

# When and why consumers choose supersized food?

Supersized  
food

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to achieve three objectives: to explore the perception of consumers about supersized foods (in both pre- and post-consumption scenarios), to identify why consumers prefer supersized options over other available options and to determine the types of situations that push consumers to make such decisions.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This qualitative study uses the triangulation of projective methods, coupled with semi-structured interviews with 120 participants. The data was collected from major cities of Pakistan, using a convenient sample of 25 semi-structured interviews, 35 narratives and 60 sentence completions and constructions analyzed by performing thematic analysis.

**Findings** – The findings indicate that the antecedents of the purchase of supersized food include price/quantity trade-off, hunger, liking and the social setting of consumption. Such purchase decisions also lead to consequences such as saving after purchase, health concerns, food waste, guilt and satisfaction. The findings also reveal the factors that play a dual role of an antecedent and a consequence: sharing, social status, quantity and leisure time.

**Practical implications** – The knowledge of factors that make consumers select supersized foods can help marketers design deals that can control overconsumption and food waste. Instead of only focusing on the motivations behind the purchase of supersized foods, the authors also discuss the aspects of food purchase and consumption.

**Originality/value** – This study advances the literature on purchase decision, consumption and post-consumption of supersized foods, providing insights for food retailers, regulators and policymakers.

**Keywords** Supersizing, Supersized food, Food consumption, Qualitative study, Projective techniques

**Paper type** Research paper

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## ¿Cuándo y por qué los consumidores eligen alimentos de gran tamaño?

### Resumen

**Propósito** – Este estudio busca alcanzar tres objetivos: 1) explorar la percepción de los consumidores sobre los alimentos de gran tamaño (tanto en escenarios previos como posteriores al consumo), 2) identificar por qué los consumidores prefieren las opciones de gran tamaño sobre otras opciones disponibles, y 3) determinar qué tipo de situaciones empujan a los consumidores a tomar tales decisiones.

**Diseño** – Este estudio cualitativo emplea la triangulación de métodos proyectivos, junto con entrevistas semiestructuradas con 120 participantes. Los datos se recopilaron en las principales ciudades de Pakistán, utilizando una muestra conveniente de 25 entrevistas semiestructuradas, 35 narraciones y 60 terminaciones y construcciones de frases analizadas mediante la realización de un análisis temático.

**Conclusiones** – Los resultados indican que los antecedentes de la compra de alimentos de gran tamaño incluyen la relación precio/cantidad, el hambre, el gusto y el entorno social del consumo. Estas decisiones de compra también conllevan consecuencias como el ahorro después de la compra, la preocupación por la salud, el desperdicio de alimentos, el sentimiento de culpa y la satisfacción. Los resultados también revelan los factores que desempeñan un doble papel de antecedente y consecuencia: compartir, estatus social, cantidad y tiempo de ocio.

**Implicaciones prácticas** – El conocimiento de los factores que hacen que los consumidores seleccionen alimentos de gran tamaño puede ayudar a los responsables de marketing a diseñar ofertas que puedan controlar el consumo excesivo y el desperdicio de alimentos. En lugar de centrarse únicamente en las motivaciones que subyacen a la compra de alimentos de mayor tamaño, los autores también analizan los aspectos de la compra y el consumo de alimentos.

**Originalidad** – Este estudio supone un avance en la literatura sobre la decisión de compra, el consumo y el posconsumo de los alimentos de gran tamaño, proporcionando información a los minoristas de alimentos, a los reguladores y a los responsables políticos.

**Palabras clave** – Gran tamaño, Alimentos de gran tamaño, Consumo de alimentos, Estudio cualitativo, Técnicas proyectivas

**Tipo de artículo** – Trabajo de investigación

### 消费者何时以及为何选择超大号食品？

**目的** – 本研究旨在实现三个目标。1) 探索消费者对超大号食品的认知看法（在消费前和消费后的场景下），2) 确定消费者为什么喜欢超大号食品而不是其他现有选择，以及3) 确定促使消费者做出这种决定的情况类型。

**设计/方法/途径** – 这项定性研究采用了投射方法中的三角测量，以及对120名参与者的半结构化访谈。这些数据是从巴基斯坦的主要城市收集的，研究者使用了一个方便性样本，其中包括25个半结构化访谈，35个叙述，以及60个句子的完成和结构。这些数据通过主题分析来进行解析。

**研究结果** – 研究结果表明，购买超大号食品的前因包括价格/数量的权衡、饥饿感、喜好和消费的社会环境。这样的购买决定也导致了购买后的节省、健康问题、食物浪费、内疚和满足感等后果。研究结果还揭示了几个即是前因又是结果的双角色因素：分享、社会地位、数量和休闲时间。

**实际意义** – 了解促使消费者选择超大号食品的因素可以帮助营销人员设计能够控制过度消费和食品浪费的交易。作者不仅仅关注了购买超大号食品背后的动机，还讨论了食品购买和消费的各个方面。

**原创性/价值** – 这项研究推进了关于超大号食品的消费决策、消费和消费后的文献，为食品零售商、监管者和政策制定者提供了见解。

**关键词** 超大，超大食品，食品消费，定性研究，投射技术

**文章类型**：研究型论文

## 1. Introduction

The decisions related to food choice and consumption quantity are not the same. Food choice decision refers to the type of food we eat, such as fruits or fast food, whereas consumption quantity decisions are related to the amount of food, partial or full (Liu *et al.*, 2019; Wansink and Chandon, 2014). Consumer psychologists and health psychologists have tried to comprehend the factors that impact food choice compared to consumption quantity. In an era of growing obesity, knowing about the amount of food is as pertinent as what we eat (Cornil *et al.*, 2022; Liu and Haws, 2020).

