

Hungry, Hurried, and at the Store: Exploring On-the-Go Meal Choices

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to assess the on-the-go meals of Seven-Eleven stores in General Santos City. The primary objective of this study was to examine the factors that influence on-the-go meal choices among students, working professionals, and busy consumers. This study used a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative part explored the On-the-Go Meal Choices of Seven-Eleven among selected students, working professionals, and busy consumers. Additionally, the qualitative approach was used to the using a structured survey, while the qualitative part gathered deeper insights through guided interviews. Together, these methods provided a fuller understanding of the factors influencing hurried, on-the-go meal decisions among students, working professionals, and busy consumers. Participants students, working professionals, and busy consumers were selected using simple random sampling. An adopted survey questionnaire was utilized to gather data from the respondents. The results indicate that all nine factors assessed were perceived as moderately important in influencing food choices among the respondents. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of food choice, where sensory gratification and emotional satisfaction often take precedence over health and ethical considerations, highlighting the need for more integrated and accessible health promotion strategies. Further, the qualitative findings highlight that on-the-go food choices are shaped by time pressure, emotional states, and environmental cues, with health often taking a backseat to convenience and sensory appeal. While respondents acknowledge the importance of better choices, rushed decisions and mood-driven behaviors tend to dominate. These patterns suggest the need for strategies that integrate emotional regulation, improved food environments, and time-efficient health education to support better eating habits in fast-paced contexts.

Keywords: On-the-go meals, students, working professionals, busy consumers, Seven-Eleven

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced world, modern consumers are increasingly making food choices driven by convenience, time constraints, and hunger. With lifestyles becoming more hectic, particularly among urban dwellers and working professionals, on-the-go meals—ranging from ready-to-eat packaged items to prepared foods from convenience stores—have emerged as essential components of daily nutrition (Statista, 2024). This growing demand reflects a shift away from traditional, home-cooked meals toward more accessible, portable options that cater to immediate hunger and time efficiency. Consequently, food retailers have expanded their offerings, blurring the lines between grocery and quick-service outlets.

This shift in eating behavior also reveals deeper concerns about nutritional quality, decision-making environments, and consumer priorities. Research indicates that impulsive food choices made in-store are often influenced by environmental cues such as product placement, packaging, and perceived value (Crawford et al., 2023). Moreover, the intersection of hunger and hurriedness can undermine consumers' intentions to eat healthily, leading to choices that prioritize speed and satiety over nutrition. Public health advocates have raised alarms about this trend, linking it to increased consumption of ultra-processed foods and the potential for long-term health consequences (Monteiro et al., 2023).

Understanding the dynamics of on-the-go meal choices is critical for stakeholders in both the food retail and public health sectors. Investigating how hunger, time pressure, and retail contexts interact can inform the design of healthier retail environments, including nudges for better decision-making and improved access to nutritious grab-and-go options. As convenience continues to redefine the modern food landscape, identifying both the drivers and implications of these choices remains essential to shaping sustainable and health-conscious food systems (Bianchi et al., 2024).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study was to examine the factors that influence on-the-go meal choices among students, working professionals, and busy consumers. Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. Identify the key food choice factors among students, working professionals, and busy consumers.
2. Assess the impact of urgency and time constraints on the selection of on-the-go meals.
3. Analyze the influence of the retail environment (e.g., product placement, availability, and marketing) on consumers' purchasing decisions regarding on-the-go meals.
4. Evaluate the level of perceived satisfaction and post-purchase reflection among different consumer groups following immediate food choices.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aimed to examine the factors that influence on-the-go meal choices among students, working professionals, and busy consumers. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What factors influence the food choices of students, working professionals, and busy consumers?
2. How do urgency and time constraints impact the selection of on-the-go meals?
3. How does the retail environment influence the purchasing decisions of consumers when selecting on-the-go meals?
4. What is the level of perceived satisfaction and reflection after making immediate meal choices among different consumer groups?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focused to explore the On-the-Go Meal Choices of 7-Eleven which involved 100 students, 100 working professionals and 100 busy consumers from N. Cahilsot Central Elementary School, General Santos City National High School, Holy Trinity College and Brigada Mass Media Corporation all located in the city of General Santos.

