

Article

## Social and Economic Drivers of Fast Food Consumption Among University Students: Evidence from South Korea

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**Abstract:** The consumption of fast foods among university students has been on the rise, especially in the urban setup where convenience and social factors have been playing a significant role in influencing the dietary behaviours of students. This paper will discuss how social and economic factors affect consumption of fast food by university students in Seoul National University. The study is quantitative descriptive-analytical, and it is used to conduct the research with the help of a structured questionnaire to 200 undergraduate students. The research questions the role of some major factors, such as socioeconomic status, peer pressure, media exposure, and urban living, in determining the fast food consumption behaviour of students. The obtained data was analysed using SPSS with the help of descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis. The research results indicate that the most influential predictors of fast food consumption among students are the urban lifestyle and impact of peers. There are also statistically significant relationships that exist between media exposure and socioeconomic factors and dietary behaviours of students. These findings show that consumption of fast foods among university students is a situational and not a personal choice but a mixture of social, environmental, and economic factors. The research is relevant to the literature as it empirically presents social determinants of dietary behaviour in young adults. The results indicate that educational and policy interventions are necessary to encourage healthy eating habits among the university students.

**Keywords:** *Consumption behaviour, Fast Food, university students, South Korea, Social factors*

## **Introduction**

The intake of fast food has been a very salient trend in modern dietary habits, especially among teenagers and college students (Akbaş, 2024; Mendonca, 2023; Naga & Alvarez, 2024; Sharma & Pageni, 2024). A developing body of evidence indicates that the preferences of people do not solely determine eating behaviour but that it is also affected by more social, economic and environmental factors (Hafeez et al., 2025; Marcone, 2020; Saha et al., 2022). As a result, there is a growing trend whereby researchers have explored the issues that affect the consumption of fast food using a multidisciplinary approach that includes sociological, behavioural, and public health conceptualisations.

Many researchers have highlighted the importance of socioeconomic causes in determining the dietary behaviour (Desbouys et al., 2020; Gautam et al., 2023; Mahmood et al., 2023). Socioeconomic status may also impact food preferences based on purchasing power, availability of food outlets, and also lifestyle habits (Szalonka et al., 2021; Chen & Antonelli, 2020; Frehner et al., 2021). People of lower income status might be more dependent on the cheap and accessible food sources (such as fast food) whereas students with higher socioeconomic status might have a richer range of food choices. Janssen et al. (2018) in a narrative review have focused on highlighting that the utilisation of takeaway and fast foods is influenced by various socioeconomic and environmental factors, among which are neighbourhood deprivation, accessibility of food, and food in cities.

Social influence is also another factor that contributes greatly towards the eating habits of the young people (Higgs & Ruddock, 2020; Gilmour, 2020). Colleges and universities usually promote eating habits, where peer groups have much influence in food preferences and consumption behaviours. Bauer et al. (2009) have discovered that the intake of fast foods by adolescents was affected by social and environment factors, personal and behavioural factors such as peer influence, family food environment and availability of unhealthy foods. They do indicate that the eating behaviour in the youths is founded in expansive social contexts that support the specific eating habits.

The change in the conventional dietary patterns has become a subject of growing academic interest in the East Asian societies (Song & Kim, 2022; Othman & Aini, 2021). The fast economic growth, urbanisation, and globalisation have played a role in the change of eating habits to convenience-based among the younger generations. In South Korea, Seo, Lee and Nam (2011) investigated fast food consumption by middle-school students in Seoul and they have discovered that, social norms and peer

influence were among the best predictors of consumption behaviour. The experiment has shown that the consumption of fast food is often social, e.g., when people meet with their friends, which points to the significance of the social environment in influencing food preferences.

Fast food has become very important in the majority of societies over the past few decades. The high rate of urbanisation, altered lifestyles and food industries' globalisation has significantly altered the traditional eating patterns, especially among university students (Bárbara & Ferreira-Pêgo, 2020; Alakaam & Willyard, 2020). The convenience aspect, cheapness, and the access of fast food often define the product, and this makes it quite appealing to the young groups of people which are struggling with time limitations and educational demands. Consequently, this has increased food intake by students in most parts of the world, causing an increasing academic and social health concern.

