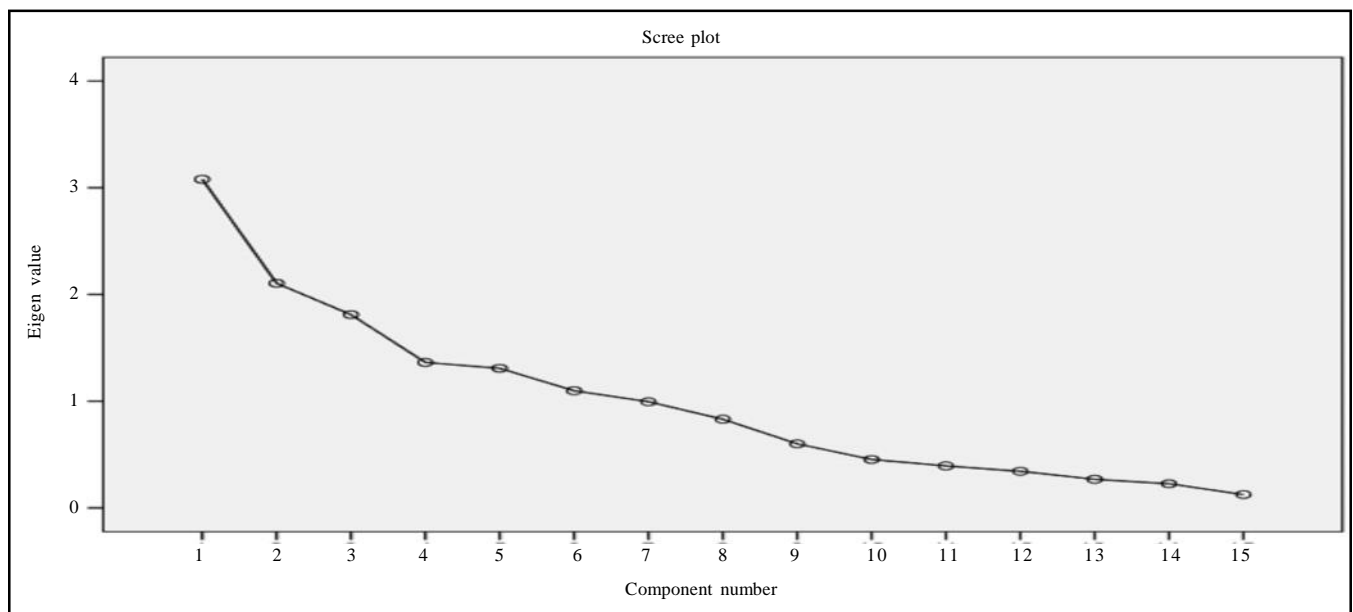

Fig. 1 : **Cattell's scree plot for perceptions about American foods**

Therefore, this factor is labelled as "classy sensory attribute". A high score on this factor reveals that the consumer was more concerned about the sensory attributes of American foods. Factor 3 collects variables that relate to nutrition, composition and preparation aspects (fatty foods, imbalance between food groups, unhealthy (causing weight gain, obesity, cancer and cardio vascular diseases), excessive calorie containing, non-usage of halal meat in the non-vegetarian preparations. For this reason, the third factor is labelled as "nutrition". Such consumers who score high on nutrition aspects are highly health conscious.

Quality and safety perception is linked closely to food choice and consumer demand (Grunert, 2005). St Everald (2002) analysed the consumer perceptions toward Biotechnology and inferred that 41.25 per cent of the respondents considered biotech foods as reasonably safe for human consumption. Customer groups significantly differ in their evaluation of perceived healthiness of functional foods and in the importance attached to price and brand (Annunziata and Vecchio, 2013).

