

HOW NEW MARKETING STRATEGIES APPLIED BY FAST-FOOD RESTAURANTS IN TASHKENT AFFECT GEN-Z'S PERCEPTION OF THE BRAND

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A B S T R A C T

Fast-food consumption in Tashkent has increased rapidly in recent years, leading to stronger competition among both local and international fast-food brands. As a result, restaurants have started to rely more on modern marketing strategies such as social media advertising, influencer promotions, and discount-based campaigns to attract young consumers. This study examines how these marketing strategies affect Gen-Z's perception of fast-food brands and their purchasing decisions in Tashkent.

The research is based on a quantitative survey conducted among 100 respondents aged 16–25. The findings show that the most popular fast-food restaurants are “Evos” (35%), “KFC” (21%), “Max Way” (14%), and “Oq Tepa Lavash” (10%), with an average spending of approximately 65,000 UZS per visit. The results indicate that promotions and discounts have the strongest influence on brand choice, followed by location convenience and brand reputation. While social media and influencer marketing increase brand awareness, they do not significantly affect purchasing frequency in the short term. Overall, the study suggests that Gen-Z consumers in Tashkent remain highly price-sensitive and tend to make rational, value-oriented decisions when choosing fast-food brands.

K E Y W O R D S

INTRODUCTION

Fast-food consumption in Tashkent has grown significantly over the past few years, driven by urban development, a growing young population, and the expansion of both local and international fast-food chains. Restaurants such as Evos, Max Way, KFC, and Oq Tepa Lavash have become dominant players in the market, competing not only through menu variety and food quality but also through different marketing strategies. As competition intensifies, fast-food companies have gradually shifted from traditional marketing methods, such as television advertisements, billboards, and printed media, to more modern approaches, including digital advertising, social media campaigns, influencer collaborations, and price-based promotions.

Generation Z represents one of the most important consumer groups for fast-food restaurants, as young people tend to eat outside more frequently and actively engage with digital content. However, unlike consumers in Western or European markets, Gen-Z consumers in Tashkent often face income limitations, as many of them are students or early-career workers. This economic factor plays a significant role in shaping their purchasing behavior, making affordability and convenience more important than symbolic brand image or influencer popularity.

Although influencer marketing and social media promotion have become widely used by fast-food brands in Tashkent, it remains unclear how effective these tools are in influencing actual purchasing behavior. While online exposure may increase brand awareness, it does not necessarily lead to immediate sales, especially in a price-sensitive market. Therefore, understanding which marketing strategies truly influence Gen-Z consumers' choices is essential for fast-food companies operating in Tashkent.

This paper aims to analyze how new marketing strategies applied by fast-food restaurants in Tashkent affect Gen-Z's perception of brands and their purchasing decisions. The study focuses on identifying the most influential marketing factors, examining the relationship between marketing exposure and purchase frequency, and analyzing possible gender differences in marketing responsiveness. By doing so, this research provides insight into consumer behavior in the fast-growing fast-food market of Tashkent and contributes to a better understanding of marketing effectiveness in emerging economies.

Methodology

A quantitative survey was conducted among 100 young respondents with an age range of 16-24. The main locations for surveying were chosen as the Tashkent City Park and the National Library named after Alisher Navoi. Each of the participants was interviewed individually using Google Forms. Each participant was asked about the frequency of visiting fast food restaurants, preferred brands, monthly spending per visit, influence of social media, marketing and discounts, and perceived effectiveness of marketing activities. Data were analyzed by using cross-tabulation, descriptive statistics, correlation, and analysis in Google Sheets. In addition, the additional statements were taken from the various independent sources such as "Nature.com" and "ResearchGate.com." However, the research lacks information about the financial background of each individual, which can also influence the choice of respondents.

Results

Which fast food wins?