University students are an important demographic group due to the fact that the eating habits of the students are pretentious by various social and economic factors. This shift in the family-controlled settings into a more independent living situation usually results in the students adopting new consumption habits, such as more consumption of fast food. Such dietary modifications are not personal choices but they are integrated into the larger social frameworks like socioeconomic status, peer groups and even cultural beliefs. This therefore means that the sociological approach is needed to understand the causes of fast food intake through university students because it gives a chance to look at the relationship between the individual and structural factors.

Over the last twenty years, there has been significant change in the eating habits of young adults in South Korea. Historically, the Korean diets were focused on balanced meals which included rice, vegetables and fermented foods. Nevertheless, the growth of the global food chains, the fast-paced migration of urban ways of life and the increased power of Western consumerism have led to the change of eating habits towards a reflex of rather convenience-orientated food consumption. One of the most impacted groups of these changes is university students, especially those who study in such large metropolises like Seoul. The proximity of fast food restaurants to university campuses, coupled with the academic schedules and social lifestyles, has facilitated the rise in the use of fast food as dietary practices.

Social and economic factors are also significant in the determination of food in addition to convenience. Food intake preferences and eating habits can be influenced greatly by socioeconomic background, household income, peer influence and exposure to media advertising. Learners represent various

socioeconomic backgrounds and thus may exhibit diverse rates of fast food consumption based on economic provisions, way of life anticipations and cultural capital. In addition, peer networks are at times strong social agents of influence, who promote common eating habits and the formation of opinion about food preference and eating habits.

Sociologically, the eating habits can also be explained in terms of social stratification and the formation of lifestyle. The theory of habitus and cultural capital as proposed by Bourdieu implies that food habits and consumption habits are closely related to social status, culture, and disposition that people acquire. In this view, preferences are acquired by individuals that are dependent on their social background and accumulated experiences in certain social settings. Thus, the consumption of fast food by university students could be the result of the general trends of lifestyle, social identity, and cultural adaptation in modern urban communities.

Even though the amount of research on the topic of nutrition and dietary behaviour is growing, comparatively little focus has been placed on the socio-cultural aspects of food intake among university students in East Asian settings. Whereas the past research has tended to concentrate on health-related outcomes e.g. obesity or nutritional deficiencies, the current research has limited on how social and economic determinants influence consumption patterns among young adults in universities. These dynamics should be understood to formulate policies and awareness campaigns that will lead to the adoption of healthier eating behaviours and also to solve the larger social situations that shape dietary behaviours.

Thus, the aim of this study is to understand the social and economic issues behind fast food in consumers in South Korea in universities. Namely, the study examines the impact of socioeconomic background, peer influence, and lifestyle factors on the food intake by students. With university students in a fast-growing contemporary society, the study will add to the sociological explanation of the consumption behaviour of the youth and give a clue into the wider understanding of the relationship between social structures and dietary habits.

### **Literature Review**

The eating of fast food has become a rather noticeable aspect of modern dietary behaviour, especially in the adolescent and university population. A number of researchers indicate that eating habits are not just personal perceptions, but influenced by wider social, economical and environmental conditions. As a result, researchers have started to take a multidisciplinary approach in studying fast food consumption combining sociological, behavioural as well as public health approaches.

A number of researchers have pointed out the influence of socioeconomic aspects to determine dietary behaviour. The socioeconomic status varies food preferences based on the variation in purchasing power, availability of food outlets, and the lifestyle pattern. People who are of lower socioeconomic status might depend much more on cheap and readily available food items like fast food, whereas people of higher socioeconomic statuses probably have a greater variety of dieting options. In a narrative review of determinants of takeaway and fast food consumption, Janssen et al. (2018) stressed that environmental circumstances, the availability of food, neighbourhoods, and socioeconomic deprivation are influential in food habits.