Factor 4 collects variables that relate to consumer expectations and behaviour (consumer delight, pleasures

Table 2: Rotated component matrix for perceptions about American foods

Sr. No.	Particulars	Component 1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	I believe that American foods are fatty foods and lack balance between food groups	-0.132	0.109	0.801	0.185	0.202	-0.065
2.	I feel American foods are unhealthy as they can cause weight gain, obesity, cancer and cardio vascular diseases because of the excessive calories that they contain	0.284	0.003	0.865	0.053	0.057	-0.014
3.	I presume that artificial additives (eg., antibiotics and hormones) and adulterants are added to American foods	0.824	-0.075	-0.032	-0.370	0.132	0.029
4.	AFR's do not use halal meat in their non-vegetarian preparations	0.046	-0.070	0.568	0.118	-0.405	0.232
5.	American foods are very expensive / eating American foods means paying more / I believe dining at an AFR would be too expensive	0.784	0.152	0.237	0.320	0.069	-0.142
6.	There is no value for money in AFR's (not economical)	0.763	-0.108	0.030	0.396	0.097	0.127
7.	I believe the prices reflect the quality of the food	-0.241	0.023	0.027	-0.059	0.025	0.768
8.	I believe American foods have that "extra something" that gives consumer delight and it meets my expectations	0.026	0.369	-0.099	-0.679	0.275	0.049
9.	I believe that the American foods offered in these restaurants are classy	-0.039	0.815	-0.133	0.038	0.090	-0.247
10.	I believe that American meals are all about the simple pleasures of childhood, a time of excitement, joy and being treated special	0.050	0.500	0.007	0.643	0.165	0.135
11.	I assume an AFR does not offer choices that are prepared according to the requirements of my religion / religious beliefs	0.164	0.078	0.198	0.656	0.084	0.011
12.	AFR's cater only to the non - vegetarian group eaters	0.221	-0.464	0.179	0.029	0.576	-0.121
13.	American foods are tasty and appetising given their colour, flavour, freshness and mouthfeel	0.032	0.793	0.309	-0.015	-0.044	0.152
14.	Foods are fusion of western influence with Indian tastes containing local flavours / foods are modified to suit Indian tastes	0.309	-0.049	0.003	0.115	0.075	0.715
15.	AFR's offer specialty dishes that are unique	0.127	0.165	0.041	0.030	0.867	0.202

Table 3: Factors influencing consumers perceptions about American foods (n=90)

Sr. No.	Factors	Mean score	Rank
1.	Sensory attributes of foods	59.67	I
2.	Nutrition and health	51.08	II
3.	Psychological factors	49.25	III
4.	Cost aspects	47.00	IV

of childhood, a time of excitement, joy and being treated special apart from AFR's not offering choices that are prepared according to the requirements of my religion/ religious beliefs). Therefore, this factor is labelled as "psychological dimension". Factor 5 collects variables that relate to the specialty dishes offered. For this reason, the fifth factor is labelled as "menu aspects". Factor 6 collects variables that relate to the prices, quality and the western influence of food. Therefore, this factor is labelled as "prices and westernization". "Consumers had positive opinions of the expansion of health functional foods to generic forms (Kang *et al.,* 2010).

Factors influencing consumers perceptions about American foods:

Garret's ranking technique was used to measure the ranking of factors influencing consumers perceptions about American foods (Table 3). It can be noticed that sensory attributes of foods is the major factor influencing consumers perceptions about American foods with a mean score of 59.67 and so it was ranked first. Nutrition and health is another important attribute influencing

consumers perceptions regarding American foods with a mean score of 51.08 followed by psychological factors with a mean score of 49.25 and so they were ranked second and third, respectively. Cost aspects was ranked fourth as it is the least important factor influencing consumers perceptions with a mean score of 47.00.

Consumer perceptions about organic food are highly subjective (Shafie and Rennie, 2012). 'Perceived value' is prominent factor in the consumers' purchasing of private label brand food product (Jaafar *et al.,* 2012). Sangkumchaliang and Huang (2012) in their study on the consumers perceptions and attitudes of organic food products in Northern Thailand pointed out that the main reasons for purchasing organic food products are an expectation of a healthier and environmentally friendly means of production.