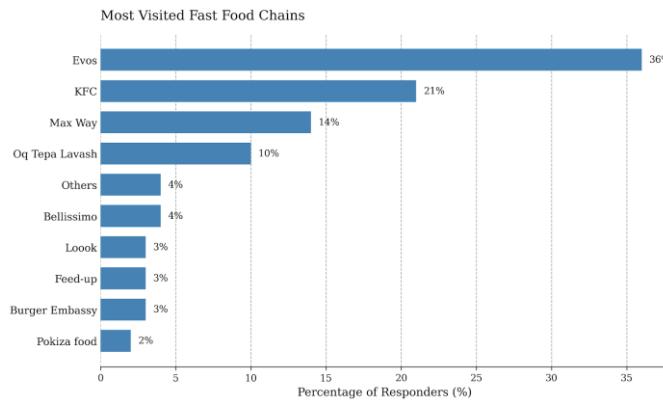


Figure 1: Most visited fast-food restaurants according to responders.

The survey, which was held in Tashkent City Park and near the National Library named after Alisher Navoi, showed that the top 4 most visited fast-food restaurants are “Evos”, “KFC” and “Max Way”, and “Oq Tepa Lavash”. These 4 fast food chains were chosen by 80,8% of whole responders, and then after them we got fast-food restaurants ‘Feed up”, “Looook”, and "Burger Embassy” with 3% of choice each. The popularity of fast-food restaurants does not strictly correspond to the number of their branches. While Evos ranks first both in popularity and branch count, this relationship does not hold consistently across other brands. For example, KFC ranks second in popularity despite having significantly fewer branches than both Evos and Oq Tepa Lavash. This indicates that the number of outlets alone does not determine consumer preference and that other factors play a more decisive role in brand choice [4], [6], [7].

What actually works? Does a social media campaign give results? What is the best way to attract Gen-Z customers to buy fast food?

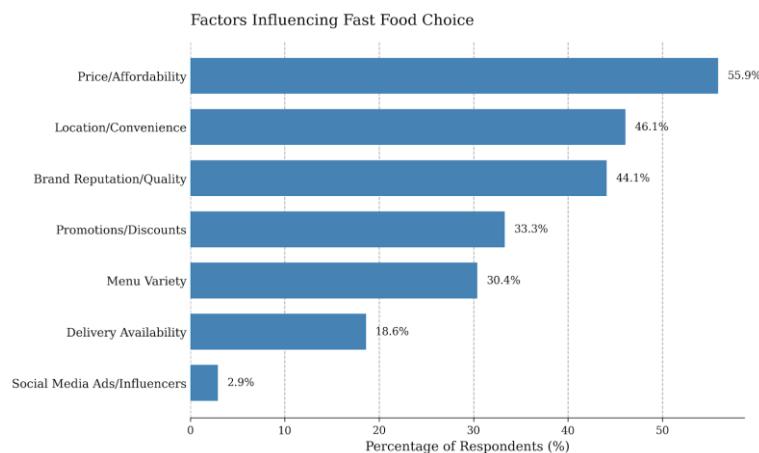


Figure 2: Top 3 factors influence the choice of fast-food restaurant of each respondent.

After interviewing respondents about the reasons for choosing these brands, the survey showed that the most choices were made on “**Promotions/discounts**”, which made up more than half respondents – **55.9%**. “**Location/convenience**” was the second reason to visit the following fast food restaurants, which accounted for **46.1%** of respondents, and **44.1%** of the respondents chose the following fast food restaurants because of their “**brand reputation/quality**.” In addition, the survey also shows that survey participants spend on average 65.000 sum per visit to a fast-food restaurant, where the minimum spending is 20.000 sum, and the maximum amount is 200.000 sum.