The eating behaviour of young people is also heavily affected by social environments. Especially, the peer groups and family backgrounds tend to influence eating habits during the adolescence and young adult years. Indicatively, Bauer et al. (2009) investigated longitudinal changes in fast food eating among adolescents and concluded that the consumption of fast foods was linked to the expansion of behavioural and lifestyle patterns. Bauer et al. (2009b) in a similar study established that family food environments, peer influence, and individual behavioural patterns were effective socio-environment factors indicating the intake of fast food among adolescents. These results suggest that the dietary behaviour of the youth is rooted in the larger social environments and not merely influenced by the individual preferences.

The fast change in the culture of dieting has gained increasing academic interest in East Asian societies (Broz, 2022). There is the economic development, urbanisation, and the growth of international food chains, which have contributed to the changes in the traditional diets to the convenience-orientated food consumption (Richards & Pasirayi, 2024). Seo et al., (2011) investigated consumption of fast food by middle-school students in Seoul and concluded that subjective norms and peer influence were some of the best predictors of consumption behaviour. The research showed that the consumption of fast food was often done in a social setting like when meeting with friends, as social interaction is significant in determining food preference.

The household settings and the way families are organised also have a significant effect on dieting behaviour in the youth population. A study by Kwon et al. (2022) established that the type of family residence and the household were important determinants of fast food intake among Korean teenagers. Young adults who were not living with a complete family displayed more excessive levels of fast foods which point to the fact that parental control and family structure might affect eating patterns.

In addition to the structural factors, a number of studies have studied the consumption of fast foods based on behavioural and psychological frameworks. In a qualitative study by Majabadi et al. (2016) in Tehran, it was discovered that socio-demographic and environmental factors can cause adolescents to consume fast food, such as preference to taste, convenience, affordability, and social pressure. The paper has put forward the intricate interplay between personal motivations and social set-ups in influencing dietary behaviours. In the same manner, Mahmoodabad et al. (2020) studied taking fast food by Iranian students in a university based on the prototype will-to-eat model. Their results showed family consumption patterns, peer behaviour and social influences had significant predictive value in regards to the willingness of the students to consume fast food. These findings indicate that social learning has significant influence on the dietary behaviour of the students in the university.

Other newer studies have also used behavioural theories to describe the consumption of fast food between students. Didarloo et al. (2022) reported that food habits consumption was predicted significantly by the behavioural intention of students, perceived behavioural control, and knowledge using the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Similarly, in a study carried out on college students, Sajjad et al. (2023) established that attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control had a significant impact on student intents to consume fast food.

Research has also showed the impact of lifestyle and economic variables on the food preferences of students in the European setting. Oliveira and Raposo (2024) investigated fast food intake behaviour among the higher education students in Portugal and observed that the most determining factors among the students with regards to food preferences were convenience, price, and taste. The study also found out correlations between age and body mass index as demographic factors and fast food intake.

Similar findings have been obtained by the research in the Middle East. As an example, Asab and Barakat (2025) examined the consumption behaviour of fast food among university students in Jordan and discovered that attitudes, subjective norms and self-identity played important roles towards influencing student intentions of consuming fast food. Secondly, it was found that income level and perceived behavioural control were predictors of the real consumption behaviour. Overall, the available literature indicates that the consumption of fast food by youth is a multifaceted process occurring in the context of socioeconomic situations and conditions, peer pressure, family background, urban life, and cultural shifts. However, most of the past studies have mostly concentrated on the health outcomes or

behavioural psychological framework, and little has been done regarding the sociological aspect of the dietary behaviour. Specifically, there has been a gap in research studies that examine the relationship between the social and economic structure, as well as fast food consumption among university students in the fast-urbanising Asian cultures like South Korean.

### **Research Gap**

Even with past studies that have been conducted on different elements of youth dietary behaviour, there are gaps that exist in the literature at present. To begin with, the recent studies have focused on the public health and nutritional implications, instead of the wider social and economic factors which dictate the consumption of fast food amongst the university students. Second, current literature tends to take dietary behaviour as an individual lifestyle and ignores the social complexities in which food consumption behaviours are constructed.