Significance of the Study

This study provides valuable insights into the on-the-go meal choices of consumers who frequent 7-Eleven stores, particularly students, working professionals, and busy individuals from selected institutions in General Santos City. By understanding the factors that influence their food decisions—such as time pressure, environment, and personal preferences—this research can help convenience store operators, nutrition advocates, and policymakers develop strategies to promote healthier and more satisfying food options. Additionally, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on consumer behavior in fast-paced retail settings.

Theoretical Framework

This study examines on-the-go meal choices through the lenses of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Time-Scarcity Decision Theory. TPB posits that food decisions are shaped by attitudes toward food (e.g., preference for convenience or health), perceived social norms, and perceived behavioral control, such as time,

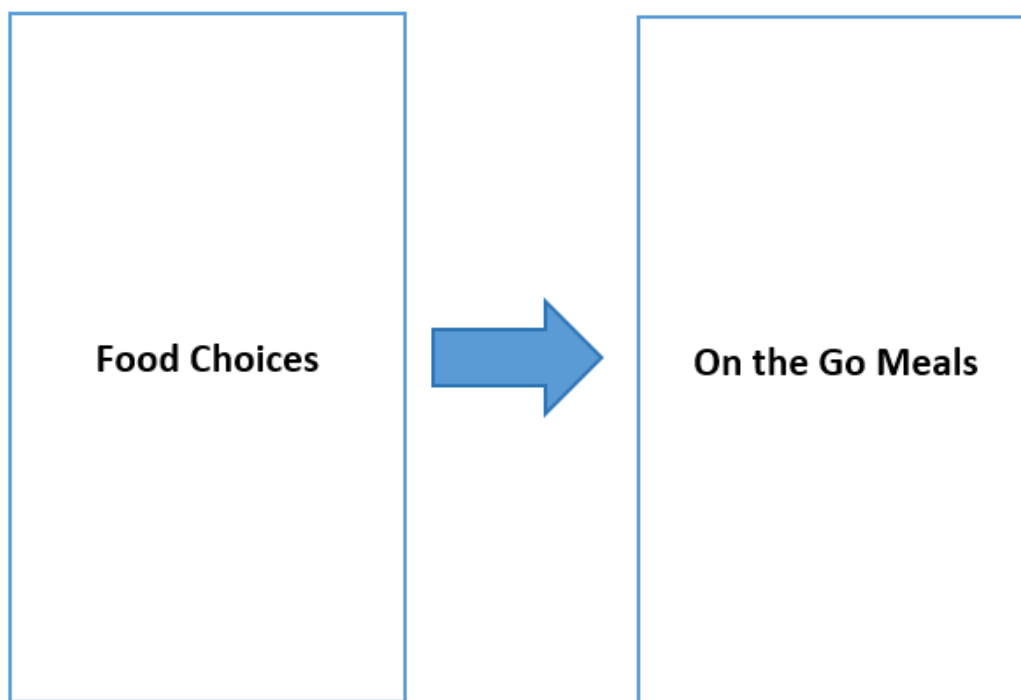
affordability, and availability. These components collectively influence consumers' purchase intentions and actual behavior.

Meanwhile, Time-Scarcity Decision Theory explains how urgency and limited cognitive resources under time pressure lead to heuristic or impulsive food choices. In such contexts, consumers tend to prioritize familiarity, visibility, and speed over nutritional value or deliberation.

By integrating these frameworks, the study explores how students, professionals, and busy consumers navigate personal, social, and situational factors when selecting convenience meals—informing both public health and retail strategies aimed at fostering healthier on-the-go consumption patterns.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework outlines the key variables affecting on-the-go meal choices:



Operational Definition of Terms

Convenience. One of the primary factors assessed through the FCQ, referring to the ease and speed of obtaining and consuming meals, prioritized by respondents in hurried conditions.

Ethical concern.

Ethical Concern: Ethical concern in this study refers to the principles of ensuring informed consent, protecting participant privacy, and minimizing harm while conducting research on consumer behavior, particularly in relation to food choices and retail environments.

Familiarity. The tendency of respondents to select known or previously experienced food products to minimize decision-making effort when hurried.

Health: In this study, health is defined as the overall physical well-being of an individual, including the absence of illness and the presence of balanced nutrition and energy levels as influenced by dietary choices.