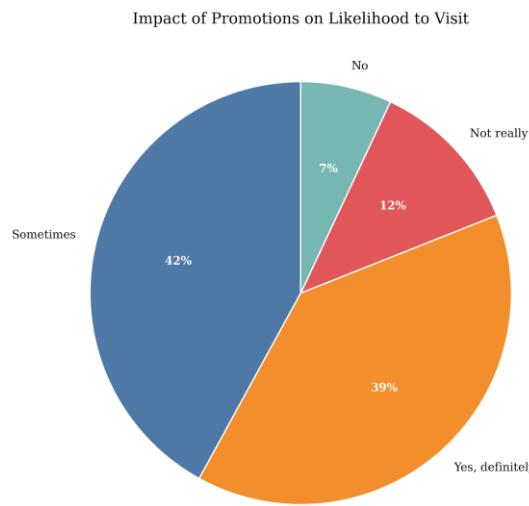


Figure 3: Answers to the question “How much promotions/discounts (e.g, “Buy-one-get-one-for-free”, “Student sets”) make you likely to visit?”

Notably, even the category “**Promotions/discounts**” falls behind these three top categories: **39,2%** of people answered that the discount offers make them likely to visit the fast-food restaurant. For example, when the respondents were asked to describe a fast-food campaign that made them visit fast-food restaurants, **27%** of the respondents replied that they were driven by the fast-food restaurants’ “**Buy-one-get-one-for-free**” campaign. Furthermore, when they saw the discount ads, they decided to try a particular fast food restaurant offer. Meanwhile, another **12%** of the interviewees preferred those brands for their other special offers, like unlimited soda. [8]

Discussion

The results show a clear pattern: Gen-Z in Tashkent is driven primarily by **price affordability, convenience, and brand reputation**, while the impact of modern digital marketing tools – particularly influencers – is present but less dominant than traditional marketing campaigns such as offering discounts, free delivery, or menu variety.

First, the dominance of Evos, KFC, Max Way, and Oq Tepa Lavash confirms that the market is controlled by a few well-established brands. However, their popularity cannot be explained solely by the number of branches. Although geographic presence contributes to perceived convenience, the findings suggest that factors such as **location accessibility, menu variety, and brand reputation**

play a more significant role in shaping consumer choice. This is supported by **Figure 2**, where location and convenience account for 46.1% of responses, brand reputation for 44.1%, and menu variety for 30.4%. For instance, while Evos benefits from a wide geographic presence with approximately 90 branches across Uzbekistan, KFC remains the second most preferred brand despite operating far fewer outlets. This demonstrates that strong brand reputation and consistent quality can compensate for limited physical presence. Therefore, marketing effectiveness and brand strength, combined with perceived convenience rather than the huge number of branches, better explain consumer loyalty in Tashkent's fast-food market [4], [7].

Second, the findings indicate that **discount campaigns are the most effective marketing tool** among Gen-Z, since most of those – who are students and early career- earn lower than the average income in Uzbekistan. The restaurant sector and digital evolution make digital marketing essential for establishing customer loyalty. ... The analysis confirms that digital marketing amplifies customer loyalty power for even small companies through dual channels, which stem from enhanced perceptions of customers in their highly rigorous research [1]. For this reason, when asked, more than half of the respondents selected promotions as their top influence, even though the restaurant they chose was not that well-known or widespread. Moreover, interestingly, “buy-one-get-one-free” deals were repeatedly mentioned. This aligns with another factor that the average spending per visit is around **65,000 UZS**, showing that young consumers remain **highly price-sensitive**, even when choosing a brand that they know well. From this, we can conclude that young people, who have a lower income, consider the lower-price or discount offers more than brand significance or popularity. Third, the weak relationship between **social media exposure** and **actual purchasing frequency** suggests that influencer marketing does not directly translate into sales in the short term. Gen-Z consumers consume online content, but this does not mean they immediately act on it or get triggered by it. The data suggest that influencer promotions raise awareness but **do not significantly alter purchasing behavior compared to discounts or the convenience of location**. However, this challenges the assumption that influencer-centered marketing is not the famous tool for this demographic, since many local fast-food restaurants choose to partner with social media influencers, such as bloggers, actors, and artists, to promote their brands in Tashkent. Specifically, it might not affect in the short term, meaning that having famous people advertising their brands might not call leads now, but in the long term, this marketing strategy helps a brand to build trust between people and its product: because those artists are the favorites of those young people, and they are watched again and again later by the young fans. For example, when young people have to decide where to go for lunch, sometimes after watching their favorite rapper eating at a certain place, they choose the same place where their favorite rapper was eating. This claim was confirmed by another study by Xiao Liu & Xiaoyong Zheng in their work “The persuasive power of social media influencers in brand credibility and purchase intention”. However, this challenges the assumption that influencer-centered marketing is ineffective for Gen-Z consumers. Indeed, existing research shows that influencer marketing plays a significant role in building long-term brand trust and credibility. De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) demonstrate that repeated exposure to influencers increases brand familiarity and positive brand attitudes, even when short-term purchase effects are limited. Similarly, Lou and Yuan (2019) find that influencer credibility and authenticity strengthen brand trust, which subsequently increases consumers' purchase intentions over time. This mechanism helps explain why young consumers may later choose a fast-food restaurant after repeatedly seeing their