Beverage manufacturers use their discretion to adjust product serving size (value or medium size) without changing their nutritional profile, with few exceptions like liquor or wine (Mohr *et al.*, 2012). Alike, restaurants choose descriptions and servings freely. For instance, Tim Horton, a Canadian chain, introduced a 24 oz. “extra-large” cup of coffee in 2012, attributing the previous extra-large and large as “large” and “medium”, respectively. Some producers and eateries even determine the shape and size of utensils (e.g. glasses, plates and bowls) that consumers use for food consumption (Chandon, 2013). The packaging of products, larger than the recommended portion size, and quantity of servings have significantly increased recently. Hence, partially responsible for the portion size effect (Almiron-Roig *et al.*, 2020). In developed countries, this drift has been detected heavily. For instance, in the USA, “supersizing” is predominantly communal and has been acknowledged as a crucial factor for obesity, growing faster than in any other developed country (Vandenbroele *et al.*, 2019).

The trend is also common in developing countries like Pakistan and India. With an additional Rs 40, French fries can be upsized at KFC (KFC Pakistan, 2021); and after paying 44% more, milkshakes can be doubled at McDonald’s (McDonalds Pakistan, 2021). Based on this practice, consumers expect the price to be quantity dependent such that the cost per unit reduces as size increases, “Supersized Pricing” (Haws *et al.*, 2020; Haws and Winterich, 2013).

The Asia Pacific has reported the fastest ever growth in fast-food consumption globally, owing to the increasing acceptance of fast food in everyday lives and low preference for cooking at home (Euromonitor, 2019). The fast-food industry is considered the second largest in Pakistan (Qasmi *et al.*, 2014) and significant growth is expected (Euromonitor, 2019). The consumption of fast-food results in increased body mass index (Mwafi *et al.*, 2021), which increases the risks of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, osteoarthritis and some cancers (including endometrial, breast, ovarian, prostate, liver, gallbladder, kidney and colon) (WHO, 2021).

The global prevalence of obesity among adults is 13% (WHO, 2021). Globally, obesity has increased more than sixfold (Abarca-Gómez *et al.*, 2017). Initially, obesity was considered as first world problem, now it is on the rise in low- and middle-income countries (WHO, 2021). Pakistan is the ninth most obese country (Ng *et al.*, 2014), encompassing 12.1% (obese) and 25.1% (overweight) adult men and 21.8% (obese) and 30.4% (overweight) adult women (World Obesity Federation, 2022).

Though many factors contribute to obesity, the food industry has been held responsible for introducing “supersized” beverage and food options, resulting in 35% more consumption on average due to the doubling of portion sizes (Haws *et al.*, 2020; Vandenbroele *et al.*, 2019; Zlatevska *et al.*, 2014).

The unit price and portion of supersized packages are always lower (in proportion to weight/volume) (Haws *et al.*, 2020; Haws and Winterich, 2013; Sprott *et al.*, 2003). Marketers enjoy huge margins on supersized foods because the additional cost of the added food is usually negligible compared to the value perceived by consumers (Dobson *et al.*, 2017).

Through sales promotion techniques such as “buy one get one free,” “one for \$1.00 and two for \$1.50”, food marketers increase package and portion size without altering the original package. According to Harnack *et al.* (2008), there is no association between the price of menu bundles and caloric intake in fast food eateries; other studies suggest that price and food intake has a significant association in the case of overweight consumers (Cornil *et al.*, 2022). Consumers’ top-of-the-list justification of their purchase is value addition through supersize packages (Vermeer *et al.*, 2010).

Despite our knowledge of consumer decision-making and the purchase of supersized foods, insight into decision making and post-consumption attitudes and behaviour of

consumers is limited. Research comparing results from more than one projective technique for understanding consumers' inclination towards supersized packages is still limited (Vidal *et al.*, 2013). To address the gap in the literature this study aims to determine the perception of consumers about the supersized foods in both pre- and post-consumption scenarios; identify why consumers prefer supersized options over other options and determine the types of situations that push them to make such decisions. Consumer perception helps shape their opinions that translate into consumer attitudes, intentions and behaviour (Solomon, 2011). Because the purpose of the study was to understand the underlying interpretations of the factors behind buying, consumption and post-consumption of supersized foods, we deemed it important to gather consumer insights related to consumer perceptions in the context of the present study.

Understanding consumers' feelings and actions after purchasing supersized containers can help marketers and policymakers better meet the needs of more health-aware and health-conscious consumers who want to enjoy fast foods but with better options. The study also offers insights for further research into the health and well-being of fast-food consumers, with a specific focus on consumers' beliefs and attitudes in this regard.

We begin with methodology, analyze data and discuss findings and implications. We conclude with the theoretical and practical implications, limitations and future research directions.

