



Fast-Food Consumption in Shimla: Demographic and Behavioural Determinants of Expenditure

Mansi Sharma*

Department of Economics, Himachal Pradesh University.

***Corresponding Author**
Mansi Sharma

Department of
Economics, Himachal
Pradesh University.

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Abstract:

Background: In the modern era, there has been a significant surge in fast food consumption across India. Shimla, as a major tourist destination, has witnessed rapid growth in restaurants and food outlets, increasing consumption among residents.

Method: A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted among individuals aged 18 years or above, either born in Shimla or currently residing there. A total of 52 respondents completed a structured questionnaire via Google Forms.

Key Results: Employment status significantly influenced fast-food expenditure, while age, gender, and income showed no significant associations. Discounts and promotional offers marginally affected spending. Price importance and salary-related changes did not predict expenditure. Most respondents consumed fast food at least once a week, and many intended to reduce consumption in the future.

Conclusion: Fast-food expenditure in Shimla is primarily driven by employment status and marketing incentives rather than demographics or income. Findings underscore the importance of behavioural and structural factors when designing interventions for healthier diets.

Keywords: Fast-food consumption, Consumer behaviour, Expenditure patterns, Behavioural economics, Demographic determinants, Nutrition transition, and Shimla (Himachal Pradesh).

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Introduction

Dietary habits strongly shape health, influencing chronic disease risk, weight regulation, and cognitive performance. (Keshari & Mishra, 2017). India has undergone a nutrition transition, with traditional diets giving way to fast food and ultra-processed products. (Fardet & others, 2022; Monteiro et al., 2019; Shetty, 2002). Urbanization, globalization, and online delivery platforms have made fast food increasingly accessible. (Abdulkader et al., 2022; Bennett & others, 2025; Jia & others, 2024). Consumption has risen across age groups, including youth and adults. (ICF, 2019; Rathi & others, 2016; UNICEF India, 2025).

In Shimla, traditional foods are being replaced by convenience-driven fast-food choices. (Anand, 2016; Sharma & Kaushal, 2023). These products are energy-dense but nutrient-poor, contributing to obesity and related diseases. (Popkin & Reardon, 2018; Swinburn & others, 2011). Studies highlight that digital promotions and lifestyle shifts shape consumption. (Ghosh-Jerath & others, 2024;

Mahajan & Gothankar, 2020; Roy et al., 2021; Sharma, 2023). Socio-economic background significantly influences how Indian consumers perceive and consume fast food, with noticeable differences between income groups. (Aloia et al., 2013). Understanding these patterns is vital for shaping nutrition policies. (Naik & others, 2024; Sehrawat, 2022; Shuval & others, 2016).

Literature Review

India's dietary transition shows steady increases in processed food consumption. (Ghosh-Jerath & others, 2024; Misra & Khurana, 2011; Monteiro et al., 2019). In Shimla, about 70% of adults report regular fast-food intake. (Sharma & Kaushal, 2023). Urbanization, rising incomes, and lifestyle shifts are major drivers. (Keshari & Mishra, 2017; Patel & others, 2017). The growth of food outlets and delivery platforms has accelerated this change. (Abdulkader et al., 2022; Jia & others, 2024) Traditional diets are giving way to modern fast-food preferences. (Anand, 2016).



Socio-economic factors shape consumption. Higher-income and urban populations consume more fast food than their rural counterparts. (Gupta et al., 2018; Singh & others, 2021) Taste, convenience, and affordability attract young adults and professionals. (Naik & others, 2024).

Health impacts are clear: energy-dense foods are linked to obesity and metabolic disorders. (Bhurosy & Jeewon, 2014; Gupta et al., 2018; Swinburn & others, 2011) Adolescents are particularly influenced by peers and advertising. (Fast-food consumption among Indian adolescents & youth, 2024; WJBPHS, 2024). Policy interventions like taxation and subsidies reduce unhealthy intake. (Basu et al., 2014; Thow et al., 2014).

