Global Journal of Educational Thoughts
GJET vol.3, no.2, December 2026

Submitted: 12 September 2026
Reviewed: 17 September 2026
Revised: 9 October 2026
Accepted: 19 October 2026

CONSUMER PREFERENCES FOR FOOD BRANDS AMONG THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY IN UDAIPUR, INDIA: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Food preferences within a school community may be shaped by taste, perceived value for money, accessibility, health perceptions, brand image, and promotional communication. This study examines preferences for local and international food brands within the school-community context, drawing on responses from 74 participants in Udaipur, India, to explore the factors shaping their food choices. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed descriptively through frequencies and percentages. The findings indicate that taste was the most frequently selected primary factor influencing food choice (53/74, 71.6%). Local food was more commonly perceived as offering better value for money (53/74, 71.6%) and greater accessibility (64/74, 86.5%), whereas international food brands were more strongly associated with brand image (63/74, 85.1%). Perceptions of healthiness were relatively balanced, with 52.7% of respondents favouring local food and 47.3% favouring international food. Notably, 68.9% of respondents reported an equal overall preference for local and international food brands. Word of mouth (33.8%) and social media (31.1%) emerged as the most frequently selected promotional channels. Overall, the findings suggest that food preferences are shaped by multiple considerations, with local and international brands perceived to offer different advantages rather than demonstrating a clear overall preference for either category. These findings provide descriptive insights that may help food businesses better understand consumer perceptions and identify opportunities to enhance product quality, communicate value, strengthen brand identity, and improve customer engagement within the school-community market.

Keywords: *Consumer preference; school community; local food brands; international food brands; Udaipur; descriptive analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

Food markets increasingly bring local food businesses and internationally recognized brands into close competition. Consumers may choose between these options on the basis of taste, familiarity, price, convenience, perceived healthiness, brand image, and recommendations from others. These

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influences are relevant to school communities, where students' food choices may be shaped by personal preferences, peer interaction, family purchasing decisions, school routines, and exposure to digital marketing.

A school community may include students, parents or caregivers, teachers, and other school personnel. These groups can differ in their purchasing responsibilities, budgets, food routines, and use of promotional media. Students may influence snacks and meals consumed during the school day, while parents and staff may make or influence purchases for themselves and others. Examining food preferences in this setting can provide useful contextual information for food businesses and stakeholders.

Local food may be valued for familiarity, cultural connection, proximity, and affordability. International brands may benefit from recognizable identities, standardized presentation, and broader marketing visibility. These perceptions can coexist: consumers may prefer local options for everyday convenience while appreciating international brands for their image or variety. Research on food choice emphasizes the combined roles of sensory, economic, personal, social, and contextual influences (Fernqvist et al., 2024).

This study examines reported preferences for local and international food brands among respondents in Udaipur, India. It describes the factors respondents associate with food choice, their perceptions of the two categories, and the promotional channels they prefer. The study does not assume that one category is universally preferred; instead, it presents the reported patterns across several attributes.

Research Problem

The availability of local and international food brands does not by itself explain how school-community members evaluate them. It is useful to understand how taste, value for money, accessibility, perceived healthiness, brand image, and promotional communication feature in reported food choices. This study provides a descriptive account of these perceptions among the participating respondents in Udaipur, India.

Research Objectives

- To describe respondents' overall preferences for local and international food brands in Udaipur.
- To identify the food-choice factors most frequently reported by respondents, including taste, health, availability, and price.
- To describe perceptions of local and international food in relation to value for money, accessibility, brand image, trust, and healthiness.
- To describe reported advertising influence and preferred promotional channels.
- To identify practical implications for food businesses and future research involving school communities.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors Influencing Food Choice

Food choices arise from interacting influences rather than a single determinant. A review of reviews identifies product characteristics, information, price, sensory perception, individual influences, social influences, and context as recurring domains in food choice (Fernqvist et al., 2024). Taste can be especially salient because it is experienced directly, whereas price, health information, and brand associations are cues consumers use to evaluate alternatives. Ballco and Gracia (2022) similarly emphasize the importance of taste alongside health-related information.

Local Food, Familiarity, and International Brands

Food is connected to familiarity, culture, memory, and social identity. Cross-cultural research suggests that cultural background and familiarity can shape food perception and acceptability (Jeong & Lee, 2021). Zhang et al. (2022) indicate that global and local identity can operate through different pathways in attitudes toward local food. Local preference should not be reduced to price alone. International brands may also create recognizable associations through their names, presentation, and marketing. Research comparing localized and foreign restaurant brands indicates that consumer responses can reflect food quality, environment, risk perceptions, and value (Liu et al., 2022).