Third, the amount of available empirical research on the sociological aspects of fast food consumption in East Asian higher-education settings is relatively small, especially in large urban metropolitan settings where the urban life and the globalisation process have a severe impact on youth culture. Lastly, studies that integrate sociological theory with empirical data are limited to explain the interaction between structural and environmental to influence students' habits.

Hence, this paper aims at filling these gaps by exploring the social and economic factors that motivate university students in Seoul to consume fast food. The study will bring out a more insightful approach to the issue by incorporating sociological views with empirical evidence to develop a clear picture on how the dietary practices of young adults are influenced by socioeconomic factors, peer pressure, and urban living in modern urban communities.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The need to comprehend fast food consumption among the young population necessitates the theoretical approach that provides insights on how the personal behaviour derives out of the larger social environments. This research is based on two theoretical approaches that are complementary to one another: Bourdieu theory of habitus and cultural capital, and the Social Ecological Model. These frameworks put together give a holistic explanation in the way the social structures, cultural practices and the environmental contexts affect dietary behaviours of students.

#### **Bourdieu: The Theory of Habitus and Cultural Capital**

The sociological theory by Pierre Bourdieu is a valuable instrument in the explanation of consumption practices in a social setup. Bourdieu (1984) suggests that people acquire tendencies of behaviour, tastes

and ways of life based on what he termed as habitus, which is the system of enduring dispositions that are predetermined by social origin and daily experiences. These inclinations affect the decisions that people make in different facets of life including eating (König et al., 2021).

Another important aspect that Bourdieu stressed was the factor of cultural capital, which is defined as the knowledge, values, and cultural competencies learned in the process of socialisation in a particular social group (Parzer, 2023; Mikus et al., 2020). Cultural capital is known to affect consumption and preferences of people such as eating habits (Foroumandi et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2021). In this area of food consumption, people with varying social economic statuses might form their own preferences depending on the social surroundings, education, and family culture (Enriquez et al., 2022; Jayasinghe et al., 2025).

In this field, the eating of fast foods by university students can be viewed as a wider lifestyle trend that is determined by social status, cultural precondition, and daily behaviours. Every student brought up in a world where people take convenience food can develop eating habits that make food intake normalise. In the same manner, the dietary habits of the youths might also change due to urbanisation and exposure to the culture of global cuisine, such that fast food is now a part of their social and cultural activities.

### **Social Ecological Model**

Although the Bourdieu theory focuses on the role of social structures and cultural practices, the Social Ecological Model offers a wider approach towards explaining how the various levels of influence determine health-related behaviours (Eriksson et al., 2025; Tanhan & Young, 2021). Rendering to the model, individual, interpersonal, organisational, community, and societal factors interact in order to influence human behaviour (McLeroy et al., 1988).

On a separate level, single preferences, knowledge and attitudes are some of the factors that might affect food choice (Sahadeo et al., 2025; Chen & Antonelli, 2020). On the interpersonal level, peer groups and family members are significant in influencing the nature of dietary habits by eating together and intermingling (Xu, 2022). The food consumption patterns of students also depend on the organisational factors (university environment and the presence of fast food restaurants around campuses) (Racine et al., 2022)

Food environments and consumption habits are influenced at a wider structural level at the community and societal level, such as urbanisation, the exposure of media, and the globalisation of fast food industries (Boafo et al., 2021; Akter et al., 2025). In urban cities like Seoul, where there are large

numbers of fast food outlets and where there is fast-paced lifestyle, the consumption of convenience foods among university students may be promoted (Saha et al., 2022).

Using the Bourdieu sociological understanding and the Social Ecological Model, this paper would give a detailed approach in examining the fast food among the university students (Sarhan et al., 2025). The intraoperative framework emphasises the interaction of socioeconomic background, peer influence, and lifestyles in the urban areas with more structural conditions to influence dietary behaviours in young adults.

