Marketing Drivers of University Students' Consumption Behavior in the Fast-Food Industry

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

ABSTRACT

The fast-food market contains many competing companies, causing them to need to promote and market themselves to gain the attention of target consumers. An important target market for many fast-food companies is students in university. The purpose of this research is to examine how university students' consumption of McDonald's is affected by the company's media advertisement, menu innovation, and the brand image. A quantitative research method was used in this research. An online questionnaire was sent to 150 university students who were McDonald's customers, and their responses were analyzed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression. Media advertisement (β = 0.322, p < 0.001), menu innovation (β = 0.292, p < 0.01), and brand image (β = 0.077, p < 0.05) are the predictors of influencing students' consumption behavior. Media advertisement, in comparison to the others, is the strongest. The multiple regression model accounted for 36.6 percent of the variance (R^2 = 0.366) in students' consumption behavior. These findings contribute to consumer behavior literature by demonstrating how marketing communication, product innovation, and brand perception influence students' fast-food purchasing behavior and provide practical insights for marketers.

Keywords: Brand Image; Consumption Behavior; Fast-Food Industry; Media Advertisement; Menu Innovation

INTRODUCTION

The fast-food industry is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world. This is due to urbanization, academic and occupational pressures, and changes in lifestyle, especially in young consumers. Recently, university students have become a primary target for fast-food markets because of their easy and cheap meal options. College students have busy schedules, and because of this, they find it easier to obtain food from fast-food restaurants. McDonald's is one of the most recognized and dominant restaurants in this industry. Because of how McDonald's promotes its food and how the food is perceived, it allows students to experience a meal, or even just have a sit-in.

Prior research has explored a variety of factors influencing consumers in the fast-food industry. In Kee et al. (2023), the authors note relationship marketing outcomes as the most important for drive-through marketing because brand loyalty, brand trust, and customer satisfaction influence purchase intention towards McDonald's in Malaysia. Earlier case studies analyzed how McDonald's adapted its business model and shaped its key success factors in the fast-food industry to meet external challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Kee, Ho et al., 2021; Kee, Long et al., 2021). Empirical research has recently been concentrated on McDonald's customer preference research, relationship marketing, and the impact of social media on the fast-food industry (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Lok et al., 2024; Teoh et al., 2024).

The fast-food industry has also seen an increase in research on sustainability. Lee et al. (2024) showed the positive impact of McDonald's sustainability accomplishments on the company's public perception, thereby creating positive brand equity for the consumers. These studies together show the importance of marketing, sustainability, and relationship management in the consumers' perception of McDonald's. From this perspective, the current research adds to the existing body of literature by analyzing the combined effect of media advertising, brand image, and menu innovation on McDonald's consumption behavior among university students.

Recent studies show that consumer behavior is being affected by external factors such as organizational practices, innovations, and shifts towards eco-sustainability. In the context of Industry 5.0 and the sustainability paradigm, studies show consumption and adoption behavioral shifts can also be explained by demographic factors and values-based driving factors (Xia et al., 2025). In a similar vein, studies on organizational initiatives show that strategy, communication, and perceived support are critical to the construction of stakeholder mental models and the behavioral responses that follow (Rubel et al., 2025). Despite the differences in context, all these studies point to the significance of strategic signaling and communication, which are pertinent to fast-food companies impacting the youth through advertising, innovation in products, and brand placement.

The digital sphere and the specialization of marketing communication have profoundly affected the eating behavior of students by impacting the choice of food. Typically, ads on social media are instrumental in garnering attention, creating brand preferences, and establishing brand loyalty in young consumers. Fast-food companies can reach students in college through various methods such as social media advertising, image-based influencer marketing, and other forms of communication on Instagram, YouTube, and other websites (Coates et al., 2019). Given the high online activity of students, exposure to these ads provides an opportunity to create brand awareness and to be motivated to visit McDonald's frequently.

