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Debunking Misnomers and Cultural Narratives Surrounding Foreign Fast Food Chains in Pakistan

Nomeeta Ghazanfar

Graduate Scholar of MS in Applied Anthropology, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bahria University E-8 Campus, Islamabad.
nomeetamalik123@gmail.com

Iqra Riasat*

Graduate Scholar of MS in Applied Anthropology, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bahria University E-8 Campus, Islamabad. Corresponding Author Email: zoyariasat12@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study explored the perception of people on misnomers surrounding foreign food chains operating in Islamabad, Pakistan. Due to current issue of Israel and Palestine international food industry is also in risk and facing issues like boycott as many of international food chains are owned by Jews. These food chains are not only known for their quality and uniqueness in Pakistan, but they also confront particular difficulties because of misnomers, or misconceptions, that surround their business practices. The purpose of this study was to investigate how consumers view these misnomers and how they affect their purchasing decisions, brand loyalty, and trust. This study involved Qualitative research method. Data included secondary and primary data. Customers of food chains were interviewed with convenience sampling technique and managers of international food chains with purposive sampling technique in Islamabad. The study's focal point was Islamabad, a burgeoning metropolis with a varied populace. By investigating the underlying factors which contribute to these perceptions such as cultural biases and marketing strategies, this study intended to offer a thorough grasp of how these misnomers impact consumer behavior and decision-making in Islamabad, Pakistan. In order to close the gap between brand perception and consumer comprehension, the study aimed to offer insights to both consumers and global food chains. The results of this study added to the expanding corpus of research on global branding and customer behavior, with useful ramifications for multinational food chains looking to modify their tactics in culturally sensitive regions like Pakistan.

Keywords: Boycott, Consumer Behavior, Islamabad, Misnomer, International Food Chains, Culture

Introduction

Eating out is becoming more and more common these days, especially with the younger generation, as it's quick, easy, and available to practically everyone. As a result of the growing demand from customers, numerous foreign food chains are opening franchises in Pakistan. Mostly fast food chains in Pakistan are of international brands, and these international food chains are most preferred among the new generation. Pakistanis spend almost 40% of their household income on food, even though their nation is still developing. As a result, the food industry is booming, and foreign restaurant chains have opened quickly to



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establish franchises in Pakistan (Shahzadi, 2018).

It was recently found that the fast-food business, which employs 17% of Pakistan's manufacturing workforce, is currently the country's second-largest industry. Fast food has supplanted home-cooked meals and traditional cuisine, primarily because it is more convenient in today's hectic lifestyle. A restaurant's goal is to increase customer happiness through efficient marketing and management practices. Multinational fast food chains have opened offices in Pakistan, just like in other developing nations. Customers are the most important marketing instrument that influences and evaluates the quality and image of the restaurant, according to customers as the most significant marketing tool.

Despite having a late start in Pakistan, the trend of international restaurants has been extremely popular because of the local cuisine and culture. The restaurants' primary goal is to keep their patrons happy, which is mostly dependent on the cost and caliber of their meals. The success of international food chains like McDonalds and KFC and other validates the growing popularity of fast food in Pakistan (Austrade, 2009). Customer satisfaction is also significantly influenced by factors including location, cleanliness, advertising, and surroundings. In order to cater to a wide range of consumers, particularly the urban middle and upper classes, many chains have modified their menus to suit regional preferences while preserving their global brand identity. These franchises' quick growth is a reflection of Pakistani consumers' growing exposure to international culture through media, travel, and the internet, in addition to shifting eating habits and lifestyles. Nevertheless, despite their widespread appeal, these food chains frequently give rise to a number of false beliefs and presumptions about their ownership, the source of their food, and cultural compatibility, all of which influence how customers view and interact with them. The focus of this study is on consumers and their perception towards misleading names associated with international food chains operating in Pakistan. This research attempts to give a detailed knowledge of ground reality check for international fast food chains specially McDonalds, KFC, Tim Hortons and Hardees which are popularly known in international food market, whether they are owned by Jewish or not. Secondary data for finding out ownership, operating and beneficiary for international food chains in Pakistan will be collected and consumer's perception will be analyzed by collecting primary data. In order to examine consumer perceptions and gain insight into how the general public perceives these brands in terms of authenticity, trust, and possible cultural associations, primary data will also be gathered. A fuller image of the actual dynamics at work for these international chains in the Pakistani market will be provided by this thorough approach, which will assist in highlighting any disparities or misunderstandings among customers.