### **Conceptual Model**

Regarding to the previous literature analysis and the theory framework, the consumption of fast foods can be explained as the resultant consequence of a complex of interacting social and economic determinants. The current research is based on the theory of habitus and cultural capital provided by Bourdieu and the Social Ecological Model and presupposes that the food consumption patterns of students depend on their socioeconomic status, the surrounding environment of their peers, and their exposure to the presence of modern urban lifestyles.

The socioeconomic status is also a major determinant of the consumption habits, since it determines the purchasing capacity of students, their expectations in pursuing lifestyle and availability of foods. On the same note, peer influence is also a significant social construct that can influence the eating behaviour of students via similar eating habits and social behaviours in university campuses. The reasons of living an urban lifestyle, such as academic hectic schedules and accessibility of fast food restaurants located on the university campuses, can also play a role in consumption of fast food as an easy dietary choice.

Moreover, media coverage and advertising can shape the perception of the students about fast food by creating certain consumption styles and making the fast food consumption standard among the younger consumers. All of these cause the formation of dietary behaviours of the students in modern urban societies.

Consequently, the conceptual model of the present research postulates that social and economic variables such as socioeconomic status, peer pressure, urban living, and media exposure are major predictive variables that can determine consumption of fast food among the university students in Seoul.

### **Research Hypotheses**

Based on the theoretical framework and previous literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H1:** Socioeconomic status has a significant influence on fast food consumption among university students.

**H2:** Peer influence positively affects fast food consumption among university students.

**H3:** Urban lifestyle factors significantly contribute to increased fast food consumption among university students.

**H4:** Media exposure and advertising positively influence fast food consumption among university students.

**H5:** Social and economic factors collectively predict fast food consumption among university students.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The research followed a quantitative research design with descriptive-analytical approach to research the effects of social and economic issues on consumption of fast food among university students. It is believed that the quantitative technique is suitable in this study since it will enable the systematic gathering and statistical examination of the information connected to the consumption behaviours of students and factors that are expected to affect them.

The aim of the study is to find out the association between some of the independent variables, which include socioeconomic variables, peer pressure, media exposure, and urban lifestyle, and the dependent variable, which in this case is the fast food consumption among the university students.

The research design will allow studying the trends and associations among variables in the social settings of students. It also offers empirical data that may be used in determining how social and environmental factors influence dietary behaviour in the current urban society among young adults.

### **Population and Sample**

The sample of the proposed research will include undergraduates studying at Seoul National University in South Korea in the 20242025 academic year. One of these social groups that have significant potential in the present investigation of the fast food eating patterns is university students, who are usually subject to hectic academic time schedules, peer pressure and city living, which could influence their eating patterns.

An example of 200 students was used because simple random sampling technique was used so that the respondents had equal probability of being included in the study. The sample was composed of students of various years of study and demographics to have a more detailed picture of what factors affect the consumption of fast food. See table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Characteristics of the Sample*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	92	46.0
	Female	108	54.0
Age	18–20 years	74	37.0
	21–23 years	89	44.5
	24 years and above	37	18.5
Monthly Family Income	Low	63	31.5
	Middle	97	48.5
	High	40	20.0
Residence	Urban	138	69.0
	Rural	62	31.0
Academic Year	First Year	49	24.5
	Second Year	58	29.0
	Third Year	51	25.5
	Fourth Year	42	21.0

The findings in table 1 show that half of the samples were female, whereas the remainder were male (54% and 46%, respectively). In the case of age distribution, most of the respondents (44.5) fell within the 21-23 age bracket, 37% fell within the 18-20 age bracket, and 18.5% fell within the 24 years and above age bracket. Regarding family income, almost half of the participants (48.5) said that they are middle-income families, and 31.5% were low-income families and 20% were rich families. In regards to residence, the majority of the sample (69%) were in urban areas, with 31% of the students in rural areas. In terms of the academic year, 29% of the interviewees were second-year students, 25.5% were third-year students, 24.5% first-year students and 21% were fourth-year students.

These findings suggest that the sample is a varied sample of students from various demographic and socioeconomic groups in the university.