Value, Accessibility, and Health Perceptions

Perceived value concerns the balance between benefits and costs, which may include more than the listed price. Consumers may value taste, portion size, convenience, reliability, or familiarity alongside affordability. Accessibility can include perceived ease of obtaining food, location, time, and effort. Bogard et al. (2024) describe convenience in terms of reducing time, physical effort, mental effort, or required skills. Perceived healthiness should also be distinguished from objectively measured nutritional quality, because consumers may rely on contextual cues and beliefs when judging whether a food is healthy (Chan & Zhang, 2022).

Brand Image and Promotional Communication

Brand associations can influence perceived meaning and strength (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2013). However, a strong brand image does not necessarily translate into exclusive overall preference because consumers also consider taste, value, accessibility, and occasion. Word of mouth, social media, discounts, and celebrity endorsements provide different forms of information and social influence. A systematic review by Rini et al. (2024) documents a broad research field connecting social media with food-consumer attitudes and behaviour. Nevertheless, a preferred promotional channel is not the same as measured marketing effectiveness.

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Theoretical Perspective

The Theory of Planned Behaviour proposes that behavioural intentions are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). In food choice, attitudes may relate to taste, value, health, and brand image; subjective norms may be relevant to recommendations and peer influence; and perceived control may relate to affordability and accessibility. The present study uses this theory as a broad interpretive perspective and does not claim to test it as a causal model.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study uses a quantitative, cross-sectional descriptive survey design to document respondents' reported preferences without manipulating food choices or marketing exposure. The analysis focuses on frequencies and percentages, which are suitable for summarising the categorical responses reported in the questionnaire.

Study Population and Sample

The study focuses on the school-community context in Udaipur, Rajasthan, India. The dataset comprises 74 respondents, including 55 students (74.3%), 8 parents (10.8%), 2 teachers (2.7%), and 9 respondents classified as "others" (12.2%). The "others" category includes vendors, passers-by, and visitors to the school. These respondents were included to capture perspectives from individuals who interact with or are present within the broader school environment, thereby providing a wider understanding of consumer preferences for food brands in the local school-community context.

The study employed purposive sampling, as participants were intentionally selected based on their relevance to the research objectives and their presence within the school-community environment. The selection of students, parents, teachers, vendors, passers-by, and school visitors enabled the study to gather responses from different groups associated with the school setting. This sampling approach was appropriate for obtaining descriptive insights into consumer preferences for food brands among the selected respondents in Udaipur, India.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting primarily of close-ended questions. The questionnaire covered several aspects of food preferences, including respondent category, frequency of eating out or ordering food, primary food-choice factors, perceived value for money, accessibility, advertising influence, preferred promotional channels, overall brand preference, brand image, trust in international food brands, and perceived healthiness. The questionnaire was reviewed to ensure the clarity and relevance of its items to the study objectives. Its reliability was assessed

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using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.890, which indicates high internal consistency. Based on the reliability assessment and the methodological guidance provided by Quinlan et al. (2024), the questionnaire demonstrated satisfactory reliability for the study.

Data Collection and Ethics

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire, while books and published studies were consulted to establish the theoretical background and contextual foundation of the research. The study documented the data-collection period, the participating school or schools, and the procedures used to administer the questionnaire. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and applicable institutional ethics approval or exemption, were also addressed. For participants below the age of 18, the relevant procedures for obtaining parent or guardian consent and student assent were documented, where applicable.

Data Analysis

The responses were summarized using frequencies and percentages, with tables used to present the distribution of answers. The percentages describe the participating respondents for all members of the school community in Udaipur, India.

RESULTS

Table 1: Respondent Profile

Respondent category	Frequency	Percentage
Student	55	74.3%
Parent	8	10.8%
Teacher	2	2.7%
Other	9	12.2%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**

Students accounted for nearly three-quarters of the sample. Parents, teachers, and respondents classified as 'other' were represented in smaller numbers. Consequently, the overall findings are likely to reflect student responses more strongly than the perspectives of other school-community groups.

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Table 2: Frequency of Eating Outside or Ordering Food

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Rarely	11	14.9%
Sometimes	49	66.2%
Very often	14	18.9%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**

Most respondents (66.2%) reported that they sometimes ate outside or ordered food. A further 18.9% did so very often, while 14.9% reported doing so rarely. This suggests that eating outside or ordering food was a familiar routine for many respondents, although the questionnaire does not provide details on spending or specific food outlets.

Table 3: Main Factor Influencing Food Preference

Main factor	Frequency	Percentage
Taste	53	71.6%
Health	13	17.6%
Availability	7	9.5%
Price	1	1.4%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**

Taste was the dominant single factor, selected by 71.6% of respondents. Health was selected by 17.6%, availability by 9.5%, and price by 1.4%. The small number selecting price as the primary factor does not mean that price is irrelevant, as respondents separately identified local food as offering better value for money.