Consumers are the clients who buy the products or services. Their buying behavior is individualistic and is dependent on the customer and his environment, be it their income, perceptions, fads and fancies, social status, culture etc. So, there is every necessity for the marketers to clearly understand the decision making and consumer

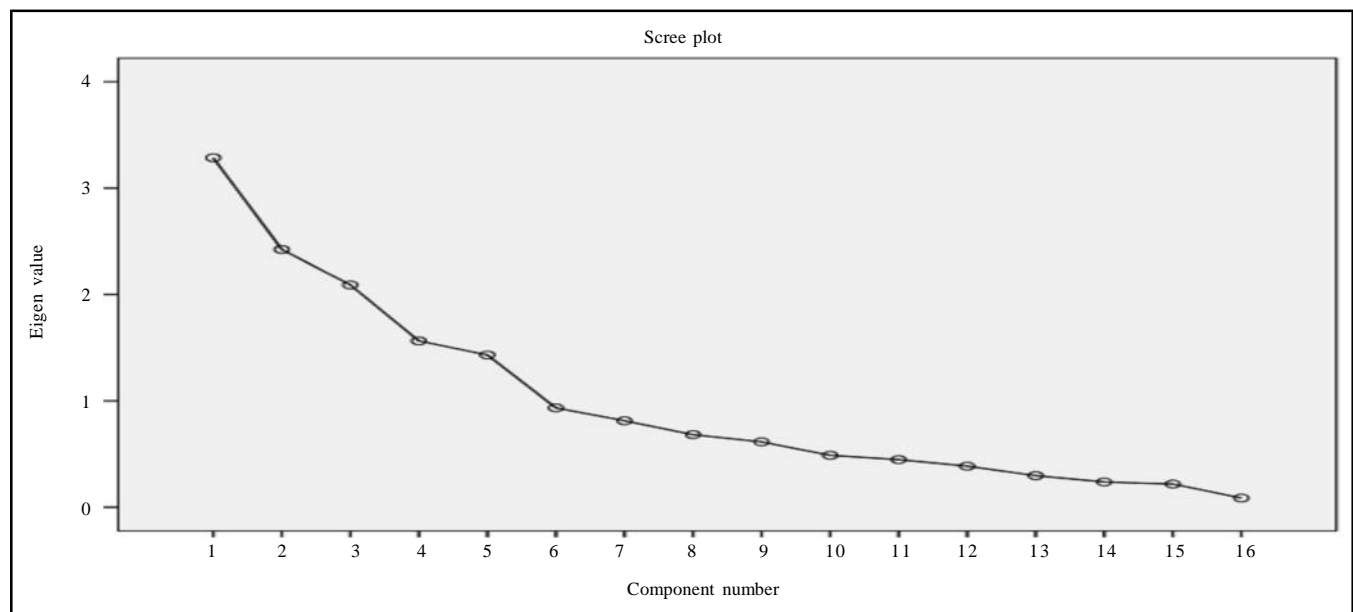| Table 4: Kaiser-meyer-olkin measure and bartlett's test for adequacy of factor analysis (Perceptions about American Food Restaurants)		
Kaiser-meyer-olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.523
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approximate Chi-square	548.330
	Difference	120
	Significance	0.000

Fig. 2 : Cattell's scree plot for perceptions about ARS's

buying behaviour. Sukalakamala (2004) has pointed out that the taste of the cuisine is the most important component in the dining experience at a Thai restaurant. Additionally, consumers emphasise the fact that they consider American foods to appeal to their taste buds as they contain a unique blend of flavours.

Goyal and Singh (2007) assessed the consumer perception about fast food in India and highlighted that consumers have the highest value for taste and quality (nutritional values) followed by ambience and hygiene. It is not quite known as to whether particular organic products (e.g., organic meat) are perceive as normal goods by frequent buyers, or if such products are considered by consumers as luxury goods (Yiridoe *et al.,* 2005). Consumers also remarked the importance of food safety assurance given by good hygienic restaurant

conditions of AFR's as compared to other restaurants. Cunha *et al.* (2010); Musaiger (2014) and Shoyemi (2014) also reported similar findings in their studies.