## 2. Research methods

The current study uses qualitative research methods, using the personal experiences of research participants. Data collected through qualitative techniques describe a complex problem in a specific context (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Vidal *et al.* (2013) suggest that the qualitative paradigm, with inductive analysis, is appropriate for exploring and describing social realities in a specific context. A qualitative approach was adopted involving projective techniques (narratives/stories and construction and completion) and semi-structured interviews.

Research participants were students (full time and part-time [working]) from four major cities of Pakistan. Convenience sampling method was used to conduct 25 semi-structured interviews (see Table 1), 35 narratives and 60 sentence completions and constructions tasks.

After having informed consent from the participants, they were briefed about the subject and purpose of the study. The participants were requested to follow the link created via google forms for projective techniques; 90% of the semi-structured interviews were

No.	Age	Gender	No.	Age	Gender
1	25	Male	14	19	Female
2	26	Female	15	22	Male
3	25	Male	17	23	Female
4	24	Female	18	24	Male
5	22	Male	19	25	Male
7	23	Male	20	26	Male
8	24	Female	21	24	Female
9	25	Female	22	25	Male
10	26	Male	23	21	Male
11	24	Male	24	23	Male
12	22	Female	25	24	Female
13	20	Female			

**Table 1.**  
Profile of interview  
participants

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conducted in-person within the universities' premises; the rest of data were collected online as per participants' request and convenience.

The sample size is determined following the concept of saturation in qualitative research (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013), where the new data no longer contributes further to the study under consideration. 70% of 120 participants were male, 30% were females and the average age was 23, ranging from 19 to 26. Following previous research patterns on supersizing and fast-food consumption in developing and developed countries, this population segment was selected for their modern lifestyle and inclination toward eating out and socializing (Thayer *et al.*, 2021).

Moreover, some pre-interviews were performed via the personification technique (Mesias and Escribano, 2018) to identify the individuals who are more likely to purchase and consume supersized food. All the participants reported that they were consumers of supersized food; thus, the sample was relevant to the phenomenon of interest.

Data collection methods include projective techniques and semi-structured interviews as they allow flexibility, detailed and desired information and provision of new questions from the responses. Both the techniques help minimize the interpretation predisposition biases (Bell, 2022). Triangulation was used as it allows researchers to validate findings by converging the information from different sources and uses scientific approach to overcome any weaknesses in the methodology, measuring similar characteristics with different methods, thereby enhancing the quality of data and credibility of the research (Patton, 2014).

### 2.1 Projective techniques

The projective techniques help study the complex behavioural phenomena through an indirect approach and have been widely used and acknowledged in qualitative consumer and marketing research (Steinman, 2009). Such techniques allow researchers offer consumers an ambiguous and unstructured stimulus for the deepest attitudes, beliefs, feelings and motivations and bring out consumers' perceptions and attitudes (Donoghue, 2000).

*2.1.1 Narratives/stories.* "Storytelling is a cognitive process that organizes human experience into temporally meaningful episodes" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 11). Stories are robust and have received growing consideration in marketing (Deighton and Narayandas, 2004). Researchers may consider stories as a piece of qualitative data; however, the interpretation of data depends upon the patterns of responses. According to Belk (2007), a researcher looks for a story in data. However, the version of the story may vary based on the philosophical associations of the researcher. For instance, a positivist would interpret that the story reflects social world events, as it represents truth out there and gives access to the world's nomothetic understanding. On the contrary, the interpretivist would interpret the story based on the storyteller's experiences which relates mainly to the ideographic philosophical underpinning (Belk, 2007, p. 158). Based on the interpretivist view, we used storytelling and asked individuals to narrate their experiences in stories. The purpose was to extract detailed and accurate information without interrupting the respondents. The issue of rapport was avoided by negating the personal role of the researcher. The participants gave less time and effort (in terms of explaining the self) (Dahl *et al.*, 2003). Dahl *et al.* (2003) used the critical incident technique to pursue "fact" and "objectivity" as stories are considered "factual reports"; their approach guided the procedure for this study. The research instrument, modified and adapted from Dahl *et al.* (2003), asked the participants to:

Recall and describe in as much detail as possible, a recent situation where you purchased a supersized food product (i.e., burger, french fries, chips, soft drink,). Be sure to describe the reasons to choose and what followed the decision.

*2.1.2 Construction and completion.* The most extensively used projective technique is “construction” whereby consumers’ answers reflect their feelings and thoughts in the guise of someone else (Donoghue, 2000). Sentence completion was used as a completion technique and bubble drawings as a construction technique. In the completion technique, respondents get a half-finished sentence, argument, story, or dialogue to complete (Donoghue, 2000), whereas, in bubble drawings, consumers are given the speech bubbles conferring to the characters presented in a cartoon strip. Analogous to third-person questioning, bubble drawings’ fundamental proposition is that the consumers’ responses would reflect their opinion of the characters. The respondents are asked to fill in the characters’ thoughts (Donoghue, 2000; Steinman, 2009) by vaguely describing some complex scenarios related to consumers (i.e. a consumer looking for an item in the store or a consumer at the checkout line).

Five pictures with incomplete dialogues or no dialogue were used as stimuli, followed by the statement “Please complete the dialogue as you think appropriate” and “Please comment about the picture as you think appropriate”, as shown in Figure 1.