In rural areas, processed foods are also prevalent. For example, 36% of Himachal Pradesh schoolchildren consumed junk food within 24 hours. (Gupta et al., 2018). Behavioural economics research emphasizes how promotions and marketing shape choices. (Shuval & others, 2016; Srivastava & others, 2021). Local studies also link shifting diets to emerging health concerns in Shimla. (Schrawat, 2022).

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to assess the patterns of fast-food consumption and expenditure among adults in the Shimla district of Himachal Pradesh and to examine the influence of demographic and behavioural factors on these consumption behaviours.

Materials and Methods

Research Methodology

- Research Approach: Descriptive
- Research Design: Cross-sectional survey design
- Study Area: District Shimla, Himachal Pradesh
- Study Population: The study includes the target population of all adults aged 18 and above who were born and raised in District Shimla or currently reside there.
- Sample Size: The study was based on survey data collected from 52 respondents. The sample size was determined by the number of participants who consented to complete the questionnaire within the study period. Although smaller than recommended statistical samples, this size was adequate for preliminary analysis using chi-square tests and regression models.
- Study Tool: A structured Google Form questionnaire was developed by the researcher to collect data on participants' socio-

demographic characteristics, expenditure patterns, and consumption behaviour related to fast food, including preferences, frequency of consumption, and spending habits.

- Demographic Data Survey Instrument: The demographic section gathered information on participants' age, gender, employment status, and income.
- Consumer Behaviour Questions: The questionnaire included items related to fast-food consumption patterns, monthly expenditure, importance of price, influence of offers/discounts, and intention to reduce consumption in the future.
- Validity of Tool: The questionnaire was developed based on prior literature and study objectives. To test its clarity and reliability, the survey was pre-tested on a small sample of 10 individuals similar to the target population. Their feedback was incorporated to improve question wording and structure. Statistical validity of the analysis was ensured by using PSPP software to perform chi-square tests and regression analysis on the collected data.
- Data Analysis: The responses were entered into Microsoft Excel for initial cleaning and coding. Statistical analysis was carried out using PSPP software. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were calculated, and results were visually presented using pie charts and bar graphs. Inferential analyses such as chi-square tests and regression analysis were applied to examine the association between demographic factors, discounts, and expenditure patterns.
- Ethical Considerations: Participant's confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before participation, and responses were used solely for academic purposes.

Results

The results of this study provide insights into the demographic profile of respondents, their fast-food consumption patterns, and the statistical relationships between demographic and behavioural variables.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents: The demographic distribution of the participants is summarized in Table 1. The majority of respondents were young adults aged between 18 and 25 years, with both males and females well represented. Most participants reported being students or early-career professionals, indicating that the sample primarily reflects younger, economically active individuals.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

S.no	Variables	Category	Frequency(n)	Percentage(%)
1.	Age	18-24	35	67.3%
		25-32	10	19.2%
		Above 32	7	13.5%
2.	Gender	Yes	26	50%
		No	26	50%
3.	Born and brought up in Shimla	Yes	49	94%
		No	3	5.8%
4.	Currently living in Shimla	Yes	44	84.6%
		No	8	15.4%
5.	Employment status	Employed	18	34.6%
		Student	25	48.1%
		Unemployed	9	17.3%
6.	Monthly income (INR)	Less than 10,000	11	35.5%
		10,000-25,000	10	32.3%
		25,001-50,000	6	19.4%
		More than 50,000	4	12.9%

Fast-Food Consumption Behavior: Patterns of consumption behavior are presented in Table 2. Results show that fast food consumption was highly prevalent, with the majority of respondents consuming fast food at least once a week. Many participants reported being influenced by promotional discounts, combo offers, and special deals. However, a notable proportion also expressed intentions to reduce fast-food intake in the future, reflecting growing health awareness.