Methodology

The current study is exploratory in nature as it explored the perception of consumers towards misnomers associated with international food chains. Explanatory research is a research which is used to gain better a better understanding of a problem or issue. It is used to refine a general idea into more specific research problem. This study involves a Qualitative research method as this method seeks an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon within natural



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settings.

Locale

Locale selected for this study included MNC's for primary data from Islamabad which are from following sectors:

Table 2 Locales for Interviews

S/N	Food chains	Location
1.	KFC	Centaurus
2.	Hardees	F7
3.	McDonald's	F9
4.	Tim Horton's	F9/G9

Sampling Technique

Sampling in qualitative research prioritizes information richness, diversity, and depth over statistical representativeness. In this study convenience sampling technique and purposive sampling technique is used. These method allows to select participants who are easiest to reach, available, or willing to take part, rather than randomly choosing from the entire population.

Sample Size

Sample size includes 4 managers from each foreign food brand and 4 customers of each foreign brand through convenience sampling technique. In total sample size is 20.

Results

This study explored consumer perceptions towards international food chains which are operating in Islamabad, Pakistan. The findings reveal a complex interplay between food brand identity, consumer awareness, and perceived authenticity influenced by socio-cultural and psychological factors. The results shows that significant portion of consumers in Islamabad associate International food chains with their hygiene and super quality. It's interesting to note that many respondents were unaware of the fact that a number of so-called "International" companies were actually locally owned franchises. This discrepancy between perception and reality suggests that branding misnomers are common and have a significant impact on how consumers behave. Based on analysis, there are two ways of explaining the trends of consumer participation in boycotting international food chains. The first view perceives boycott as merely an expression of emotions which is temporary and seasonal according to situation. Few people show anger and are upset about the cruel action of a certain group or people who just boycott Israel food production their stance is why no to other stuff which are also Israeli products like clothing, groceries and technological stuff. The second view describes a way for people to stand together against very bad actions that harm human rights.

These findings of this study align with the previous research conducted in Malaysia University Kebangsaan (2017) where consumers moral response and choices related factors, which include religious affiliation and obligation, type of



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product and link of egregious conduct towards particular consumer boycott practice. This study highlighted similar consumer patterns to this current study. Few responses from previous study mentioned similar concerns regarding this study's objectives and question patterns. Few respondents explained that: *"For me, the McDonald's boycott campaign is a kind of emotional way which is temporary and in the end we are actually the one who lose.... I heard that because of the boycott there are a few (outlets) closed, people lose their jobs. Those are all Malays, Malaysian."* (Ishak, 2018)

Similarly another respondent expresses his stance like: "as in my case, I do boycott all the items in the boycott list. Nevertheless, there are certain things which I cannot control from not using it and I cannot exercise my boycott on that particular items. For example, when purchasing a laptop, usually a laptop with Intel chips would perform much better and more durable compared to AMD. AMD is not created by Israel and it only last for 2 years. On the contrary, if I bought Intel it probably last for more than 5 years. So I have to think for long term which one would most benefit me. Of course I will select Intel. Other product, sometimes I have no choice due to circumstances. For example my sister said to me, let's drive thru to McDonald's, then I would just go for drive thru." (Ishak, 2018)

For foreign food brands ownership and structure, secondary data was collected through managers of food chains who stated that who owned these foreign food chains in Pakistan and are they linked to any foreign country for investments or not. Through detailed interviews it is come to know that Pakistani McDonalds, KFC, Hardees and Tim Hortons are owned by Pakistani business men and products used for food items are totally local like sabroso. Through customers of food chains it is came to know that mostly people are consuming because of family and peer pressures. In this busy life, people choose convenient and high quality food for their children and they are used to it and alternative local food chain's taste don't fit for them as they stated. One qualitative research technique for finding, examining, and summarizing patterns (themes) in data is thematic analysis. This study used theme for its analysis. Following are the themes that were made using respondent's knowledge and experience.