Mood: Mood refers to the emotional state or feelings experienced by individuals at the time of making meal choices, such as stress, hunger, or satisfaction, which may impact their food preferences and decisions.

Natural Content. The degree to which participants prefer food items perceived as natural or minimally processed during rushed meal decisions.

On-the-go Meal Choices. In this study, refers to immediate food selections made by students, working professionals, and busy consumers in convenience stores, supermarkets, or fast-food outlets when experiencing time pressure.

Price. The monetary cost of food items, which serves as a significant determinant in respondents' quick meal choices under budget and time limitations.

Sensory Appeal. The extent to which the taste, smell, texture, and appearance of food influence participants' decisions in choosing meals quickly.

Urgency and Time Constraints. Situations encountered by participants wherein limited time availability leads to faster and sometimes impulsive meal choices.

Weight Control: Weight control is defined as the process of managing one's body weight through dietary choices, exercise, and lifestyle habits to maintain a desired weight range or prevent excessive weight gain.

Retail Environment Influence. The influence exerted by store layouts, product displays, promotions, and accessibility within retail settings on the on-the-go meal decisions of the respondents.

Perceived Satisfaction. The immediate sense of contentment or approval participants feel after purchasing and consuming an on-the-go meal.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

On-the-Go Meal Choices

On-the-go meal choices have become increasingly prevalent among students, working professionals, and busy consumers, driven by factors such as time constraints, environmental cues, and personal preferences. Recent studies have highlighted the multifaceted nature of these decisions.

Time pressure significantly impacts food selection behaviors. A study analyzing traffic patterns in Los Angeles County found that unexpected delays led to a 1% increase in fast food visits, equating to approximately 1.2 million additional trips annually. This suggests that commuters, when faced with time constraints, are more likely to opt for quick, convenient food options over home-prepared meals (New York Post, 2025).

The retail environment also plays a crucial role in shaping food choices. Research indicates that grocery stores often promote energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods through strategic product placement and marketing. However, interventions such as positioning healthier options at checkout counters have been associated with increased sales of healthier items, demonstrating the potential of environmental cues to influence better purchasing decisions (Frontiers in Nutrition, 2022). In resource-poor communities, access to healthy food options is often limited. A scoping review highlighted that factors such as cost, transportation, and the density of unhealthy food outlets serve as barriers to healthy eating. Conversely, the presence of supermarkets and farmers' markets, along with strong in-store marketing of healthy foods, can facilitate better food choices (BMC Public Health, 2023). Digital retail environments are emerging as influential factors in food purchasing behaviors. A systematic scoping review found that online grocery shopping often leads to healthier food and drink purchases compared to in-store shopping. This trend is attributed to reduced impulse buying and the ability to make more deliberate choices in a less stimulating environment (Obesity Reviews, 2023).

Lastly, individual decision-making processes under time constraints have been examined. Research suggests that when individuals are under time pressure, they tend to rely on heuristic decision-making, leading to

choices that prioritize convenience over health. This highlights the importance of understanding cognitive shortcuts in hurried food selection (Food Quality and Preference, 2020).

Health. Health considerations are a primary motivator in food selection. Individuals with higher nutrition self-efficacy and an internal health locus of control tend to prioritize health-related motives when choosing foods. This association underscores the importance of personal beliefs and confidence in making healthier food choices (Papadaki & Scott, 2022).

Mood. Mood significantly influences eating behaviors. Foods are often selected for their potential to enhance mood or provide comfort. Studies have shown that mood-related motives are prevalent across various demographics, indicating a universal tendency to use food as a mood regulator (Retelny, 2021).

Convenience. Convenience is a critical factor, especially among individuals with busy lifestyles. The ease of access, preparation time, and portability of food items play a significant role in food choice decisions. Research highlights that convenience-driven choices are common among working professionals and students (Retelny, 2021).

Sensory Appeal. The sensory characteristics of food, including taste, aroma, and texture, are powerful motivators. Sensory appeal often overrides other considerations, leading individuals to choose foods that provide immediate sensory gratification. This factor is consistently ranked among the top reasons for food selection (Ares & Deliza, 2021).

Natural Content. A preference for foods perceived as natural or minimally processed is growing. Consumers associate natural content with health benefits and environmental sustainability. This motive reflects a broader trend towards clean eating and transparency in food sourcing (Castellari et al., 2021).