Another important reason for variations in student dining behavior is menu innovation. Today's students want dining options that go beyond simply convenient. Novelty, excitement, and cultural relevance are key. To meet customer expectations, McDonald's is adding region-specific new menu items, limited-time offers, and healthier menu items. Innovations like this help McDonald's stay competitive in the fast-food market, while appealing to university students' desire for menu variety and experimentation.

Branding plays an essential role in shaping the behavior of consumers. Creating an image for a brand allows consumers to trust the brand. Consistency and affordability allow them to keep that trust. Positive brand images also create emotional connections with consumers and help them feel familiarized with the brand, and increase brand loyalty. This is especially true for the younger consumers. The perception of a positive brand image in university students is attributed to the perceived quality of the university, the social experience they have, and the satisfaction that they experience from the university. Previous research has indicated that interactions in social media and other online channels influence the way consumers think and the way they buy from McDonald's (Lok et al., 2024). Customer satisfaction and the trust of consumers in the brand are two of the most influential factors that increase the intention to buy (Kee et al., 2023).

Recent studies show that sustainability influences consumer behavior. Studies show that environmentally responsible activities such as eco-friendly packaging, sustainable ingredients, and green marketing positively affect consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions in the fast-food, beverage, fashion, and retail industries (Lee et al., 2024). In the fast-food industry, sustainability has also been shown to improve corporate reputation and consumer-brand loyalty and sustain positive consumption behavior (Lee et al., 2024; Teoh et al., 2024). A similar trend has been seen in value-added service transactions in food delivery and ride-hailing services, where the perceived value, trust, and convenience are responsible for the behavioral intention (Chen et al., 2022; Kee et al., 2023).

University students' consumption behavior, based on marketing communication, brand image, experiential value, digital engagement, and sustainability perceptions, is said to be multidimensional. Although there is an increasing body of research on consumer behavior concerning the fast-food industry, little has been done on the specific marketing mix and how its individual elements, especially media advertisement, menu innovation, and brand image, shape university students' consumption behavior towards global fast-food brands. Hence, this study seeks to determine the impact of media advertisement, menu innovation, and brand image on the consumption behavior of university students towards McDonald's. This study focuses on university students as a key consumer demographic and provides a better understanding of the relationship between marketing practices and consumption behavior in the fast-food industry.

This study holds value for research on consumer behavior by demonstrating how marketing communication, product innovations, and brand perceptions impact the consumption behaviors of university students. Moreover, the study integrates and updates research on marketing communication, product innovations, and brand perceptions by analyzing those factors in the context of quick-service restaurants (QSRs). The study also provides value by demonstrating how knowledge of advertising, menu innovations, and brand equity on consumer behavior assists marketers and managers of QSR in making informed strategic trade-off decisions. By utilizing appropriate advertising, menu innovations, and effective brand equity, QSR marketers can better satisfy the needs of students by meeting their consumption demands,

increasing their consumption of the services offered, and further enhancing their competitiveness within the QSR market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumption Behavior

Consumption behavior is essentially the role of an individual in selecting, purchasing, and disposing of products or services to meet their particular needs and wants (Chen et al., 2022). In a hyper-competitive fast-food landscape, this is caused by the fact that what fast food brings to market, convenience, value, speed, is particularly well aligned with university student values. This population is considered an important market segment for McDonald's because their busy academic schedules and lack of time to prepare meals at home lead to frequent use of fast-food restaurants (Tunde et al., 2023).

Accelerated as digital natives, the purchasing decisions are fluid and highly influenced by external factors such as online exposure and social trends rather than just physiological replenishment (Wibowo et al., 2020). Consumer behavior in the sector is greatly influenced by a brand image that also results in brand trust, which has become an important factor influencing the final choice (Sauqy & Ariescy, 2026). Thus, examination of their multidimensional consumption perspectives constitutes a necessary baseline to assess the extent to which mode-specific marketing strategies (e.g., advertising, menu innovation, and brand image) affect their loyalty and purchase intentions (Anas et al., 2023).