1. Perception of Authenticity

For international food brands authenticity is not just associated with taste but also through their food brand image and their cultural representation as well. Consumers develop trust and believe towards a food brands when a brand genuinely represents a specific culture or tradition. But few misnomers like local food brands been marketed as foreign brand and disguising their true ownership, this can distort this perception which will further lead to confusion, misnomers and skepticism among consumers. Respondent (customer of KFC Islamabad E11) pointed out:

"People of our society don't know much about real ownership and from where the franchise has been monitored. Students must do research and spread awareness among other people as well. This confusion exists because of such misnomers. People are educated but they do not put efforts to research about the truth and spread awareness among their surrounding people"



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2. False Narrative Through Social Media

A narrative is referred to a story, idea or experience which is shared to convey a specific message or perspective. In simple terms, it's the way something is presented that influences how people perceive or comprehend it. On social media such as Instagram, Facebook and twitter people follow what majority says for example our influencers, podcasts though it doesn't matter if they are prevailing authentic or right news or not they will still follow. According to this concept Respondent, manager of Tim Hortons for my secondary data said:

"Food bloggers visits us but with masks on their face and hide that they visit such branches and still participating in boycotting our brands on social media which automatically misguide people who follow them. They promote CBTL (coffee beans and tea leaf) but they don't promote Tim Hortons just because of this misnomers circulating about us. No one knows the actual reality."

3. Incomplete Boycott: Balancing Values with Practicality

It reflects the struggle many families face when they try to align their ethical or political beliefs with the realities of daily life. It highlights the tension between personal or political values and practical realities of modern living like convenience, time constraints and children preferences. Respondent customer of McDonalds food chain said:

"In today's busy life and schedule we prefer quicker efficient and convenient food choices for our kids like drive through McDonalds and KFC. Also our kids are used to like taste of these food chains. Though we tried to switch over local food chains like but our kids demand that quality and taste and also McDonalds and KFC kids meal and toys with meals are more attractive for our children which they wish to get with their every meal. In current situation of Gaza we do try to boycott for ourselves as much as we can do but for children it is difficult for us to provide same taste and choices through local food chains."

4. Cultural Localization and Branding

It refers to how international food chains adopt their image, language and marketing strategies to align with local culture, region and consumer expectations of country 54 they are operating in. in context of Islamabad it includes halal certifications and adopting local customs, using local frozen items and promoting local brands. Based on this theme food manager of McDonalds Islamabad mentioned:

"As we present our own country we work in our country territory so it's our duty to represent our cultural and country's identity. For customers satisfaction, our uniforms our language preferences and most importantly using halal and local products from our own local market like we use frozen items from sabroso. We totally use this local brand and very few people are aware of it though we still try to maintain our quality and taste but this boycott situation is making difficult for us. We clearly claims that we do not linked to Jews or any foreign country for funding or investment. It's totally our own investments and branches all over Pakistan are owned by Pakistani ownerships."

5. Economic Tension

The term "economic tension" refers to Conflicting pressures between national values (such economic independence and support for local industry) and the



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financial gains from having foreign fast food franchises, including jobs and investment. International food chains operating in Pakistan employ thousands of locals which helps in contribute to the economy through taxes the challenge is to balance people's patriotic feelings with the practical need to support the economy. Respondent customer of *Hardees* said:

“Pakistani food chains are not connected to foreign countries as they produce their own products. If we participate in such boycott it will harm our own country economy and our employees labor. Many religious protestors have been protested to boycott such brands but people still consume such brands to satisfy their hunger and taste. In many food brands people still prioritize to have Pepsi instead of next cola as a drink and I have seen this from my own eyes. And brands still have these in stock back in their cabins.”