Perception about American Food Restaurants:

Factor analysis was used to identify the perceptions about AFR's by the consumers. The adequacy of factor analysis was checked with the help of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure and Bartlett's Test (Table 4). The KMO measure was 0.523 which reveals that the factors extracted account for a fair amount of variance. The Chi-square value for Bartlett's test was significant, thus rejecting the Null hypothesis of independence among the variables.Only those factors with Eigen values greater than one were considered for determining the number of factors. Therefore, with the help of Cattell's scree

Table 5: Rotated component matrix for perceptions about American food restaurants

Sr. No.	Particulars	Component				
		1	2	3	4	5
1.	A discount (eg., coupons or loyalty cards / gifts / toys) does not influence me to dine at an American food restaurant	0.160	-0.044	-0.153	0.758	0.058
2.	I go to AFR's because of member privilege	-0.082	0.263	-0.244	-0.331	0.645
3.	An advertisement / promotion (on TV and food magazines) does not influence me to dine at an AFR	-0.121	-0.022	0.156	0.789	-0.014
4.	Positive comments about an AFR from publicity encourages me to dine at one	0.356	0.072	0.430	-0.658	0.087
5.	Going to an upscale AFR is a great way to experience a different culture	-0.061	-0.066	0.941	0.145	-0.059
6.	AFR's offer an authentic experience	-0.017	0.065	0.825	-0.281	-0.005
7.	AFR's provide solitude / social isolation (ample privacy) unlike other restaurants	0.749	0.190	0.118	0.011	0.235
8.	I choose an AFR whose image reflects my self image	0.035	0.792	-0.316	0.142	-0.184
9.	I feel there is patronage of these American food outlets by all social classes (has mass appeal)	0.192	0.727	0.129	-0.032	0.002
10.	These restaurants cater only to the 'niche' or upscale clientele	-0.558	0.437	0.169	-0.275	0.023
11.	I believe that AFR's have cosmopolitan appeal	0.423	0.601	-0.051	-0.106	0.011
12.	I feel that going to AFR's is a status symbol	-0.095	0.767	0.065	-0.115	0.174
13.	I do not choose an AFR on the basis that my friends / family like to go there	0.799	-0.037	-0.174	-0.118	-0.206
14.	I believe AFR's provide a modern environment to socialize with friends	-0.372	-0.084	0.177	0.101	0.503
15.	I feel that AFR's are located at convenient locations (eg., malls) of outlets, being closer to my workplace / my place of stay (proximity)	0.351	-0.062	-0.029	0.118	0.788
16.	I believe that AFR's offer excellent and prompt service (lesser waiting time at the restaurant)	0.682	0.378	0.129	-0.071	0.078

Table 6: Factors influencing consumers perceptions about AFR's

Sr. No.	Factors	Mean score	Rank
1.	Enjoyment	61.34	I
2.	Restaurant attributes and services	58.76	II
3.	Previous experience	50.43	III
4.	Marketing aspects	47.55	IV
5.	Psychological factors	34.23	V

plot, the number of factors was determined (Fig.2) and accordingly only five factors were retained.

The correlation matrix of rotated factor loadings is presented in Table 5. Factor 1 labelled as "psychological experience", collects variables with higher loadings relating to the consumers general attitude with respect to their experiences of dining at AFR's (excellent and prompt service *i.e.*, lesser waiting time at the restaurant and also the restaurant attributes (solitude/ social isolation/ ample privacy,niche/ upscale clientele). Similarly, factor 2 collects variables that relate to the patronage, appeal and image of AFR's(Social/ mass/ cosmopolitan appeal, status symbol). Therefore, this factor is labelled as "social values". Factor 3 collects variables that relate to culture and authenticity of the restaurants. For this reason, the third factor is labelled as "authentic culture". Such consumers who score high on the culture aspects are highly experimental.

Factor 4 collects variables that relate to the marketing aspects of AFR's. Therefore, this factor is labelled as "marketing orientation/ dimension" {discount (eg., coupons or loyalty cards/ gifts/ toys), advertisement/ promotion (on TV and food magazines), Positive comments, reviews and ratings}. Factor 5 collects variables that relate to the services offered by AFR's (Membership, modern socializing environment) and their proximity factor (convenient locations (eg.,malls) of outlets, closer to workplaces/ place of stay of consumers. For this reason, the fifth factor is labelled as "service and location orientation". The health perceptions of fast food company's menus of college students were found to be significantly affected by nutrition knowledge, health consciousness and gender (Hwang and Cranage, 2010).