Table 4: Perceived Value for Money

Food category perceived as better value	Frequency	Percentage
Local food	53	71.6%
International food	21	28.4%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**

A majority perceived local food as offering better value for money. This reflects respondents' judgements rather than a direct comparison of actual prices, portion sizes, or product quality.

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Table 5: Perceived Accessibility and Convenience

Food category perceived as more accessible	Frequency	Percentage
Local food	64	86.5%
International food	10	13.5%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**

Local food was strongly associated with accessibility or convenience. Since actual distance, opening hours, delivery coverage, and waiting time were not measured, this result should be interpreted as a perceived advantage.

Table 6: Perceived Influence of Advertising

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	42	56.8%
Yes	20	27.0%
No	12	16.2%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**

More than half of respondents (56.8%) reported that advertising sometimes influenced their food choices, while 27.0% answered yes and 16.2% answered no. These responses indicate that advertising may be one of several cues used in food choice, but they do not show whether advertising exposure resulted in a purchase.

Table 7: Preferred Promotional Channel

Promotional channel	Frequency	Percentage
Word of mouth	25	33.8%
Social media	23	31.1%
Discounts/offers	20	27.0%
Celebrity endorsement	6	8.1%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**

Word of mouth was the most frequently selected channel, followed by social media and discounts or offers. Celebrity endorsement was selected by 8.1%. The relatively close percentages for the three leading categories indicate that respondents reported a range of communication preferences.

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Table 8: Overall Preference for Local and International Food

Overall preference	Frequency	Percentage
Both equally	51	68.9%
Local food	14	18.9%
International food	9	12.2%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**

Most respondents (68.9%) reported equal overall preference for local and international food. More respondents selected local food than international food when choosing a single category, but neither single-category option attracted a majority. The pattern suggests that local and international options coexist in respondents' preferences.

Table 9: Perceived Brand Image

Food category perceived to have stronger brand image	Frequency	Percentage
Local food	11	14.9%
International food	63	85.1%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**

International food brands were perceived to have a stronger brand image by 85.1% of respondents. This indicates a substantial perceived image advantage, but brand image should not be treated as equivalent to overall preference, trust, product quality, or repeat purchasing.

Table 10: Trust in International Food Brands

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Both equally	36	48.6%
Yes	26	35.1%
No	12	16.2%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**

Almost half of respondents (48.6%) reported equal trust. A further 35.1% answered 'yes' and 16.2% answered 'no' to the question about trust in international food brands.

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Table 11: Perceived Healthiness

Food category perceived as healthier	Frequency	Percentage
Local food	39	52.7%
International food	35	47.3%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**

Perceived healthiness was almost evenly divided, with 52.7% selecting local food and 47.3% selecting international food. This small descriptive difference does not establish objective nutritional superiority for either category.

DISCUSSION

Importance of Taste

Taste was selected as the main food-choice factor by more than seven in ten respondents. This is consistent with research emphasizing the central role of sensory experience in food decisions (Ballco & Gracia, 2022; Fernqvist et al., 2024). For businesses serving school-community customers, product consistency and acceptability should therefore be central priorities. Health messages, discounts, and branding may attract attention, but they are unlikely to sustain demand if the food does not meet taste expectations.

Only one respondent selected price as the main factor, but this should not be interpreted as evidence that price is unimportant. Respondents may consider price together with taste, portion, convenience, and perceived quality rather than identifying it as the single most important factor.

Local Food's Perceived Value and Accessibility

Local food was more frequently perceived as better value and more accessible. These responses may reflect familiarity, availability, proximity, or perceived affordability, although the survey does not distinguish among these explanations. The pattern aligns with research that treats price and convenience as important influences on food choice (Bogard et al., 2024; Fernqvist et al., 2024). Local businesses may wish to preserve these perceived strengths while maintaining quality and consistent service.

International Brands' Image Advantage

The international-brand advantage in perceived image contrasts with the finding that most respondents reported equal overall preference for local and international food. This is not necessarily contradictory: brand image concerns associations and impressions, whereas overall preference may

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also reflect taste, value, convenience, familiarity, and occasion. Consumers may appreciate an international brand's image while continuing to choose local food for everyday needs.

This interpretation is compatible with research indicating that local and global identities can coexist and that consumer responses to local and foreign restaurant brands depend on several attributes (Liu et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). Local businesses may therefore benefit from strengthening brand identity and presentation without neglecting the value and accessibility that respondents associate with local food.

Health Perception and Trust

The near-even split in perceived healthiness does not demonstrate that either category is nutritionally superior. Perceived healthiness can be influenced by beliefs and contextual cues rather than objective nutritional composition alone (Chan & Zhang, 2022). Food businesses should provide accurate information about ingredients, allergens, hygiene, and nutrition where appropriate, and avoid implying that local or international origin automatically guarantees healthfulness.