Price. Economic considerations heavily influence food choices. Price sensitivity can lead individuals to opt for more affordable options, sometimes at the expense of nutritional quality. Studies indicate that price is a significant barrier to healthy eating, particularly in low-income populations (EUFIC, 2022).

Weight Control. Concerns about body weight and appearance drive many to select foods that align with their weight management goals. This includes choosing low-calorie or diet-specific products. The motive is prevalent among individuals actively engaged in weight control practices (Steinhauser et al., 2022).

Familiarity. Familiarity with certain foods provides comfort and reduces the uncertainty associated with trying new items. This motive is particularly strong among individuals with specific dietary habits or cultural food preferences. Familiar foods are often chosen for their predictability and associated positive experiences (Stok et al., 2021).

Ethical Concern. Ethical considerations, including animal welfare, environmental impact, and fair trade practices, are increasingly influencing food choices. Consumers motivated by ethical concerns tend to support products that align with their values, reflecting a shift towards more socially responsible consumption (Steinhauser et al., 2022).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative part explored the On-the-Go Meal Choices of 7-Eleven among selected students, working professionals, and busy consumers. Additionally, the qualitative approach was used to the using a structured survey, while the qualitative part gathered deeper insights through guided interviews. Together, these methods provided a fuller understanding of the factors influencing hurried, on-the-go meal decisions among students, working professionals, and busy consumers.

Respondents of the Study

Participants were selected using simple random sampling, ensuring that all respondents had prior experience purchasing meals from convenience stores or retail outlets of 7-Eleven. The study included three groups of respondents, each composed of 100 individuals. The first group consisted of 100 students from H.N. Cahilsot Central Elementary School, General Santos City National High School, and Holy Trinity College. The second group comprised 100 working professionals, including employees from the same institutions—H.N. Cahilsot, GSC National High School, and Holy Trinity College—as well as from Brigada Mass Media Corporation. The third group included 100 busy consumers, characterized by individuals managing work and multiple daily responsibilities. These respondents were drawn from areas surrounding three selected 7-Eleven branches located at J.P. Rizal Street, Barangay Calumpang; Daproza Avenue, Barangay Dadiangas South; and NLSA Road, Barangay Lagao, all within General Santos City. These locations were intentionally chosen due to their high foot traffic and close proximity to schools, workplaces, and residential areas, where quick, on-the-go meal decisions are commonly made.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at three (3) selected 7-Eleven outlets located at J.P. Rizal Street, Barangay Calumpang; Daproza Avenue, Barangay Dadiangas South; and NLSA Road, Barangay Lagao, all situated in General Santos City.

Research Instruments

The study used a survey questionnaire to gather data from the respondents. To determine the food choices of students, working professionals and busy consumers was adopted from the study of Steptoe, Pollard, and Wardle, (1995). Each statement were rated using a 4-point Likert scale as follows: 4-Very Important' 3-Moderately Important, 2- A little important, 1- Not important at all.

For the qualitative instrument, a semi-structured interview questionnaire was developed to gather personal insights from participants. The interview was divided into three main sections: (1) **Urgency and Time Constraints**, which explored how participants make food purchasing decisions under time pressure; (2) **Retail Environment Influence**, which examined how factors such as store layout, promotions, and product placement affect their choices; and (3) **Perceived Satisfaction and Reflection**, which focused on participants' feelings about their rushed food decisions and the improvements they suggest. This qualitative instrument enabled respondents to share their experiences in their own words, providing rich, contextual data that complemented and deepened the study's statistical findings.

Data Gathering Procedures

Prior to the collection of data, a letter of permission was secured to conduct surveys and interviews from students, working professionals and busy consumers. Data collection was conducted over a two-week period. The survey questionnaire was administered face-to-face, and ensured that all data remained confidential and anonymous.

For the key informant interviews, semi-structured questionnaire was utilized using audio-recorded to gather data. All chosen participants were informed of the study's purpose and voluntarily provided their consent. Lastly, the gathered data was carefully organized, tabulated, coded and applied the appropriate statistical treatment.

Statistical Treatment

The following methods were used to analyze the quantitative data:

Mean was used to assess the food choice students, working professionals and busy consumers.