### **Research Instrument**

A questionnaire was used to collect the data that was based on the past research on the same topic that dealt with fast food consumption and social determinants of dietary behaviour. The questionnaire was divided into two major parts.

The initial part contained demographic data of the respondents, including gender, age, year of study, family income, and the area of stay. The second part had the measures of the key variables in the study which include the socioeconomic variables, peer pressure, media exposure, urban lifestyles and consumption behaviour of fast foods.

The questions on the questionnaire were applied to a specified five-point Likert scale, with a 1 (strongly disagree), and 5 (strongly agree) as the smallest (minimum) and the largest (maximum) points respectively. This scale enabled the respondents to state the extent to which they concurred with every statement concerning their eating pattern and social factors.

The instrument had 26 items that were spread in the various variables that were in the study. A number of academic experts in the fields of sociology and public health reviewed the questionnaire to ascertain the clarity, relevance and appropriateness of items as used to measure the study variables. There were few amendments in an attempt to ameliorate the wording of certain statements and to make sure that the instrument clearly presented the objectives of the research. In order to control the reliability of the instrument, the alpha coefficient of a Cronbach was computed to the various scales used in the questionnaire.

These findings pointed out that there were satisfactory levels of internal consistency in all variables with Cronbach alpha located between 0.79 and 0.86 and the overall reliability of the instrument was 0.88. The values are higher than the generally accepted level of 0.70 and this means that the measurement scales adopted in the study have good reliability.

### **Data Analysis**

The data was analysed by means of Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). The data was analysed using several statistical tools that were used to test the study hypotheses.

The frequency, percentage, means, and standard deviations were descriptive statistics that were applied to explain the demographic properties of the sample and also analyse the overall trends of fast food consumption among students.

Moreover, Pearson correlation analysis was employed to check the relationships that existed between the independent variables and fast food consumption.

Besides, multiple regression was undertaken to establish how much social and economic variables forecast consumption of fast food among university students. Such statistical processes helped the researcher to compare the importance of the suggested relationships and to test the hypotheses of the study systematically and reliably. See table 2.

**Table 2***Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
Socioeconomic Factors	6	0.84
Peer Influence	5	0.81
Media Exposure	5	0.79
Urban Lifestyle	4	0.82
Fast-Food Consumption	6	0.86
<b>Overall Scale</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>0.88</b>

The findings in table 2 indicate that the internal consistency levels have been acceptable in all the variables. The alpha values of Cronbach ranged between 0.79 and 0.86 which showed good reliability of the measurement scales applied in the research study. In particular, the coefficient of reliability of socioeconomic factors amounted to 0.84, that of peer influence was 0.81, the exposure to the media was 0.79, and urban lifestyle was 0.82. Fast food consumption was the dependent variable and it registered a reliability of 0.86. The total consistency of the instrument was 0.88, which is above the generally accepted consistency of 0.70, which proves that the instrument adopted by the research is well-established in terms of internal consistency.

### **Results**

This part will show the statistical analysis of the data obtained among the university students to investigate the role of social and economic factors on the consumption of fast food. The findings are represented in a sequence of tables to have a clear picture of how the study variables are related.

#### **Descriptive statistics results**

**Table 3***Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Level</b>
Socioeconomic Factors	3.41	0.71	Moderate
Peer Influence	3.78	0.66	High
Media Exposure	3.65	0.69	High
Urban Lifestyle	3.83	0.63	High
Fast-Food Consumption	3.74	0.67	High

The results show that the urban lifestyle came number one with mean value ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) i.e. students often are exposed to the urban lifestyle conditions that are likely to promote fast foods. This was then peer influence ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) and fast food consumption ( $M = 3.74$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ) which were categorised as high. In the same way, the media exposure ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ) also demonstrated a rather high level among the respondents. On the other hand, the socioeconomic factors had a moderate

mean (M = 3.41, SD = 0.71). On the whole, the given descriptive statistics suggest that a number of social and environmental aspects are significant to inform the trends of fast food consumption among the university students.