favorite artists or influencers engaging with the brand, even if they do not respond immediately after the advertisement. As authors state: "Our findings indicate that influencers' authenticity exerts the most significant influence on the relationship between influencers and their followers, followed by influencers' homophily and content's informative value. The informative value of influencer-generated content played a crucial role in shaping the parasocial relationship between influencers and their followers. This, in turn, influenced how followers evaluated the credibility of the endorsed brand and their purchase intentions." [2]. As an example from Uzbekistan, the "Feed Up" fast-food chain collaborated with Samy Naceri, the well-known actor from the cult film Taxi, to promote the company by having him eat and drive a car as he did in the film. This campaign led to a noticeable increase in customer awareness, demonstrating the long-term impact of influencer marketing in Uzbekistan [3]. Fourth, gender differences appear to be limited. Both male and female respondents prioritize affordability and location similarly. This suggests that marketing strategies targeted by gender may not yield significant advantages in this market since fast-food choices are made proportionally equal. Fifth, compared to Western markets where influencer marketing and brand storytelling often dominate, Uzbek fast-food advertising relies more on direct promotions, location convenience, and tangible deals. This difference reflects variations in consumer priorities, income levels, and the relative effectiveness of traditional campaigns over digital strategies in emerging markets.

Overall, the discussion shows that Gen-Z consumers behave rationally and economically. For them, **price, convenience, and brand reliability** play a more significant role than intensive marketing campaigns. Fast-food brands – who want to achieve short-term success – need to recognize this and adjust strategies accordingly: fewer influencer collaborations and more emphasis on combo deals, discount offers, loyalty programs, and accessible locations.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the most effective marketing strategies for fast-food brands targeting Gen-Z in Tashkent are discount-based promotions, convenient locations, and a strong brand reputation. The findings clearly show that affordability plays a main role in shaping purchasing behavior, as young consumers - many of whom are students or early-career workers - remain highly price-sensitive. Special offers such as "buy-one-get-one-free" deals and value-oriented promotions have a direct and significant impact on restaurant choice. While social media advertising and influencer collaborations contribute to brand awareness, they do not significantly influence short-term purchase frequency. Instead, their role appears to be more long-term oriented, supporting brand recognition and trust rather than triggering immediate sales. This suggests that influencer marketing should be viewed as a complementary strategy rather than a primary driver of sales in the Tashkent fast-food market. The results also indicate that gender differences in marketing responsiveness do not really matter, meaning that division by gender may not provide huge advantages in this context. Compared to Western markets, where brand storytelling and influencer marketing often dominate, fast-food consumption in Tashkent is driven more by tangible value and accessibility.

In conclusion, fast-food companies seeking short-term growth in Tashkent should focus on value-based strategies, including discounts, loyalty programs, and convenient locations, while using digital marketing tools to support long-term brand image. Future research could enhance these findings by incorporating additional variables such as income levels, residential location, and food delivery platform usage to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Gen-Z consumer behavior.

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