### *2.2 Semi-structured interviews*

Through interviews, respondents share their stories and allow their voices to be heard. Lee and Lings (2008) argued that interviewing facilitates exploring opinions, feelings and deep-rooted experiences that methods such as structured surveys cannot extract. An interview guide comprising a schematic presentation of questions required to explore the topic (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006) was prepared to gain insights into participants’ perspectives on supersized foods. This interview guide was pre-tested to ensure that it is non-directive (McCracken, 1988). Initially, the participants were asked about their food perceptions and the importance of food in their lives. It was followed by more specific questions like:

- Q1. When was the last time they ordered supersized food/drink?
- Q2. Why do they upsize their meals?
- Q3. What causes consumers to purchase supersized food?
- Q4. Do all consumers prefer to supersize their food?
- Q5. How do they feel after consuming the supersized food?
- Q6. Can they identify the consequences of purchasing a larger package of food or drink?
- Q7. Does larger package or supersized food within an assortment of product sizes reflect status?

Each interview lasted for 30–45 min. The protocol included recording, note-taking and transcription before analysis.

## **3. Data analysis**

### *3.1 Narratives and semi-structured interview*

The narratives and interviews were analyzed thematically. The stories were presented in a transcribed form, with manual transcription of the audio clips. The purpose of the thematic analysis was to create themes based on frequently occurring words and ideas (Owen, 1984). There were four steps – transcription of data, creation of codes, conversion of codes into concepts and surfacing primary themes related to the aim of the study (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Figure 1: The stimulus used during Completion and Construction Technique



Figure 1.  
The stimulus used  
during completion  
and construction  
technique

**Note:** Stimulus 1 and 5 reproduced with permission from Mr Aitzaz Ahsan and Mr Ghazanfar Shah and Photos 2–4 available on Google

Raw interview data was assigned conceptual or descriptive labels (codes) (e.g. “I often prefer the larger size because the larger size gives the price benefit” was labelled as “low cost, value for money” and “I often buy the same food as my friends do” was coded as “me too, like you, same food”). The codes were then converted into the concepts after discussion between authors.

The findings are presented with descriptions of the themes generated along with the selected quotes that reflect key ideas; but do not reflect the data supporting a particular theme (Crowe and Utley, 2021). Later, all contents were categorized and sifted. Two researchers performed thematic analysis to ensure reliability, matched their results, selected the most common themes from both the pieces and selected and presented the findings.

Following standards of framework analyses, findings are presented through descriptions of the empirical themes, with a selection of quotes from participants that highlight key points, but that do not constitute the entire data supporting that theme. The relationships we see between themes and our broader interpretation of findings are then presented in the discussion.

### *3.2 Completion and construction technique*

Data obtained through completion and construction techniques was analyzed using the Vidal *et al.* (2013) method. The method involved searching recurrent terms within each stimulus and categorizing words with similar meanings. The classification was performed based on the subjective interpretation of researchers. After individual evaluation of the data, researchers developed a consensus on the definitive categories, considering categories mentioned by at least 5% of the consumers for further analysis (Ares *et al.*, 2015). Because it is an exploratory study, 5% was chosen as a cut-off point to prevent unnecessary exclusion of essential pieces of information (Vidal *et al.*, 2013). Frequencies were determined by counting the number of respondents using those words or phrases while responding to the task.

## **4. Findings and discussion**

The following themes emerged from the overall data analysis: price quantity trade-off, hunger, liking and palatability of food, financial saving, food quantity, health concerns, food waste and affective outcomes emerged through narratives. Additional themes such as sharing, social influence, price consciousness, social status and leisure time emerged through the completion/construction technique, as shown in Table 3. All these themes were validated through interviews. Two new themes, health consciousness and quality, emerged the interviews data, as presented in Table 2.

### *4.1 Antecedents*

*4.1.1 Price/quantity trade-off.* Our findings suggest that the purchase of supersized food packs results in a price-quantity trade-off.

I often prefer the larger size because the larger size gives the price benefit and I enjoy more quantity of food by paying just a few rupees more. (Participant 04, Female)

Participants perceived the supersized packages as economical, providing more quantity and lower per-unit cost. Mostly, supersized foods are sold at lower unit prices, except for fierce competition on smaller sizes or retailers using small sizes as loss leaders (Spratt *et al.*, 2003). Marketers can decrease the unit price of supersized packs and enhance value for consumers through lower product packaging costs (Chandon, 2013). However, supersized packages have higher total, but lesser per unit prices. Pricing, due to its significance is the most dominant antecedent for every purchase decision, including the choice of supersized packs. Findings from the completion and construction techniques with the frequency of mention are similar, as shown in Table 3.



Codes	Antecedents	Theme	Consequences
Cost less, low cost, value for money, quantity vs price benefit, cheap, less price, less amount, benefit of the deal	Price quantity trade-off	Saving, saves money, cost less, paying less, feeling of benefit	Financial saving
Loving it, like it, enjoy it, pleasurable, tasty	Liking	More food, more quantity, too much food	Quantity
		It's too much, over-drinking, harmful for health, weight gain	Overconsumption/ Health concerns
Hungry, starving, did not eat, empty stomach	Hunger	It gets wasted, can't drink all, can't finish, can't clean the plate	Food waste
Me too, like you, same food	Social influence	Satisfied, feel good, gives pleasure, happy, enjoy	Affective outcomes
Sharing food, buying the deal, eat together, sharing the cost	Sharing	Sharing food, sharing the cost, eat together	Sharing
Looking for a deal, cheap menu, offer, low price, health, diet conscious, health-focused	Health vs price consciousness	Low quality, poor quality, not the same quality	Quality
Status-conscious, show off, afford to buy	Social status	Luxury food, show off, feel superior	Social status
To spend more time at the restaurant	Leisure time	To chat with friends, enjoy the atmosphere	Leisure time

**Table 2.**  
Themes emerged from projective techniques and interviews

*4.1.2 Sharing/collaborative consumption.* Participants also believed that they buy supersized packs or deals of food to share with friends and family. Data through other techniques validate this finding.