Consumer trust represents another important consideration in understanding food preferences. Differences in trust may reflect variations in respondents' experiences, perceptions of product quality, familiarity with brands, and confidence in food safety and business practices. Nevertheless, conclusions regarding the level and determinants of trust should be drawn cautiously, particularly when the precise wording of the relevant questionnaire item has not been reported alongside the results.

Promotional Channels and Advertising

Word of mouth and social media were the most frequently selected promotional channels, while discounts and offers were also prominent. These findings suggest that interpersonal recommendations, digital communication, and price incentives may all be relevant to respondents. However, preferred channels are not necessarily the most effective channels. Businesses should evaluate campaigns using observable measures such as reach, engagement, redemption, sales, and repeat purchasing rather than relying only on stated preferences (Rini et al., 2024).

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

- **Local food businesses:** Maintain perceived strengths in value and accessibility while investing in consistent taste, cleanliness, service reliability, and clear brand presentation.
- **International brands:** Do not assume that strong brand image guarantees exclusive preference. Communicate product quality and value and ensure the consumer experience supports brand promises.

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- **All food businesses:** Use customer feedback to monitor taste, portion, value, and service experience. Clear and accurate information can help customers make informed choices.
- **Marketing teams:** Consider word of mouth, social media, and offers as channels worth evaluating. Measure campaign outcomes rather than treating stated channel preferences as proof of effectiveness.
- **Schools and families:** Encourage critical evaluation of food advertising and accessible, evidence-based information about ingredients and nutrition. Avoid unsupported claims that one brand origin is inherently healthier.
- **School-community stakeholders:** Use the findings as a local starting point for discussion rather than a city-wide benchmark, given the small and student-dominated sample.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Maintain and monitor taste consistency through routine customer feedback and product-quality checks.
2. Communicate value clearly by explaining price, portion, ingredients, and quality rather than competing on low price alone.
3. Strengthen brand recognition through consistent names, visual identity, menus, packaging, and service standards.
4. Provide accurate information about ingredients, allergens, hygiene practices, and nutritional attributes where relevant, and avoid unsupported health claims.
5. Evaluate word-of-mouth, social-media, and promotional-offer activities using observable outcomes such as engagement, redemption, sales, and repeat visits.
6. Encourage food and advertising literacy among students and families without assuming that either local or international brands are always preferable.
7. Conduct future surveys with clear eligibility criteria and broader representation from students, parents or caregivers, teachers, and other school personnel.
8. Record the exact questionnaire items and document consent, confidentiality, and applicable ethics procedures, especially where student participants may be minors.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample is small (N = 74), and students represent 74.3% of respondents.
- The eligibility of respondents classified as ‘other’ should be confirmed against the school-community definition.
- The data are self-reported and may be affected by recall, interpretation, or social-desirability bias.
- The study is limited to Udaipur and should not be generalized to all consumers or all school communities in the province.
- Perceived value, accessibility, healthiness, and brand image were not verified using objective price, distance, nutrition, or brand-equity measures.
- The study uses descriptive analysis only; the percentages describe this sample and do not establish statistically significant differences or causal relationships.

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FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could use a larger and more balanced sample of students, parents or caregivers, teachers, and other school personnel, with clearly documented eligibility and recruitment procedures. The questionnaire could include exact item wording and validated multi-item measures for perceived value, brand image, trust, and purchase intention. Objective information about menu prices, portion sizes, ingredients, nutrition, accessibility, and purchasing frequency could complement perceptions. Repeating the survey across schools or cities would help determine whether the patterns observed in this sample are context-specific. Campaign tracking could also examine whether reported preferences for promotional channels correspond with actual customer engagement and purchasing behaviour.

CONCLUSION

This study describes food-brand preferences among 74 respondents in Udaipur, India. Taste was the most frequently selected primary food-choice factor. Local food was more often perceived as better value for money and more accessible, while international food brands were strongly associated with a stronger brand image. Perceived healthiness was almost evenly divided, and most respondents reported equal overall preference for local and international food. Word of mouth, social media, and discounts or offers were the most frequently selected promotional channels.

The findings highlight the multidimensional nature of food choice, suggesting that respondents may appreciate local food for its value and accessibility while associating international brands with a stronger brand image. Food businesses should therefore prioritise taste and product quality, communicate value propositions effectively, establish credible brand identities, and assess the effectiveness of promotional activities based on measurable outcomes. These findings offer useful insights for food businesses and school-community stakeholders in Udaipur, India, by highlighting consumer perceptions and identifying potential areas for improving product positioning, marketing strategies, and customer engagement.

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