For the qualitative part of the study, a thematic analysis was used to categorize the responses of the KII participants into themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses and analyzes the data collected on on-the-go meal choices from 300 respondents, including students, working professionals, and busy consumers at 7-Eleven branches in General Santos City.

Food Choices in terms of Health

Based on Table 1, the two highest mean scores were for the statements “keeps me healthy” ($M = 3.43$) and “is good for my skin/teeth/hair/nails etc.” ($M = 3.31$), both rated as Moderately Important. These results suggest that while consumers recognize the health-related benefits of food, they tend to prioritize overall wellness and physical appearance in their food choices more than specific nutritional content. The general weighted mean of 3.18 also falls under the Moderately Important category, indicating a moderate level of concern for health when making food decisions. This implies that although health is considered, it may not be the dominant factor influencing their food selections, especially when other elements such as convenience or taste come into play.

Table 1. Food Choices in terms of Health

Health	Mean	Description
It is important to me that the food I eat on a typical day		
1. ...is high in fibre and roughage	2.94	Moderately Important
2. ...is nutritious	3.26	Moderately Important
3. ...contains lots of vitamins and minerals	3.14	Moderately Important
4. ...is high in protein	3.02	Moderately Important
5. ...keeps me healthy	3.43	Moderately Important
6. ...is good for my skin/teeth/hair/nails etc	3.31	Moderately Important
General Weighted Mean	3.18	Moderately Important

Food Choices in terms of Convenience

Based on Table 2, the two highest mean scores were for the statements “can be cooked very simply” ($M = 3.39$) and “is easily available in shops and supermarkets” ($M = 3.38$), both described as Moderately Important. These findings indicate that respondents value food choices that require minimal preparation and are readily accessible, reflecting a preference for convenience in their daily routines. The general weighted mean of 3.29, also rated as Moderately Important, suggests that while convenience is not the top priority, it remains a significant factor influencing food selection, especially for individuals managing busy lifestyles and limited time for meal preparation.

Table 2. Food Choices in terms of Convenience

Convenience	Mean	Description
It is important to me that the food I eat on a typical day		
1. ...is easy to prepare	3.32	Moderately Important
2. ...is easily available in shops and supermarkets	3.38	Moderately Important
3. ...can be cooked very simply	3.39	Moderately Important
4. ...takes no time to prepare	3.13	Moderately Important
5. ...can be bought in shops close to where I live or work	3.26	Moderately Important
General Weighted Mean	3.29	Moderately Important

Food Choices in terms of Mood

Based on Table 3, the two highest mean scores were for the statements “makes me feel good” ($M = 3.42$) and “helps me cope with stress” ($M = 3.41$), both categorized as Moderately Important. These results suggest that emotional well-being plays a notable role in respondents' food choices, with many valuing foods that provide comfort or enhance their mood. The general weighted mean of 3.33, also Moderately Important, indicates that while mood is not the primary factor in food selection, it remains a meaningful consideration, especially for individuals seeking emotional balance or stress relief through their eating habits.

Table 3. Food Choices in terms of Mood

Mood	Mean	Description
It is important to me that the food I eat on a typical day		
1. ...cheers me up	3.39	Moderately Important
2. ...helps me cope with stress	3.41	Moderately Important
3. ...keeps me awake and alert	3.18	Moderately Important
4. ...helps me relax	3.28	Moderately Important
5. ...makes me feel good	3.42	Moderately Important
6. ...helps me to cope with life	3.32	Moderately Important
General Weighted Mean	3.33	Moderately Important

Food Choices in terms of Sensory Appeal

Based on Table 4, the highest mean score was for the statement “smells nice” ($M = 3.57$), rated as Very Important, indicating that the smell of food plays a significant role in food choices for the participants. The lowest mean score was for both the statements “has a pleasant texture” and “looks nice,” each with a mean of 3.37, categorized as Moderately Important. These results suggest that while sensory appeal is important, the aroma of food is prioritized over texture and appearance when making food choices. The general weighted mean of 3.46, categorized as Moderately Important, reflects the overall importance of sensory appeal in food selection.