Table 2. Fast-Food Consumption Behavior of Respondents

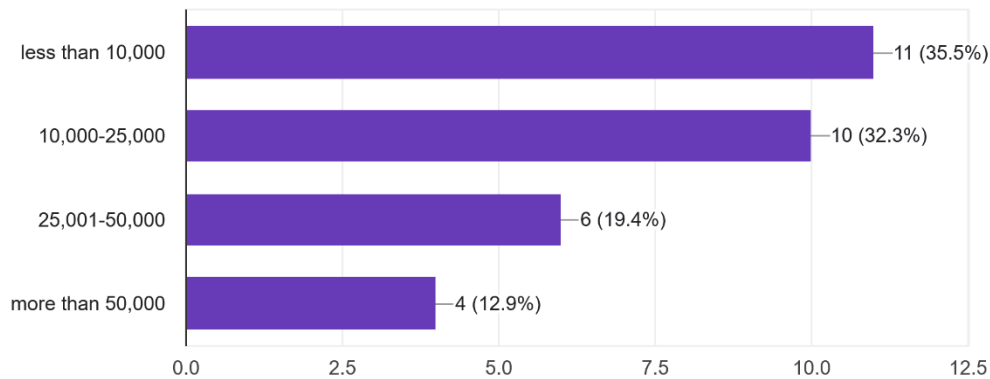
S.no	Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage(%)
1.	Fast-food spendings change after receiving a salary.	Yes	16	50%
		No	16	50%
2.	Frequency of fast-food consumption	Rarely	12	23.1%
		1-3 times a month	13	25%
		Once a week	8	15.4%
		2-3 times a week	17	32.7%
		Daily	2	3.8%
3.	Monthly expenditure on fast food (INR)	Less than 1,000	28	53.8%
		1,000-2,500	14	26.9%
		More than 2,500	10	19.2%
4.	Importance of price when choosing fast food	Very important	11	21.2%
		Important	22	42.3%
		Neutral	16	30.8%
		Not important	3	5.8%
5.	Do discounts influence purchase?	Yes	36	69.2%
		No	16	30.8%
6.	Will you reduce fast-food consumption in the future?	Yes	31	59.6%
		No	3	5.8%
		Maybe	18	34.6%

To visually illustrate these trends:

- Figure 1 presents a bar graph of monthly income distribution, showing the proportion of participants in each income category (less than ₹10,000, ₹10,000-25,000, ₹25,001-50,000, and more than ₹50,000).

Monthly income (optional)

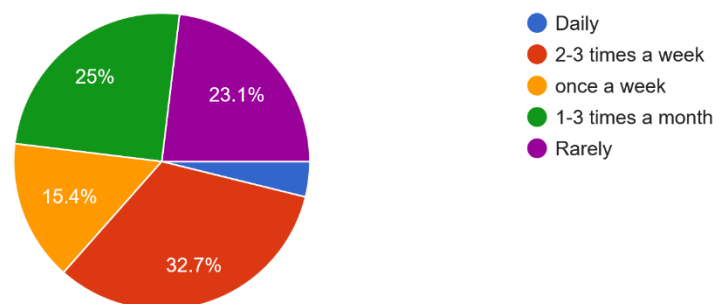
31 responses



- Figure 2 presents a pie chart of consumption frequency, highlighting the proportion of respondents in each category (daily, 2–3 times a week, once a week, 1–3 times a month, and rarely).

How often do you eat fast food?

52 responses



Chi-Square Test Results: To examine associations between demographic and behavioral factors, multiple Chi-square tests were conducted.

- Age and Fast-Food Consumption:** The association was not statistically significant ($\chi^2=12.38$, $df=8$, $p=0.135$), suggesting that age did not play a major role in shaping consumption frequency.
- Gender and Fast-Food Consumption:** No significant association was observed ($\chi^2=2.38$, $df=4$, $p=0.666$).
- Employment Status and Expenditure:** A significant relationship was found ($\chi^2=11.78$, $df=4$, $p=0.019$), indicating that employment status influenced the level of spending on fast food.
- Income and Expenditure:** The association was not statistically significant ($\chi^2=2.89$, $df=6$, $p=0.823$).