Hypotheses Development
Media Advertisement and Consumption Behavior

Media advertisement is a crucial component of modern marketing strategy, with social media platforms serving as a powerful tool for generating sales and fostering brand visibility (Wibowo et al., 2020). In recent years, literature in the food industry continues to reinforce social media marketing mechanisms as significant tools for shaping customer attitudes and consumption behavior, especially in competitive contexts like casual dining (Anas et al., 2023). The shift toward digitalization has changed the way fast-food companies, such as the giant McDonald's, communicate with customers. This is consistent with findings evidencing that service, quality, and location are important elements that significantly influence consumption behavior towards McDonald's in Malaysia, emphasizing the effect of all marketing mix elements (Chen et al., 2022).

Furthermore, digitization in this field requires more efforts to increase brand presence through social media activities for the university-student high-consumption market (Fatorachian et al., 2025). The role of advertising in consumption behavior is found to consistently support the notion of a positive direct impact. Specifically, research work on digital engagement mechanisms such as social media also reinforces their crucial position regarding customer receptivity and transactions in the food sector (Sarkis et al., 2025). Indeed, visits to social media advertisements have empirically been established as significantly affecting fast-food consumption behavior (Mkumbo & Mbise, 2022). Such positive effects are the result of improving customer relationship quality that ultimately influences favorable behavioral intentions, including increased consumption behavior and enhanced customer loyalty (Wibowo et al., 2020). As a result, by utilizing these digital communication avenues, fast-food retailers can successfully instill interest and impulse purchases among college students. Based on this robust foundation, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Media advertisement has a positive influence on the consumption behavior of university students toward McDonald's.

Menu Innovation and Consumption Behavior

Menu innovation is a strategic imperative in the fast-food industry, encompassing the introduction of new products, the improvement of existing items, and the diversification of menu offerings to meet evolving consumer demands (Arsat et al., 2025). Ongoing innovation is necessary for global brands such as McDonald's to appeal to university students. Particular menu innovations, such as themed menu items and creative packaging (e.g., the "Aquatic Animal Happy Meal" version), substantially increase consumer motivation and perception of products, which ultimately prompt consumption behavior among young consumers (Wibowo & Susanto, 2024). Reliable quantitative studies provide support for product innovativeness as a stimulator that enhances customer satisfaction and eventually fosters the likelihood of becoming brand evangelists through repeat visits (Manhas et al., 2024). Additionally, menu innovation (together with the brand image) significantly contributes to building a positive customer repurchase decision through mediating customer satisfaction, which is very important in retaining student customers (Fitrianti et al., 2025). The positive effect of menu innovation on consumption behavior is proven through its role in improving customer experience and satisfaction.

Reflected through the empirical context of brand evangelism, perceptions surrounding product innovativeness act as antecedents and have a positive effect on customer satisfaction, which consequently leads to brand evangelism and repeat visits (Manhas et al., 2024). In the fast-food industry, for example, product variety and quality are both seen as key elements of customer delight and satisfaction, serving as yet another reason why fast-food chains must always be changing their menu items (Tunde et al., 2025). Besides, the provision of diverse options for menus has been highlighted by studies as having a robust association with students' satisfaction in consuming food delivery services (Dsouza et al., 2025). Furthermore, the menu and packaging innovations influence customer engagement, thereby reinforcing a brand's emotional bonding with its consumer (Zikra et al., 2025). Based on these insights, the study proposes:

H2: Menu innovation has a positive influence on the consumption behavior of university students toward McDonald's.

Brand Image and Consumption Behavior

Brand image is described as the sum of perceptions and impressions that exist in the memory of consumers and represents an important intangible capital that differentiates a company from competitors. For a world-renowned brand such as McDonald's, developing and nurturing a strong brand image is crucial, especially regarding the university student segment, who prioritize reliability and consistency in dining choices. Studies focused on McDonald's in particular show that consumer behavior is largely affected by brand perception; when students perceive the brand as having consistent quality and value, their consumption behavior is significantly influenced (Chen et al., 2022).