**Correlation results**

**Table 4**

*Correlation Matrix Between Study Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
Socioeconomic Factors	1				
Peer Influence	.34**	1			
Media Exposure	.28**	.39**	1		
Urban Lifestyle	.31**	.42**	.36**	1	
Fast-Food Consumption	.37**	.45**	.41**	.48**	1

The results indicate that variables have a positive correlation with the consumption of fast food. The greatest correlation was found between the urban lifestyle and fast food intake (r =.48, p <.05) which implied that students living in highly-urbanised settings easily eat fast food often. Also, peer influence exhibited a strong positive relationship with the intake of fast food (r =.45, p <.05) indicating that peer behaviours and social interactions play a significant role in determining the eating habits of students. Likewise, the exposure to media was positively related to the consumption of fast food (r =.41, p <.05), meaning that exposure to advertisement and online media can possibly influence the boldness of students to fast food. The socioeconomic factors were also positively correlated with the consumption of fast food (r = .37, p < .05).

These findings affirm the existence of significant association between social and environmental variables and the fast food consumption behaviour of the students.

**Multiple Regression Analysis**

A multiple regression analysis was done to explore the predictive effect of the independent variables on the consumption of fast food. Table 5 displays the results.

**Table 5**

*Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Fast-Food Consumption*

Predictor	Beta	t	Sig.
Socioeconomic Factors	0.22	3.41	.001
Peer Influence	0.31	4.87	.000
Media Exposure	0.26	3.96	.000
Urban Lifestyle	0.34	5.12	.000

The regression equation describes around 47% of the variance in fast food intake ( $R^2 = 0.47$ ), which means that the independent variables in total contribute significantly to the dietary behaviour of students.

The strongest predictor of the peer influence was found to be urban lifestyle ( $= 0.34, p < .001$ ), then it was peer influence ( $= 0.31, p < .001$ ). The results of these studies indicate that social set ups and lifestyle habits of the students are major contributors to the prevalence of fast food events.

The positive impact on media exposure was also significant ( $0.26, p < .001$ ), which means that advertising and digital media are relevant to influence the consumption preferences of students. Also, the socioeconomic factors showed a strong impact ( $0.22, p < .01$ ) on intake of fast food.

All in all, these results lend credence to the hypotheses of the study and prove that social and economic determinants play a significant role in determining the consumption of fast food by the university students.

### **Discussions**

The current research attempted to analyse how social and economic factors affected the consumption of fast food through university students. The results indicate fast food use is greatly determined by the combination of various interdependent factors such as socioeconomic status, peer pressure, exposure to the media, and urban living. These findings demonstrate the multi-dimensionality of dietary behaviour in young adults and confirm that the selection of food is shaped by not just other personal preferences but also greater social and environmental factors.

Among the main results of the present research is that the urban lifestyle became the most effective predictor of the fast food intake between university students. This outcome indicates the increasing impact of urban settings on food habits especially among the youths who tend to have time constraints and demanding school programmes. The presence and accessibility of fast food restaurants in the city is possibly a factor that will motivate the students to use the convenient food provisions. These results are associated with the previous studies postulating that urbanisation and contemporary lifestyles are some of the causes of high consumption of fast food by young people (Janssen et al., 2018).

The research also established that peer influence has a significant effect on the fast food consumption behaviour. University students can have meals and social activities with their friends and this can strengthen certain eating patterns and preferences. This outcome is in line with previous research which suggests that peer groups have significant influence on the dietary behaviour of adolescents and young

adults (Bauer et al., 2009). In universities, socialisation may internalise eating together, hence making regular consumption of fast foods normal.

The other significant observation is that of media exposure and advertising as a determinant of the perception and consumption habits of students. Digital media and food marketing can also impact students when they develop an attitude towards fast food, by making it an option that is socially desirable, cheap, and convenient. This observation aligns with the existing literature that has proven food preferences and dietary behaviour of the youths to be influenced greatly by marketing and media portrayals (Seo et al., 2011; Oliveira and Raposo, 2024).