Table 4. Food Choices in terms of Sensory Appeal

Sensory Appeal	Mean	Description
It is important to me that the food I eat on a typical day		
1. ...tastes good	3.52	Very Important
2. ...smells nice	3.57	Very Important
3. ...has a pleasant texture	3.37	Moderately Important
4. ...looks nice	3.37	Moderately Important
General Weighted Mean	3.46	Moderately Important

Food Choices in terms of Natural Content

Based on Table 5, the two highest mean scores were for the statements “contains natural ingredients” ($M = 3.21$) and “contains no artificial ingredients” ($M = 3.11$), both rated as Moderately Important. These findings suggest that while consumers show some awareness and preference for natural content in their food, such as avoiding artificial additives and favoring natural ingredients, it is not a dominant concern in their daily food choices. The general weighted mean of 3.10, also categorized as Moderately Important, reinforces the idea that natural content is considered to a moderate extent, possibly influenced by increasing awareness of food quality but still secondary to factors like taste, convenience, or price.

Table 5. Food Choices in terms of Natural Content

Natural Content	Mean	Description
It is important to me that the food I eat on a typical day		
1. ...contains no additives	2.97	Moderately Important
2. ...contains natural ingredients	3.21	Moderately Important
3. ...contains no artificial ingredients	3.11	Moderately Important
General Weighted Mean	3.10	Moderately Important

Food Choices in terms of Price

Based on Table 6, the two highest mean scores were for the statements “is not expensive” and “is cheap,” both with a mean of 3.38 and described as Moderately Important. These results indicate that affordability is a key consideration for respondents when making food choices, with an emphasis on keeping costs low. The general weighted mean of 3.38, also categorized as Moderately Important, suggests that while price is not rated as extremely important, it remains a consistent and influential factor, particularly for consumers who are budget-conscious or managing limited financial resources.

Table 6. Food Choices in terms of Price

Price	Mean	Description
It is important to me that the food I eat on a typical day		
1. ...is not expensive	3.38	Moderately Important
2. ...is good value for money	3.37	Moderately Important
3. ...is cheap	3.38	Moderately Important
General Weighted Mean	3.38	Moderately Important

Food Choices in terms of Weight Control

Based on Table 7, the two highest mean scores were for the statements “helps me control my weight” ($M = 3.21$) and “is low in fat” ($M = 3.09$), both rated as Moderately Important. These findings suggest that while weight control is a consideration in food choices, it is not a top priority for most respondents. The general weighted mean of 3.08, also categorized as Moderately Important, reflects a moderate level of concern about calorie and fat intake, indicating that while some consumers are mindful of maintaining or managing their weight, other factors such as price or convenience may have a stronger influence on their daily food decisions.

Table 7. Food Choices in terms of Weight Control

Weight Control	Mean	Description
It is important to me that the food I eat on a typical day		
1. ...is low in calories	2.93	Moderately Important
2. ...is low in fat	3.09	Moderately Important
3. ...helps me control my weight	3.21	Moderately Important
General Weighted Mean	3.08	Moderately Important

Food Choices in terms of Familiarity

Based on Table 8, the two highest mean scores were for the statements “is familiar to me” ($M = 3.23$) and “is what I usually eat” ($M = 3.22$), both rated as Moderately Important. These results suggest that respondents tend to prefer foods they recognize and are accustomed to, likely due to comfort, habit, or cultural influence. The general weighted mean of 3.13, also categorized as Moderately Important, indicates that familiarity plays

a moderate role in food choices, reflecting a tendency to stick with known and trusted food options rather than frequently experimenting with new or unfamiliar items.

Table 8. Food Choices in terms of Familiarity

Familiarity	Mean	Description
It is important to me that the food I eat on a typical day		
1. ...is familiar to me	3.23	Moderately Important
2. ...is like the food I ate when I was a child	2.93	Moderately Important
3. ...is what I usually eat	3.22	Moderately Important
General Weighted Mean	3.13	Moderately Important

Food Choices in terms of Ethical Concern

Based on Table 9, the two highest mean scores were for the statements “is packaged in an environmentally friendly way” (M = 3.25) and “comes from countries I approve of politically” (M = 2.63), both rated as Moderately Important. These findings suggest that while environmental concerns, such as eco-friendly packaging, are more influential in food choices, political considerations related to the country of origin are less significant. The general weighted mean of 2.91, also categorized as Moderately Important, indicates that while ethical concerns do factor into food decisions, they are not as dominant as other considerations like price, convenience, or taste.