The following quote from one of the participants reflects on the preference for supersized deals and sharing:

A few days back, my friends and I went to McDonald's. Initially, we thought of ordering a big mac(beef) burger separately, its price was 590 rupees per burger, but when we checked for the deals, we found that there was a deal including 3 things (jumbo fries+ 1.5 litres cold drink plus 4 big macs which were quite economical compared to burger fries and cold drink separately and we got all this in the deal in just 2790. This way, we saved money and got more food to share and I believe we consumed more than usual, which is not good. (Informant Narrative, Male)

This situation is referred to as sensory-specific satiety, where a greater variety leads people to eat more than they would otherwise (Snoek *et al.*, 2004). According to Parker *et al.* (2019), in collaborative consumption compared to personal consumption, consumers buy more food than the group needs, leading to wastage and overconsumption.

Participants reported that friends' presence leads to overconsumption, as they focus on the company and not the food. This phenomenon is referred as the social facilitation effect (Herman, 2015).

*4.1.3 Hunger and liking.* Tables 1 and 3 depict that all the data collection techniques validated that hunger and likeness also lead to supersized food purchasing. Interestingly, respondents mentioned that extreme hunger urges them to eat supersized food.

A person buys the supersized pack of food when he or she is hungry and buys more significant size options. (Participant 09, Female)

**Table 3.**  
Emerging themes via  
completion and  
construction  
technique

Category	Examples	% of mention
<i>Categories identified via completion task for the first stimulus</i>		
Price benefit	Cost less, low cost, saving, value for money	42
Quantity	More food, more quantity	41
Likeness	Like it, love it, enjoy it	25
Affective outcomes	Feel satisfied, feel good, gives pleasure	25
Status	Feel superior, status-conscious, show off, afford to buy	35
Leisure time	Spend more time at a restaurant, want to chat with friends	15
<i>Categories identified via completion task for the second stimulus</i>		
Price benefit	Cheap, less price, less amount, the benefit of a deal	50
Quantity	Too much, more food, more quantity	45
Price consciousness	Looking for a deal, cheap menu, offer	30
Status	Luxury food, show off, affordability	15
<i>Categories identified via completion task for the third stimulus</i>		
Modeling/social influence	Me too, like you, same food	60
Uninfluenced choice	Any other deal, normal size, hot and spicy, salad	40
<i>Categories identified via completion task for the fourth stimulus</i>		
Sharing	Sharing food, sharing the cost	70
Likeness	Loving it, like it, enjoy it	40
<i>Categories identified via completion task for the fifth stimulus</i>		
Health concerns/ overconsumption	It's too much, over-drinking, harmful for health, weight gain	80
Food waste	It gets wasted, can't drink all, can't finish	50
<i>Categories identified via completion task for the sixth stimulus</i>		
Need/thirst	It's too much, over-drinking, harmful for health, weight gain	75
Sharing	It gets wasted, can't drink all, can't finish	60
Leisure time	Spend more time at a restaurant, want to chat with friends	15

However, while consuming, they realize that they are satiated and the chosen portion size exceeds their appropriate serving, leading to overeating or food wastage. Research suggests that hunger is erroneously considered a significant element of consumption quantity (Vartanian *et al.*, 2008). However, as per data, its role is insignificant in food quantity decisions, suggesting that consumers cannot analyze their consumption behaviour (Wansink and Chandon, 2014).

A segment of participants believed that apart from hunger, liking food also matters.

I buy a large size of fries because I love to eat chips. (Participant 25, Female)

It results in the purchase of more food quantity and more pleasure. According to Giesen *et al.* (2010, p. 966), food liking refers to “the palatability or pleasure obtained from tasting a given food” and this palatability and pleasure from eating or smelling of tasty food influence food consumption (Mak *et al.*, 2012).

*4.1.4 Social status.* Participants believed that the purchase of supersized packs reflects on their buying power.

I believe people who buy large have better status. (Participant 01, Male)

The completion/construction technique also validated this finding, as shown in Table 3. Respondents also mentioned that showing off in front of others is common, especially in the lower middle class. Many participants believed that consumption of supersized foods is an indicator of better status

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I think going to McDonald's, or KFC is not a routine thing, so if someone goes there and eats or drinks something, they show off while ordering at the counter by asking for upsized drinks, etc. (Participant 23, Male)

People tend to choose foods not only for nutritional and sensory reasons but also for bolstering their public image and feeling good about themselves (Stuppy *et al.*, 2020). Consumers constantly express their identities by using products or posting photos of foods on social media (Zhu *et al.*, 2019). Scholars have associated larger sizes (Baudrillard, 2005), greater length and height (Schubert *et al.*, 2009) with higher status. The products, such as soft drinks or cookies, with no integral status, are viewed to have a status-signalling value over larger options. Consumers perceive larger size as status indicator within a set, especially those with low power (Dubois *et al.*, 2012).