In addition, positive consumer perceptions, such as new product offerings and unique brand image, have been shown to influence the motivation and directly stimulate the consumption behavior of young consumers (Wibowo & Susanto, 2024). Brand image's impact on consumption behavior proves to be positive and significant. Empirical evidence supports the notion that a positive brand image acts as a potent mediating factor, easily transforming marketing actions and new product ideas into solid repurchase decisions (Fitrianti et al., 2025). Nowadays, low perceived risk and high trust are the main benefits that can be obtained after building a brand; otherwise, when students trust McDonald's, it directly leads them to consumption behavior. Moreover, since there are

many places to eat for university students, it is easier to recall the image of a brand so that they can easily choose fast food, and finally, the intention to select McDonald's rather than other alternatives is high (Sauqy & Ariescy, 2026). Second, positive brand experience results in brand evangelism, where happy students become loyal to the brand and recommend it to their peers as part of a process of positive consumption behavior (Arsat et al., 2025; Zikra et al., 2025). Based on this established link, the study proposes:

H3: Brand image has a positive influence on the consumption behavior of university students toward McDonald's.

Conceptual Framework
The study framework model is depicted in Figure 1. The independent variables are media advertisement, menu innovation, and brand image. Consumption behavior is the dependent variable of the study.

Figure 1. Research Framework
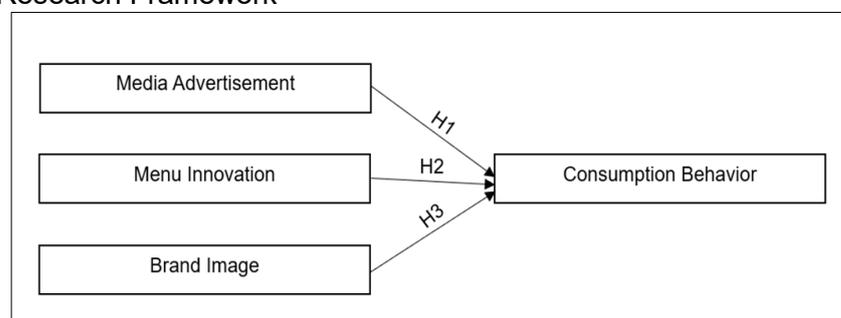
RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design
This study employs a quantitative research design to analyze the impact of media advertisement, menu innovation, and brand image on the consumption behavior of McDonald's customers. Primary data was collected through the surveys from respondents who have experienced buying food from McDonald's. The quantitative approach was chosen because of the systematic way other variables can be analyzed statistically in relation to the variables of interest.

Sample and Data Collection Procedures
The target population of this study consists of McDonald's customers, and more specifically, university students who often buy fast food. University students are the primary interest of the study because they are one of the largest demographics of fast-food buyers and possess a high degree of patronage to advertising and brand affiliation.

For data collection, a structured questionnaire was administered using an online survey system (Google Forms). The survey link was circulated through various online platforms to gather respondents who have visited McDonald's. Convenience sampling was used because of the ease of respondent access and the exploratory design of the research.

For the final analysis, we received 150 valid responses. In order to conduct the analysis, we screened the data for both completeness and consistency. All statistical analyses were done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Measurement of Variables
All of the constructs of this study were measured using a five-point Likert scale, 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Likert scale gives the respondents a certain range to measure their perceptions and attitudes towards the variables.

The measurement items were self-developed and centered on the customer experience at McDonald's and relevant marketing theories. The questionnaire was pre-tested prior to the full data collection for the purpose of determining the clarity, relevancy and readability of the items. Each construct was measured using five items. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to measure the internal consistency of the scales.

Consumption Behavior
Consumption behavior involves customers' habit of buying McDonald's products while eating out. This construct was measured with five items that reflect respondents' involvement and interests in McDonald's products. Sample item includes: "I often choose McDonald's when eating out." The reliability analysis shows that this construct demonstrates acceptable internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.796.