Factors influencing consumersperceptions about AFR's :

Garret's ranking technique was used to measure the ranking of factors influencing consumers perceptions about AFR's (Table 6). Five parameters like enjoyment, restaurant attributes and services, previous experience, marketing aspects and psychological factors have been considered as factors influencing consumers perceptions about AFR's. It can be noticed that enjoyment is the major factor influencing consumers perceptions about AFR's with a mean score of 61.34 and so it was ranked first. Restaurant attributes and services is another important attribute influencing consumers perceptions

regarding AFR's with a mean score of 58.76 followed by previous experience with a mean score of 50.43 and so they were ranked second and third respectively.

Marketing aspects was ranked fourth and psychological factors was ranked fifth as they are the least important factors influencing consumers perceptions with mean scores of 47.55 and 34.23, respectively. Consumers are better educated, consumers are not only dining out for special occasions but also are also integrating restaurants into their daily lives. They are increasingly looking for ways to add to their restaurant experience and are finding that trying new and exotic dishes at AFR's is a great way of doing that. Also, consumer behaviour characteristics of Bengalurians do show that they tend to prefer leading, popular or international brands to local ones as to most of them, it depicts their social class. This simply shows the amount of brand recognition or awareness and its effect on consumer mind especially when the brand is known to be internationally available. This implies that AFR's patronage by consumers is largely based on the brand rather than the products and services. Also, locality and proximity are the contributory factors in making AFR's choice. Tung (2003) in his study on the customer perception and satisfaction for a Chinese buffet stated that the respondents perceived positive dining experience, of service, cleanliness and dining environment.

Results indicate that the young Indian consumer has passion for visiting AFR's for fun and change and they opt for American food because they find quick service in the AFR's. They have the highest value for ambience with a cosy atmosphere, brand value and hygiene. These restaurants are considered to be convenient and economical for a busy and hectic lifestyle. People donotprefer to spend more time preparing meals, travelling to pick up meals or waiting for meals in restaurants. Consumers of the commercial center of Rio De Janeiro, Brazil basically gave importance to hygiene, food quality, pleasantness of staff, availability of safety foods, price, appearance, speed of service, variety and localization (Castelo and Salay, 2001). The middle income group spends more on convenience and the luxury to save time and energy which has in turn contributed to the growth of AFR's.Shoyemi (2014) also reported similar findings.

Conclusion:

Health and affordability, classy sensory attribute,

nutrition, psychological dimension, menu aspects and prices and westernization were the perceptions about American foods by the consumers. Sensory attributes of foods is the major factor influencing consumers perceptions about American foods followed by nutrition and health and psychological factors.Psychological experience, social values, authentic culture, marketing orientation/ dimension, service and location orientation were the perceptions about American Food Restaurants by the consumers. Enjoyment is the major factor influencing consumers perceptions about AFR's followed by restaurant attributes and services and experience.

Practical utility :

The findings provide important insights for the AFR's in preparing and serving American foods that will cater to the needs of Indian consumers and thus encourage American food consumption.The AFR's should concentrate on delivering healthy foods that are convenient and that provide an enjoyable dining experience. Today's hectic lifestyle has resulted in increased demand for American foods. People do not want to spend a lot of time preparing meals, travelling to pick up meals or waiting for meals in restaurants. Hence, it is necessary for AFR's to reduce the waiting time for meals in the restaurants.

Recommendations and suggestions:

The current findings demonstrate that there are ample prospects for the American Food Restaurant market to expand. A vast majority of the respondent consumers' have anencouraging attitude towards American foods.The consumers are of the opinion that American foods are unhealthy because of the high fat content, high oil content and high sodium content that it contains. This needs to be corrected. The trend among the Indian consumers is that they prefer low calorie, light, low fat menu items with healthy ingredients. AFR's should come out with light menu items and diverse healthy options such as fruits, sandwiches, salads, wheat breads and veggie choices and reduce the usage of fatty sauces, such as cheese on sandwiches and must use low fat alternatives. Also, AFR's need to provide optional allergen free food items, such as gluten free and peanut free food items, snack wraps, baked goods (including cookies, doughnuts and muffins), nutritious soups and healthy salads to fresh whole grains and sensible desserts

in order to capitalize on the growing consumer interest in terms of health and wellness.

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