Table 9. Food Choices in terms of Ethical Concern

Ethical Concern	Mean	Description
It is important to me that the food I eat on a typical day		
1. ...is packaged in an environmentally friendly way	3.25	Moderately Important
2. ...comes from countries I approve of politically	2.63	Moderately Important
3. ...has the country of origin clearly marked	2.84	Moderately Important
General Weighted Mean	2.91	Moderately Important

Summary Table of Food Choices

Based on Table 10, Sensory Appeal (M = 3.46) received the highest mean score, indicating that how food smells, tastes, and looks plays the most significant role in influencing consumers' choices. This is followed by Price (M = 3.38), Mood (M = 3.33), and Convenience (M = 3.29), suggesting that affordability, emotional comfort, and ease of access are also strong factors. Health (M = 3.18), Familiarity (M = 3.13), Natural Content (M = 3.10), and Weight Control (M = 3.08) were of moderate concern but ranked lower, showing that while nutrition and dietary aspects are considered, they are not top priorities. The lowest mean score was in Ethical Concern (M = 2.91), implying that environmental and political aspects of food sourcing are the least influential in consumer decisions. Overall, with a mean of 3.21 (Moderately Important), the findings imply that consumer food choices are primarily driven by sensory satisfaction and practical factors like cost and convenience, rather than ethical or health-related concerns.

Table 10. Summary Table of Food Choices

Indicators	Mean	Description
1. Health	3.18	Moderately Important
2. Mood	3.33	Moderately Important
3. Convenience	3.29	Moderately Important
4. Sensory Appeal	3.46	Moderately Important

5.	Natural Content	3.10	Moderately Important
6.	Price	3.38	Moderately Important
7.	Weight Control	3.08	Moderately Important
8.	Familiarity	3.13	Moderately Important
9.	Ethical Concern	2.91	Moderately Important
Overall Mean		3.21	Moderately Important

Qualitative results of On-the-Go Meal Choices

The qualitative results in Table 11 reveal key patterns in how individuals make on-the-go food choices, highlighting the significant influence of time constraints, emotional states, environmental factors, and health considerations. The dominant theme of practical and time-sensitive food decisions suggests that consumers often choose familiar, affordable, and quick meals, balancing planning with spontaneity. This aligns with the findings of Lim and Vong (2021), who noted that urban consumers prioritize accessibility and convenience in food selection, particularly under time pressure. Such decision-making strategies, though pragmatic, often lead to compromises in nutritional quality.

The presence of stress and urgency as mediators of choice underscores the role of emotional regulation in eating behavior. As shown in previous literature (Nguyen-Rodriguez et al., 2009), emotional states such as stress or fatigue frequently result in impulsive or comfort-driven eating. In this study, mood and pressure emerged as strong influences, with many respondents admitting to reduced focus on health when rushed or overwhelmed. This has important implications for health interventions, suggesting the need to integrate emotional coping strategies into nutritional education programs.

Table 11. Qualitative results of On-the-Go Meal Choices

Utterances/Transcripts	Codes	Categories	Emerging Theme
Choose familiar and affordable foods; decide quickly, sometimes plan ahead.	Familiarity and speed	Decision-making strategies	Practical and Time Sensitive Food Decisions
Often plan, but still pick what's near or easy when rushed.	Conditional planning	Decision-making strategies	Balancing Intentions and Convenience
Tend to buy what's available and quick; planning sometimes happens.	Opportunities selection	Decision-making strategies	Spontaneity in Food Choices
May decide on the spot; not deeply stressed, just rushed.	Situational Urgency	Time-Pressured Behavior	Rushed but Routine Consumption
Feel stressed, especially when hungry and pressed for time.	Time-related stress	Emotional Influences	Stress as a Mediator in Food Choices
Stress and urgency influence choices; mood affects decision-making.	Mood-driven decisions	Emotional Influences	Emotional State Influences Food Behavior
Often choose items near the counter.	Proximity-based choice	Environmental Cues	Environmental Triggers in Consumption
Prefer counter items when rushed; roam if there's time.	Adoptive shopping behavior	Environmental Cues	Context-Driven Navigation of Food Spaces
Prioritize counter items; roaming occurs only when familiar layout changes.	Layout-dependent behavior	Environmental Cues	Reliance on Familiarity and Accessibility