Media Advertisement
Media advertisement shows how promotion and advertising influence customers' cognition towards McDonald's products and services. This construct was measured using five items. Sample item includes: "I check media advertisements before buying products at McDonald's." The reliability coefficient for this construct was $\alpha = 0.804$, which shows good internal consistency.

Menu Innovation
Menu innovation refers to customers' view of the McDonald's menu, which is diverse, innovative, and appealing. Five items were used to measure this construct. Sample item: "The variety of food and beverages offered at McDonald's is up to my expectations." Reliability analysis shows a Cronbach's alpha of 0.834, which shows strong internal consistency.

Brand Image
Brand image constructs focus on customer perception of McDonald's being a likable and trustworthy fast-food company. Five items were used to evaluate this. One of the items is as follows: "The appearance of McDonald's outlets is more attractive compared to others." The reliability coefficient for this construct was $\alpha = 0.660$, which is reasonable for preliminary research.

Data Analysis
In order to study the relationship among the variables, descriptive statistics, reliability, correlation, and multiple regression analyses were used. Descriptive statistics summarize the overall responses and demographic characteristics of the respondents. Reliability analysis was used to measure the internal consistency of the scales through the use of Cronbach's alpha.

Afterwards, multiple regression analysis was done to study the impact media advertisement, menu innovation, and brand image have on consumption behavior. This type of analysis provides the study with the ability to assess the individual contribution of each independent variable in explaining changes in the dependent variable.

RESULTS

Table 1. Summary of Respondents' Demographics (N=150)

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	87	58
	Female	63	42
Age	18-21 years old	61	40.7
	22-25 years old	71	47.3
	Above 25 years old	18	12
Race	Malay	34	22.7
	Chinese	83	55.3
	Indian	33	22
Education Level	Diploma	18	12
	Bachelor's Degree	101	67.3
	Master's Degree	17	11.3
	PhD Degree	14	9.3
Frequency of Visiting McDonald's	Daily	6	4
	Several times a week	42	28
	Once a week	44	29.3
	Once a month	32	21.3
	Rarely	26	17.3

The 150 respondents' demographic characteristics are made clear in Table 1. With 87 respondents (58%) identifying as male and 63 respondents (42%) identifying as female, males are the majority in this survey. Of the respondents, the most represented age bracket is that of 22–25-year-olds (47.3%), while 18–21-year-olds (40.7%) are the second most represented group, and individuals older than 25 years are the least represented group, accounting for 12%. In the category of ethnicity, the majority of respondents are Chinese (55.3%). This is the only group that exceeds 50%; the next two largest groups are Malay (22.7%) and Indian (22%). In the category of education, respondents with a Bachelor's Degree are the most represented (67.3%). Next are respondents with a Diploma (12.0%) and with a Master's Degree (11.3%). The least represented group is respondents with a PhD (9.3%). Respondents' visits to McDonald's are as follows: most respondents visit McDonald's once a week, 29.3%. The second most represented group visits McDonald's several times a week, at a rate of 28%. Next are respondents in the category of once a month (21.3%). The least represented group visits McDonald's daily (4%), while 17.3% visit McDonald's rarely.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients, and Zero-order Correlations for All Study Variables

	Variables	1	2	3	4
1	Media Advertisement	0.804			
2	Menu Innovation	0.647**	0.834		
3	Brand Image	0.527**	0.551**	0.660	
4	Consumption Behavior	0.551**	0.542**	0.407**	0.796
	Number of Items	5	5	5	5
	Mean	4.07	4.04	4.02	4.06
	Standard Deviation	0.60	0.66	0.51	1.03

Note: N=150; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. The diagonal entries represent Cronbach's coefficient alpha.