*4.1.5 Social influence.* Our findings indicate that consumers are influenced by the people around them for food-related decisions. Respondents reported that what they choose from available package size options also depend on whether or not they are alone. The choice of others may influence a purchase decision, as reflected in the quote below:

Recently we went to McDonald's with a friend, she ordered a medium-sized chocolate milkshake and I also did the same. (Participant 23, Male)

Completion/construction technique findings validate this finding, as shown in Table 3. These findings correspond to the literature on social matching and mimicry. When eating with acquaintances, consumers tend to imitate the consumption patterns of others which influences their choices (Huh *et al.*, 2014).

*4.1.6 Price versus health consciousness.* The decision about specific package size also depends on the individual preference between price and health. Findings suggest that those who perceived themselves as health-conscious frequently opted for smaller packs and believed in moderate quantity consumption.

The person who is health-conscious buys smaller quantity, as he or she is not concerned about saving but has more money and is willing to pay more for their health. (Participant 01, Male)

Moreover, such consumers are also perceived to have a better income. They emphasized healthy diets and were willing to pay price premiums for smaller packages of tempting products (Dobson *et al.*, 2017). On the contrary, price-conscious consumers were reported to be always concerned about the price.

When I see someone with a large pack, I believe he is an economical person and wants to take advantage of double quantity by paying less. (Participant 02, Female)

Completion analysis indicates that approximately 30% of the respondents mentioned choosing the larger size among multiple size options based on their sensitivity to price differences. They are willing to buy at low prices and set constraints on the amount they wish to pay (Zielke and Komor, 2015).

## 4.2 Consequences

*4.2.1 Value goal/saving.* Our findings suggest that supersized option helps consumers achieve their financial goals, the saving goal by either opting for a better value for money or spending less for the same option.

When it comes to immediate consumption, consumers often buy the supersized pack owing to its saving benefit. (Participant 07, Male)

The finding was validated through all data collection techniques, as shown in [Tables 1](#) and [3](#). It is also in agreement with [Haws and Winterich \(2013\)](#) that there are two pathways for attaining financial goals: saving by abating total money spent or saving by receiving better value for money. Our findings suggest that, apart from saving money by getting a better deal, consumers also try to make their consumption decision appear more lucrative by choosing a deal in collaboration with friends.

It's economical to buy large and share compared to buying the small one separately. (Participant 04, Female)

*4.2.2 Health concerns/overconsumption.* The apparent saving benefit of supersized foods also brings hidden costs, such as health issues, primarily caused by overconsumption. The following quote represents this concern:

It often happens when I buy a large pack of lays (chips); it increases my consumption and it never lets me stop until it is over. (Participant 25, Female)

All the data collection techniques validated the notion of overconsumption, as shown in [Tables 1](#) and [3](#). The literature suggests that the doubling of portion size results in more consumption ([Vandenbroele et al., 2019](#)), 35% on average ([Zlatevska et al., 2014](#)). Despite being aware that consuming too much is bad for health, the respondents reported preferring the supersized food for the pleasure of consuming more by paying less. The quotation below refers to the said finding:

I believe consuming that much quantity is not good for health as we feel so full that it becomes tough even to walk, but still, we continue eating unless the plate is clean, or the pack is finished. (Participant 01, Male)

This explains why Lancet ranks Pakistan as the ninth most obese country globally ([Ng et al., 2014](#)).

*4.2.3 Food waste.* One of the many consequences of purchasing supersized food is food waste. This finding was validated through data collected from projective techniques and interviews, as shown in [Tables 1](#) and [3](#). The participants stated that the supersizing results in overconsumption and food waste. Despite this realization, the value of supersizing tempt them as they value the price change more than the difference in size ([Çakır and Balagtas, 2014](#)) and are leaned to underrate the increased food in supersized packages, which are highly associated with more food waste ([Wilson et al., 2017](#)). Consumers purchase food quantity beyond their need and appropriate consumption norms but blame retailers for the wastage for determining the size of portions ([Block et al., 2016](#)).

Overconsumption and food waste appear to be negatively related. A segment of consumers overconsumes to avoid wastage. Interestingly, food waste and sharing are also negatively related. Whenever consumers find it hard to finish, they take the leftovers home to share the meal with family members or give it to someone in need, as explained by the narrative below.

The quantity was too much as we were unable to finish the eight chicken pcs and that food would have been wasted had it not been taken home and shared with my family. (Informant Narrative, Male)

This finding contradicts the results of [Parker et al. \(2019\)](#) that consumers are more likely to take the food home in a personal consumption context. Our results suggest that food can also be taken home for collaborative consumption to avoid food waste.

More food sharing and smaller sizes can be solutions to food waste and overconsumption ([Lazell, 2016; Wilson et al., 2017](#)).