Discussion

A misnomer refers to a term or label that is incorrectly or misleadingly applied to a person, concept, or object. In the context of international food chains operating in Pakistan, it refers to false or misleading beliefs consumers may hold about the food brand, its ownership or cultural alignment. Such misnomers can influence how people evaluate the brand, its authenticity or acceptability towards local culture. Example for such misnomer is believing that a foreign franchise in Pakistan is still operated and owned by Western parent company when in fact it may be locally owned under a licensing agreement. It represents culture misalignments as well, thinking a global brand inherently promotes western values or is culturally insensitive, even if it has localized its operations or functions.

The ongoing war between Israel and Palestine has had a profound impact on global socio-political dynamics in recent times, which has resulted in notable implications for consumer behavior, especially in Pakistan. Different reasons could reflect conflicts among countries as struggles over the ownership, economic pressure and religious conflicts cause tension in relations among them (De Nisco, 2016). It is observed that political disputes between countries have a major influence on the purchasing habits of consumers in these difficult situations. Regarding boycotts, it is demanded of Muslims everywhere that they carry out their religious duty by abstaining from supporting specific foreign companies that would be considered offensive to any Muslim community. Decisions of consumers of buying imported products have been wildly considered. “when several people refrain from buying products, due to the same act or behavior, but not for specific reasons” this is known as boycott (John and Klein, 2003).

Consumers are increasingly using boycotts as a form of economic voting against companies that they believe to be unethical. The Indonesian populace is actively boycotting pro-Israel goods in the current boycott dispute. This is demonstrated by several food brands, such as McDonald's and KFC, that are purported to give free meals to Zionist soldiers (Mizardie, 2023). Examining how Pakistani customers develop their opinions of foreign businesses and the degree to which these are shaped by false information rather than confirmed facts is even more important in such a politically heated environment (Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011).

Brand boycotts have a big effect on companies and frequently have long-term



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effects on performance and brand loyalty. Boycotts have the power to sabotage brand loyalty and affect both present and future consumers. customer boycotts, for example, can cause turbulence for targeted businesses and have a major effect on brand loyalty based on customer demographics, religiosity, and social capital, according to a London study on transnational consumers (Al Serhan, 2017). Boycotts stemming from religious or ethical disagreements can harm a company's brand image and customer loyalty. Boycotts may have direct effects on the economy, including a decline in sales. For instance, Chinese consumers' boycotts of Japanese goods during political unrest significantly decreased Japanese brands' market share, underscoring the financial susceptibility of companies in such circumstances.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore consumer perception regarding the common misnomers about international food chains operating in Islamabad, Pakistan. The findings revealed that a considerable number of people who consume international food brands hold incorrect assumptions about ownership and operational authenticity of these international food chains in Islamabad. A considerable number of respondents believed these food chains are directly operated by foreign entities, without acknowledging role of local franchises and licensing agreements. The results are consistent with previous studies which indicates that cultural perception and branding have a big impact on customer behavior, particularly in emerging markets. The analyzed responses reveal a complex and multifaceted understanding of consumer perception toward international food chains operating in Islamabad, Pakistan. More and more people choose to buy or boycott certain brands based on what they believe about brand's political and cultural connections, rather than their own experiences with products of food chains or quality of them. The findings imply that symbolic boycotts on social media can function more as identity expressions than as useful instruments for economic change. The study shows that international food brands should be more clear and honest in how they present themselves. It also shows that consumers need to be more informed and aware so they don't judge and make decisions based on the brand's name or appearance. Media literacy, education literacy and social exposure play a critical role in shaping such misnomers for international food chains operating in Islamabad. Overall, this study brings to light the intricate interplay between consumer psychology, cultural narratives, global politics and brand identity in shaping people perception towards international food chains.

Limitations and Recommendations

The study was limited to a specific demographic and geographical area, which may not represent the broader perspective of consumers on misnomers for international food chains globally. Future studies could expand to other cities in Pakistan to explore more about similar perceptions and misnomers. Clear disclosure of local partnerships and community engagement can help rebuilt trust, correct misnomers, and position the brand as an authentic participation in the local economy. Focused group discussions can be conducted in future studies to gain deeper qualitative insights. FGD will allow for more richer exploration for intersubjective realities and collective narratives that may not be captured



through interviews and surveys.

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