Table 2 shows the results of descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, and the 0-order correlations among the study's variables. In terms of correlations, media advertisement and menu innovation (r = 0.647, p < 0.01) are positively and significantly correlated. Brand image is positively and significantly correlated with media advertisement (r = 0.527, p < 0.01) and menu innovation (r = 0.551, p < 0.01). Furthermore, consumption behavior is positively and significantly correlated with media advertisement (r = 0.551, p

< 0.01), menu innovation (r = 0.542, p < 0.01), and brand image (r = 0.407, p < 0.01). Thus, there is evidence to support the idea of strong consumption behavior among respondents due to high exposure to advertisements, innovative menus, and positive brand image.

Statistics for reliability analysis also provide evidence for the internal consistency of all constructs. Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.660 to 0.834, which is above the 0.60 threshold, indicating that the measurement items used in this study are sufficiently reliable. This is demonstrated in the diagonal figures in the table.

Table 3. Summary of Regression Analysis

	Variables	Consumption Behavior
1	Media Advertisement	0.322***
2	Menu Innovation	0.292**
3	Brand Image	0.077*
R^2		0.366
F-value		28.129
Durbin-Watson Statistics		1.943

Note: N=150; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

The regression analysis results are shown in Table 3. The model has an R^2 equal to 0.366, meaning that together, media advertisement, menu innovation, and brand image account for 36.6% of the variation in the respondents' consumption behavior towards McDonald's. The overall model has statistically significant scores, resulting from the F-value of 28.129.

Media advertisement has a positive and highly significant effect on consumption behavior ($\beta = 0.322$, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H1. This means that an advertising campaign that targets university students effectively will likely lead to an increase in the consumption of McDonald's products by the students. Menu innovation has a positive and significant impact on consumption behavior ($\beta = 0.292$, $p < 0.01$), thus confirming H2. This means that students will likely respond positively in terms of purchasing when new items are introduced on a menu. Brand image has a positive and a relatively low impact on consumption behavior ($\beta = 0.077$, $p < 0.05$), confirming H3. The effect of positive brand perception on students' consumption behavior is less than the effect of the other factors. The summarized output of the hypothesized model is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Structural Model
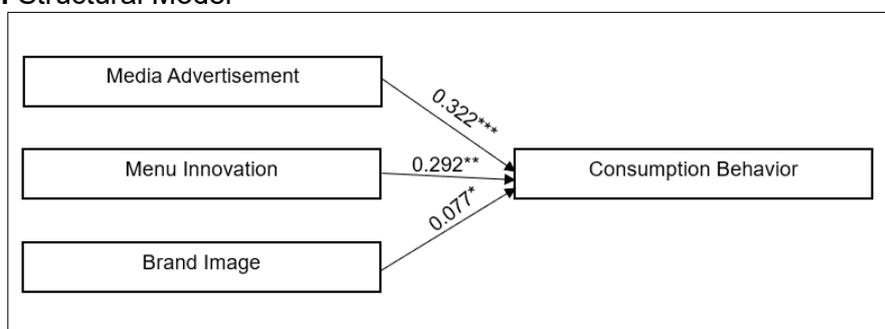
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to analyze university students' consumption behavior towards McDonald's and to isolate the determinants of media advertisement, menu innovation, and brand image. The research demonstrates that university students'

consumption behavior is affected by all three independent variables. It shows that marketing communication, product innovation, and brand perception impact consumer behavior in the fast-food industry.

Media Advertisement and Consumption Behavior
The study confirms that media advertisement positively promotes university students' consumption behavior towards McDonald's, thus confirming H1. This means that advertising promotes students' interest and awareness regarding McDonald's, persuading them to opt for the brand when deciding where to eat. The impact media advertisement has on students shows that marketing communication is imperative in the fast-food sector to influence consumers' perception and behavior.

This is in line with previous studies that shed light on the impact of digital advertising on consumption behavior. For example, Wibowo et al. (2020) point out that social media ads are instrumental in improving the visibility of a brand and building consumer participation in the digital marketplace, especially among the youth. In the same way, Anas et al. (2023) maintain that social media marketing is a critical framework for the modification of consumer behavior and buying behavior in the food service sector. The increased digitization in the fast-food sector has altered the communication strategies of brands, enabling them to adopt direct and interactive marketing communication.