Health is secondary to hunger and availability.	Health as lower priority	Health Consideration in Food Choice	Hunger Overrides Health Concerns
Health is considered but often sacrificed during urgency.	Compromised health intention	Health Consideration in Food Choice	Health Awareness
Rarely consider health; focus on what's available and quick to grab.	Health neglect	Health Consideration in Food Choice	Convenience over Health
Generally satisfied; might make better choices with more time.	Conditional satisfaction	Post-Choice Reflection	Satisfaction Mixed with Hypothetical Regret
Satisfied, though would prioritize health more with time.	Regret-linked satisfaction	Post-Choice Reflection	Time as a Factor for Healthier Choices
Satisfied; with more time, would choose easier, better, or cheaper options.	Time-dependent optimization	Post-Choice Reflection	Potential for Better Decision-Making

Environmental cues, such as product placement and store layout, further shape consumer decisions. The preference for counter items and reliance on familiar store arrangements reflect what Wansink (2016) describes as “mindless eating,” where environmental factors subtly drive behavior without full awareness. This calls for policy-level interventions in food retail design, such as nudging healthier items toward high-traffic zones to encourage better choices under pressure.

Health considerations were present but often deprioritized, particularly when hunger and convenience dominated. The themes of hunger overriding health and convenience over nutrition suggest that while health awareness exists, it is not always actionable in fast-paced contexts. This is consistent with research by Brug et al. (2020), who found that intention alone does not translate into behavior when structural and situational barriers persist.

Lastly, the post-choice reflections reveal a degree of cognitive dissonance, as respondents expressed satisfaction but acknowledged potential for better decisions if given more time. This insight mirrors the concept of “anticipated regret” in behavioral science (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007), which may be leveraged in behavioral nudges to promote healthier decisions ahead of time. Overall, the data emphasize the need for multi-level approaches—individual, environmental, and policy—to support healthier on-the-go meal choices in increasingly fast-paced lifestyles.

CONCLUSIONS

The results indicate that all nine factors assessed were perceived as moderately important in influencing food choices among the respondents. Among these, sensory appeal ($M = 3.46$) emerged as the highest-rated factor, suggesting that taste, smell, and appearance significantly influence food selection. Price ($M = 3.38$) and mood ($M = 3.33$) followed closely, emphasizing that emotional state and affordability are also key considerations, especially in fast-paced or budget-constrained contexts. Meanwhile, health ($M = 3.18$) and natural content ($M = 3.10$) were given moderate importance, indicating that although nutritional value is acknowledged, it is often balanced against other more immediate concerns like convenience ($M = 3.29$) and familiarity ($M = 3.13$). The lowest-rated factors, weight control ($M = 3.08$) and ethical concern ($M = 2.91$), suggest that long-term and socially driven motivations may be less prioritized in everyday food decisions. Overall, these findings underscore the multifaceted nature of food choice, where sensory gratification and emotional satisfaction often take precedence over health and ethical considerations, highlighting the need for more integrated and accessible health promotion strategies.

Further, the qualitative findings highlight that on-the-go food choices are shaped by time pressure, emotional states, and environmental cues, with health often taking a backseat to convenience and sensory appeal. While respondents acknowledge the importance of better choices, rushed decisions and mood-driven behaviors tend

to dominate. These patterns suggest the need for strategies that integrate emotional regulation, improved food environments, and time-efficient health education to support better eating habits in fast-paced contexts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

1. The students, working professionals, and busy consumers develop greater awareness of how emotional states, time pressure, and sensory appeal influence their food choices. They are encouraged to practice mindful eating and set intentional food-related goals that prioritize both nutrition and satisfaction.
2. For store owners and retailers like 7-Eleven, strategically placing healthier food options near high-traffic or impulse-buying areas could help nudge consumers toward better choices without compromising convenience. Offering more affordable, nutritious alternatives that still meet the taste expectations of customers may also support healthier habits.
3. Health promotion programs targeting these consumer groups should include emotional regulation techniques and time-efficient planning tools to help them manage their choices under pressure.
4. Lastly, future researchers are encouraged to explore interventions that can balance sensory appeal with nutrition, as well as investigate how specific demographic or psychological factors further shape food decisions in fast-paced environments.

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