*4.2.4 Affective outcomes.* We also found that the consumption of hedonic foods results in pleasure, happiness, joy, satisfaction and guilt. Consumers feel happy and satisfied while consuming food in larger quantities. They enjoy more volume by paying just a few extra bucks. In the following quotation, a participant refers to hedonic food consumption:

Emmm. . [pause] buying large gives a lovely feeling of having plenty of food to eat, brings great pleasure and joy to me and becomes the reason for my satisfaction. (Participant 20, Male)

This finding was also validated through all data collection techniques, as shown in [Tables 1 and 3](#). It validates previous research findings that consumers acquire both the deal and their desired food, in greater quantity at lower unit price. It results in more consumption, pleasure and satisfaction, especially of hedonic products ([Zane et al., 2021](#)). We also found that some consumers feel guilty while buying and consuming supersized meals but sometimes justify their guilt by getting better value for money ([Shabir, 2019](#)). Respondents mentioned two kinds of guilt: consuming supersized packs leads to overconsumption and supersized containers are the primary cause of food waste.

We also found that the guilt of consuming supersized food can be moderated by sharing the meal with others, especially the poor.

I often buy a large pizza, but it either results in overconsumption or food waste. As a result, I start to feel bad. So to overcome that bad feeling, I try to share the food with the poor now as it gives me mental peace and I feel happy. (Participant 07, Male)

People often look for ways to overcome consumption guilt via altruistic behaviour ([Khan and Dhar, 2006](#)), kind behaviour (e.g. giving a promotional product to a friend) ([Lee-Wingate and Corfman, 2010](#)) and flow consciousness ([Barta et al., 2021](#)). We propose that sharing can also play the role of moderator for reducing the feeling of guilt arising from the decision of opting for supersized foods.

*4.2.5 Quality.* Our findings also suggest that while opting for the supersized food or a deal at a restaurant, consumers intuitively know that the quality is compromised compared to consuming the same food in a small pack. As stated below:

I was happy at the time of order placement; however, the post-consumption feeling was not good. I decided not to avail the same deal again. And I would not even prefer to visit McDonald's again. (Informant Narrative, Male)

The finding was also validated by semi-structured interviews, as shown in [Table 2](#). According to [Yan et al. \(2014\)](#), package size of the product influences the quality perceptions; consumers consider smaller-sized products to have better quality than the equivalent product in a larger pack. It happens so because consumers associate smaller package sizes with higher unit prices (despite having a lower overall price). It suggests that information about unit price is more indicative while establishing opinions of product quality; hence, supersized food products are perceived to have lower quality.

*4.2.6 Leisure time.* Lastly, consumers also buy a supersized meal to spend more time at a restaurant, either for chatting with friends or enjoying the ambiance.

Sometimes when I want to spend more time in a restaurant, I buy large. (Respondent 10, Male)

This finding was validated by the completion and interview technique, as shown in [Tables 1 and 3](#). Interestingly, spending more time at a restaurant is mentioned as an antecedent and a consequence for choosing supersized meals.

### 5. Conclusion and implications

Our findings suggest that consumers purchase supersized foods for several reasons, as shown in Figure 2, in the form of antecedents and consequences. Some factors play a dual role, being antecedent and consequence simultaneously. Many of these findings echo the means-end theory (Gutman, 1997); product attributes such as price, taste, palatability and quantity are the means that guide consumers' food-related decisions for achieving their goals in the form of better value for money.

Table 4 summarizes the study's conclusion and main theoretical and managerial implications.

The size choice decision brings both positive and negative consequences. Means-end theory suggests that consumers' decision-making focuses on obtaining desired outcomes and avoiding undesirable consequences (Gutman, 1997). For example, in the case of supersizing, consumers get to eat more quantity, resulting in more satisfaction, financial saving and pleasure. Yet, they may also face negative consequences, such as food waste and guilt of overconsumption. These negative consequences, especially overconsumption and food waste, result from consumers' food myopia, a short-sighted approach towards food purchase and consumption decisions focusing on an instant gratification coupled with most immediate and salient food attributes (i.e. price, quantity and taste) and ignoring post-consumption consequences (health and well-being) (Qazi and Cova, 2019). It is vital to get consumers out of food myopia through awareness about the role of package and food size, portion distortion, serving and portion sizes and their impact on consumption quantity. It can lead to moderate consumption; eating in moderation would help consumers achieve their health goals and increase food well-being (Qazi and Cova, 2019). It would be a win-win for both marketers and consumers, as smaller hedonic food portions are more pleasurable than larger portions and consumers are willing to pay more for it (Cornil and Chandon, 2016). By saying so, we do not encourage consumers to refrain from eating hedonic foods. Instead, we propose moderation in consumption of hedonic food options and encourage inclination to healthy food options (Haws and Winterich, 2013). However, it is challenging to fight obesity by encouraging consumers to opt for the moderation of unhealthy food than abstinence, as it is easier to resist unhealthy consumption than to stop the consumption of food once it has started (Haws and Winterich, 2013).