In addition, the findings corroborate the empirical evidence presented in Mkumbo and Mbise (2022), confirming that the influence of social media advertising on the consumption of fast food is significant. Their research findings demonstrate that advertising initiatives can stimulate the interest of potential consumers and motivate them to visit fast-food restaurants. In the same vein, Fatorachian et al. (2025) point out that the university student population is an exposed and digitally active audience, and therefore, digital advertising techniques are very effective in this segment.

Also, the findings confirm Chen et al.'s (2022) proposition, which provides evidence of the influence of the elements of the marketing mix, specifically, the promotional mix, on the consumer behavior towards the fast-food brand, McDonald's. Through active and innovative advertising, companies can increase consumers' awareness of the brand, provide information about the company's products, and stimulate curiosity; therefore, the findings provide evidence to the advertising media as an important marketing strategy to increase visibility and promote consumption among university students.

Menu Innovation and Consumption Behavior
The results also show that menu innovation affects university students' consumption behavior positively and significantly regarding McDonald's. This means that when McDonald's develops innovative menu ideas that cater to students' evolving tastes, students will frequent and buy more from McDonald's. Menu innovation also helps McDonald's attract potential customers and keeps constant customers in a competitive industry like fast food, where they sell the same product at a similar price.

This finding also supports Arsat et al. (2025), who believe menu innovation in fast food is a strategic imperative. Menu innovation helps fast food businesses to deal with dynamic consumer tastes and preferences. Businesses in the fast-food industry also believe that improving existing products, coupled with creating new offerings, improves customer satisfaction and makes the customer experience more rewarding.

Correspondingly, Wibowo and Susanto (2024) mention that themed menus and innovative packaging can improve consumer motivation and perception towards the product, especially among young consumers. Packaging and themed menus incite

curiosity and motivate consumers to try new offerings and even return to the restaurant. Customer satisfaction is improved with innovative menus, and so are the repurchase intentions and loyalty towards the brand (Manhas et al., 2024).

Moreover, Fitrianti et al. (2025) show that menu innovation positively affects customer satisfaction and thus, repurchase decisions. Consumers are likely to maintain a good brand attitude and a repeat purchase behavior towards the brand when they note that a brand continually adds new and exciting menu items. This aligns with Tunde et al. (2025), who espoused customer delight and satisfaction creation in the fast-food industry through the variety and quality of offerings.

Establishing an emotional connection with a brand can also be achieved through innovative menus. According to Zikra et al. (2025), engaging customers and strengthening their affective ties to a brand can be achieved through innovative menus and creative packaging. The study also states that menu variety promotes food service satisfaction among students (Dsouza et al., 2025). This collective body of work supports the premise that the enhancement of the dining experience and the introduction of innovative menu items serve to drive the purchasing behavior of university students.

Brand Image and Consumer Behavior
The current study also shows that university students' brand image and consumption behavior toward McDonald's supports H3. Brand image is the consumer's perspective toward a brand, encompassing perceptions of quality, trust, and brand personality. A positive brand image fosters trust and repeat purchases.

The role of perceptions of brand value is reiterated by past studies focused on the fast-food sector and consumer psychology. The degree to which customers view the brand's quality and value as beneficial impacts the degree to which they engage with McDonald's, according to Chen et al. (2022). If customers view a brand to be of high quality, readily available, and dependably serviceable, they tend to favor the brand's offerings and hold a favorable view of the brand compared to its competitors.

Likewise, Wibowo and Susanto (2024) explain that a certain set of brand perceptions characterized by a positive attitude and image will encourage specific types of behavior, particularly with the young demographic. If students view McDonald's brand identity as praiseworthy and distinct, this incentivizes a greater intention to buy.

Additionally, Sauqy and Ariescy (2026) explain that brand trust is a vital factor when analyzing consumer behavior. A high level of perceived reliability and trust by the customers associated with a business reduces the perceived level of risk and therefore increases the likelihood of a purchase. With McDonald's, the customers' level of trust increases with the consistent service quality and brand awareness, and this leads to higher customer visits.