- Discounts and Expenditure:** A marginal association was observed ($\chi^2=4.97$, $df=2$, $p=0.083$), suggesting that promotional offers may influence spending behavior.

Regression Analysis Results: Two regression models were tested to explore predictors of fast-food expenditure.

- Price Importance and Expenditure:** The model was not statistically significant ($R^2=0.01$, $F=0.44$, $p=0.51$), showing that stated price sensitivity did not strongly predict actual expenditure.
- Salary-Related Spending and Expenditure:** This model also failed to reach statistical significance ($R^2=0.08$, $F=2.56$, $p=0.12$), indicating that changes in spending after receiving salary were not reliable predictors of overall fast-food expenditure.

Discussion

The findings indicate that employment status is a significant predictor of fast-food expenditure, with employed individuals spending more than students or unemployed respondents. This aligns with evidence linking income and occupational status to dietary choices. (Patel & others, 2017; Rathi & others, 2016; Roy et al., 2021). Discounts, promotions, and digital marketing campaigns also influence consumption, consistent with behavioural economics theories suggesting that perceived value shapes consumer decisions. (Shuval & others, 2016; Srivastava & others, 2021)

Urbanization, increased accessibility, and lifestyle changes remain key drivers of dietary transitions in India. (Keshari & Mishra, 2017; Misra & Khurana, 2011; Shetty, 2002). The expansion of online food delivery platforms and the aggressive promotion of processed foods have accelerated this trend. (Bennett & others, 2025; Jia & others, 2024; Johnsen & others, 2024) Adolescents and young adults exhibit similar patterns, influenced by convenience, peer pressure, and targeted advertising. (Fast-food consumption among Indian adolescents & youth, 2024; Naik & others, 2024; Singh & others, 2021; WJBPHS, 2024). Studies also emphasize the negative health outcomes of these shifts in Shimla, particularly concerning dental health and BMI. (Schrawat, 2022; Sharma, 2023).

Globally, obesogenic environments characterized by cheap, energy-dense foods contribute to rising obesity and metabolic diseases. (Bhurosy & Jeewon, 2014; Popkin & Reardon, 2018; Swinburn & others, 2011). Policy interventions such as sugar-sweetened beverage taxes and food labelling regulations have proven effective in reducing unhealthy consumption. (Basu et al., 2014; Ranjit et al., 2010; Thow et al., 2014). Implementing similar measures in Shimla could help mitigate observed dietary shifts and improve population health outcomes. (Anand, 2016; Fardet & others, 2022; Shuval & others, 2016).

Limitations

- Small sample size (n=52) limits generalizability.
- Cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences.
- Self-reported data may have recall bias.
- Conducted only in Shimla; other regions may show different patterns.

Conclusion

Employment status and exposure to promotional strategies are key determinants of fast-food expenditure among adults in Shimla. Although gender, age, and income were not statistically significant, most respondents expressed intentions to reduce future consumption. These findings underscore the need for targeted public health interventions, including nutrition education, marketing regulations, and policies to reduce the availability and appeal of ultra-processed foods. (Anand, 2016; ICF, 2019; Misra & Khurana, 2011; Monteiro et al., 2019; Thow et al., 2014).

A multi-pronged approach combining behavioural insights, policy measures, and structural changes to the food environment is necessary. Strategies such as unhealthy product taxation, front-of-pack labelling, and stricter marketing regulations can encourage healthier consumer choices. Future research should use larger,

longitudinal samples to examine causality and monitor dietary behaviour changes over time (Jena & others, 2023; Naik & others, 2024; Sehrawat, 2022). Implementing such measures can improve public health and address the ongoing nutrition transition in Shimla.

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