In addition, the research established that socioeconomic factors play a major role in the consumption of fast food. The economic capacity and family background of students could determine their access to various kinds of food and the preferences of consumption. Fast food can be a cheap and convenient choice of some students and a symbol of modern living and social position of others. These results are in line with earlier studies, which have pointed to the connection between socioeconomic status and consumptive habits of university students (Didarloo et al., 2022).

Theoretically, the results of this research could be explained according to the theory of Bourdieu of habitus and cultural capital. Bourdieu suggests that social experiences and the cultural context of the individuals shape their consumption habits and shapes their tastes and lifestyle preferences (Bourdieu, 1984). In this sense, the fast food consumption by the university students might be an indication of larger lifestyle trends that do occur due to socialisation in a given social and cultural environment.

The findings also concur with the Social Ecological Model that reinforces that the interaction among various levels of health behaviour such as individual, interpersonal, and structural are the factors that determine the health behaviour (McLeroy et al., 1988). The great role of the peer behaviour, media exposure and urban lifestyle as observed in this study validates the fact that dietary behaviour cannot be attributed to individual choice but as a combination of the social, environmental and structural factors.

In general, the results of this study become part of the general picture of the social determinants of dietary behaviour in the group of university students. This research will be of great significance in terms of its ability to determine the most important social and economic variables related to consumption of fast food, as this research can help to formulate the policies and educational programmes to be implemented to increase a number of young adults who want to adopt healthier dietary habits.

## Conclusion

This paper focused on how social and economic issues can affect the consumption of fast food by university students. The results show that the dietary behaviour of students is influenced by a mixture of social, environmental, and economic factors and not just like by individual preferences. In particular, lifestyle in the city, peer pressure, media exposure, and socioeconomic statuses were identified to play a significant role in influencing fast food eating habits in students.

Of these predictors, urban lifestyle and peer influence were the strongest predictors of the consumption of fast food. The findings reflect the importance of the modern urban setting and socialisation in influencing the food decision-making of young people. The outcomes also reflect that media exposure is a factor which is involved in the normalisation of fast food eating by encouraging convenient and desirable food.

Theoretically, the results are useful in demonstrating the applicability of Bourdieu theory of habitus and cultural capital and Social Ecological Model in elucidating food consumption behaviours. The research confirms the fact that the dietary practice of young adults accrues within the macro social and cultural set-ups that shape the lifestyle preferences and daily habits.

In general, the research is important to the existing body of research on youth consumption behaviour as it offers empirical data on the social factors driving the consumption of fast food. The results can guide policy makers, educators, and medical workers to get a clearer insight into the factors affecting eating habits in university students.

## Limitations

Although the efforts of this work cannot be underestimated, some weaknesses must be mentioned. To start with, it was carried out with students from one university and this might not be representative of other universities and the young people in general. This study can be improved in future by considering participants who belong to various institutions and geographical locations so that more representative results can be obtained.

Second, the research was based on self-reported data in a questionnaire that can be prone to response bias or social desirability. The participants might have overreported or underreported their consumption behaviours on fast foods.

Third, the study is cross-sectional, which cannot provide a chance to determine the causal connections between the variables under study. Longitudinal research may be more informative about the way in which social and environmental factors develop the dietary habits in the course of time.

Lastly, though this study considered some significant social determinants, other possible factors (e.g., psychological motivation, health awareness, and cultural factors) were not analysed and could also contribute to the development of the dietary habits of students.

### **Recommendations**

Following the conclusions of the research, it is possible to suggest a number of recommendations.

To begin with, universities and health institutions should establish educational programmes that are expected to ensure that university students adopt healthy eating habits. Programmes of this nature could enable students to be more conscious of the possible health effects of overeating fast food.

Second, universities may promote the access to the healthier food options on the campuses to make students less dependent on fast food restaurants.

Third, policy makers and medical leaders ought to take into consideration adoption of public awareness on the impact of food marketing and media exposure to the dietary behaviours of the youths.

Lastly, further studies should be done in future to determine other factors affecting the consumption of fast food like psychological factors, culture and lifestyle pattern in various social settings. The comparative research on students across the international boundaries can also help in understanding dietary trends of young adults in the world.

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