Moreover, positive experiences with a brand can result in brand evangelism, a phenomenon where happy customers become advocates of a brand and entice others to support it (Arsat et al., 2025; Zikra et al., 2025). This is especially true for university students, who tend to have social media interactions with their peers about meal experiences. Consequently, a robust brand image positively impacts the consumption choice of the individual and the favorable oral communication directed towards the brand. This goes on to solidify the consumption behavior of the brand.

CONCLUSION

For this study, a quantitative research design was used to evaluate how media advertisements, menu innovation, and brand images affect McDonald's purchasing behaviors of university students. The study shows how each of the three factors influences students' purchasing behaviors. Results show media advertisements to be the strongest of the three variables, followed by menu innovation, and brand image as the least influential, though still significant, variable of students' purchasing behaviors.

These results indicate how marketing communication influences students' attention and interaction with fast-food brands. Media advertisements help reach the target audience of university students through digital media. Menu innovation helps sustain consumer interest and also encourages purchasing behaviors by catering to the needs and wants of university students. Additionally, a strong brand image creates trust and encourages repeat purchases.

The results align with characteristics exhibited by Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers, who constitute a considerable part of university students. Although Gen Z consumers have a penchant for peer recommendations and user-generated content (UGC), brand visibility and consumer engagement can be improved through digital marketing with interactive and engagement-driving content. Previous research shows consumers trust UGC more than traditional advertisements (Younis, 2025). In light of this, some corporations like McDonald's have shifted their marketing schemes to consumer engagement on social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, with the use of user influencers and interactive campaigns.

The study reiterates the importance of fused advertising, brand, and product management strategies on university students' buying behavior. For fast-food brands to increase consumer interaction, they must provide effective advertising, innovation in their menu, and brand equity to remain competitive in the fast-food industry.

LIMITATION
In analyzing the consumption habits of university students in relation to McDonald's, this study has some limitations that should be considered.

First, the study has a sample size of 150 participants, and while this number is adequate for the purposes of this study, anything above this number practically guarantees a significantly higher level of confidence in the result. The participants in this study were primarily university students. This means that the results will be unable to capture the perceptions and consumption behaviors of other demographic groups, such as those of working adults, older consumers, and families with children. These groups may also exhibit different behavioral consumption patterns due to significant differences in lifestyle, purchasing power, and dining preferences.

Second, the biases that may be present in self-reported survey data must also be considered. Respondents may not be able to recall their consumption behavior with complete accuracy, meaning that their responses may be socially desirable. Subjects' personal interpretation of the survey questions may lead to them evaluating their experiences and perceptions differently, and so it is possible that the reliability of the responses has been affected negatively.

The study may also have limitations due to the geographical scope in which it is carried out. In relation to other regions or cultural settings, the findings may have no relevance due to differences in the economic reality, extent of market competition, and cultural values of the countries in which the study's findings may be applicable. Hence, the

findings of this study should be viewed within the geographical and contextual limitations provided by this study.

Data collection was based on a cross-sectional design, so the study was limited to a single point in time, which makes it impossible to analyze and understand how consumption behavior changes with the passing of time. There is scope, in future studies, to utilize a longitudinal approach to study the impacts of marketing initiatives, menu-associated innovations, and branding on customer behavior over an extensive period of time.

The study is limited to the examination of three independent variables, which are media advertisement, menu innovation, and brand image. There are other consumption behavior determinants that lie outside the investigation and may be of relevance. Inasmuch as price, taste, and convenience are determinants of students' consumption decisions, so are lifestyle and eating habits. There are opportunities for future studies to include these factors as consumption behavior determinants in the food and beverage market of students in the study.

Recognizing these limitations oriented the study to provide context for interpreting the results. Additionally, these limitations provide suggestions for future research that seeks to better understand consumer behavior in the fast-food industry.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

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