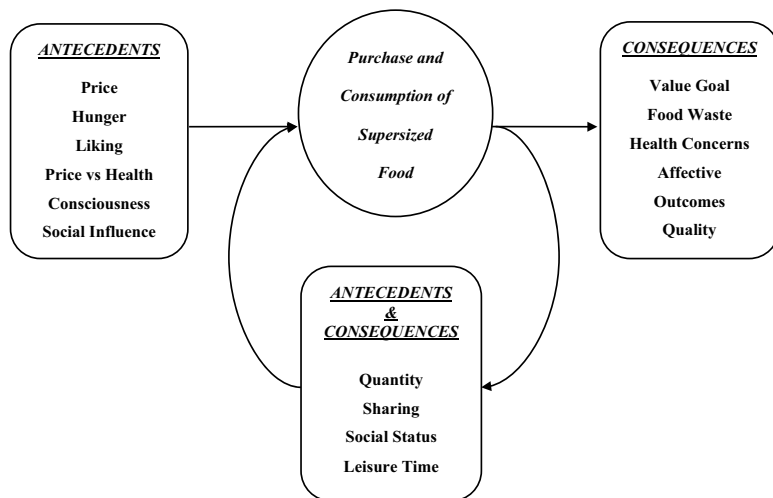


Figure 2.  
Synthesis of the  
research findings

**Table 4.**  
Conclusions,  
theoretical and  
managerial  
implications

Conclusion and theoretical contributions	Managerial implications
Antecedents of purchase and consumption of supersized foods: price-quantity trade-off, hunger, liking and social setting of consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketers can make customers aware of overconsumption and its impacts on health and wellbeing</li> <li>• Companies concerned about consumer health and wellbeing have more loyal customers</li> </ul>
Consequences of post-purchase and consumption: savings, health concerns, food waste, the guilt of overeating and satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temptation of unhealthy eating and overconsumption can be reduced with campaigns targeting the adverse consequences</li> </ul>
Factors as antecedents and consequences for purchase and consumption of supersized foods: sharing, social status, quantity and leisure time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketers can reduce food waste by promoting food-sharing ideas and deals</li> <li>• Marketers can positively link small food portions with environmentally friendly practices, encouraging more conscious buying decisions</li> <li>• Marketing campaigns highlighting post-consumption consequences can correct customers' food myopia</li> </ul>

Marketers must know about the link between the physical attributes and the benefits it provides to bring the desired qualities of the product in research and development. Understanding consumers' route to desired consequences through product characteristics allows marketers to design their products better (Gutman, 1997).

It is evident that pricing and packaging influence the consumption quantity, which requires marketers' and policymakers' attention towards such attributes and better-designed nutritional labels to encourage moderate consumption. Jain (2012) demonstrated that smaller packages help well-being for consumers and society alike, motivate consumers combat their self-control problems. However, they also enhance the consumption of vice foods. Smaller packages can also benefit the firms to attract new customers when fewer consumers have overconsumption issues. On the other hand, exposure to smaller portions in the environment changes consumers' perceptions about normal food portions to eat, resulting in less consumption in the future (Robinson *et al.*, 2019).

Coca-Cola, Scotland, has started to sell smaller bottles at elevated prices, owing to the tax imposed on sugar (Wood, 2018). Steps like these might also bring desired consequences for consumers. Moreover, supersizing can be practiced for healthier products, such as fruits and vegetables. It would be a win-win for both consumers and marketers (Haws *et al.*, 2020; Haws and Winterich, 2013).

Our findings suggest that supersized products also result in food waste. 1.3 billion tons of food is wasted annually across the globe (FAO, 2018). To our surprise, of 90 million tonnes of food produced in Pakistan, 36 million tonnes is wasted (Mughal, 2018), which means only 60% of the total food produced is consumed, by 57% of the population and 40% food is wasted. It implies that 43% of the country's population is food insecure and interestingly, the food that goes waste (40%) can help eradicate the food insecurity of the 43% population.

Five-star hotels in the capital city of Pakistan waste 870 kilograms of food each year (Mughal, 2018). Therefore, policies must be formulated to oversee food menus, restaurant opening and closing timings, inappropriate food portions served by the restaurants, over-purchase of food and food recycling to ensure that the food waste can be significantly reduced and/or diverted to the food insecure population.

According to our findings, sharing and food waste are negatively related; encouraging sharing at a restaurant can also reduce food waste. Following this concept of sharing, McDonald's Pakistan has implemented a menu option called "Share Bag", which encourages food sharing with friends and family.

There are certain limitations of the study. First, the research participants were students between 19 and 26 years. It may limit the findings as the perspectives of adults and children on choosing supersized foods might be different. It would be interesting to consider a different sample for future research. Secondly, the focus of the study was more towards food consumed immediately. Hence, it cannot be generalized to food consumed in a delayed context. Future research might explore delayed consumption, as the implications of this context are also relevant to supersized options and their impact on consumption and health.

Food sharing and smaller sizes can be remedies against food waste and overconsumption (Lazell, 2016; Wilson *et al.*, 2017); however, a better understanding of consumers' food waste behaviour is required. Exploring the reasons for food waste in restaurants, hotels, marriages halls and homes calls for future research, considering the concealed nature of food. We only focused on individual consumption, believing it to be the most critical for an individual's health. However, the overconsumption also occurs in collaborative settings (Parker *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, considering the collectivist culture, future research may also focus on collaborative consumption in value deals often offered in various restaurants in Pakistan.

Finally, it appears that socioeconomic status and need for showing status may be related and it is possible that consumers from a developed country with a better income level may not seek status in a supersized food. Thus, it will be interesting to compare the perceptions of people belonging to countries having different socioeconomic status, as size to status relationship can also be negative as at fancy restaurants food served in small quantity are more expensive and small objects also reflect status (Dubois *et al.*, 2012).

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