**Introduction**

Fast-Food Industry, is an industry concerned with the provision of fast food to customers, either prepared in restaurants or other outlets or sold in packaged form for buyers to consume or prepare at home. Although it is acknowledged to be an increasingly significant sector of the hotel and catering industry, defining fast food in any meaningful way has proved difficult. To some commentators, the basis of the fast-food business is technology such as the microwave oven, while others contend that it is a form of takeaway food retail outlet, epitomized by ubiquitous and usually American franchising and chain store operations, such as McDonald’s, Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Domino’s Pizza. Both perspectives are inadequate because they focus on how and where fast food is produced rather than what is traded. How the product is traded or produced falls into the category of differentiating one competitive offering from another, but it does not necessarily permit any material analysis of the industry’s dynamics, its scope, its economic significance, or its history.

**Definition**

A more instructive approach is to define fast food retail as the sale of an end or finished product with four generic characteristics. It has a low relative price. The finishing (and in some cases total production) and service times are quick. (The range of end products on offer, demand levels, and production/service efficiency make it difficult to apply actual times, but these typically range between 2 and 15 minutes for products made on site, and less than 30 minutes for home delivery products.) The product is suitable for eating with the fingers, has disposable packaging, and, where applicable, disposable cutlery. (While this aspect facilitates the takeaway, drive-through, and home delivery options of product delivery, it has also attracted substantial criticism from environmentalists.) The durability of the finished product (such as maintenance of heat, nutritional value, etc.) can be measured in minutes for hot fast-food products and hours for cold products. (This perishability factor clearly distinguishes fast food from snack/confectionery items, and this is where recent food hygiene legislation, such as the United Kingdom’s various Food Safety Acts, has been a central issue.) Typical fast-food products falling within this generic definition include hamburgers, fish and chips, scooped ice cream, kebabs, fried and broiled chicken, chips or French fries, pizza, Chinese and Indian takeaway food, sandwiches, and other forms of ready-to-eat products, as well as canned or packaged ready-to-drink beverages.

**History**

Many people believe that fast food is not only synonymous with the American lifestyle, but also has its origins in the United States, and that it is a modern phenomenon. To some degree, these beliefs are understandable when one considers the significant impact on traditional cultures that the American media has had, that the term “fast food” did not appear in the popular vocabulary until 1954 (followed by “takeout food” in 1962), the success of McDonald’s[[1]](#footnote-1) since Ray Kroc took over management control in 1955, and that the top ten global fast- food brands are US-owned and generate sales of over US$75 billion collectively.



**Picture of Cooked Chicken**

However, much fast food is European in origin, with a considerable history. For example, John Stow’s 1598 survey of London mentions fast-food-like items, as does Henry Mayhew in his social history of London in the 1840s and 1850s. The hamburger derived from the Baltic provinces of Russia in the Middle Ages, where various tribes ate steak tartare. These Tartars, or Tatars, introduced the delicacy to their German trading partners from the port of Hamburg. The Germans fried the meat and seasoned it with onions. When German immigrants arrived in the United States, they brought this steak dish with them. This said, there is also some evidence to suggest that the Romans ate a form of hamburger as long ago as about 500 BC, and the Romans are also on record as eating a type of pizza. The sandwich allegedly owes its existence to John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich, who asked for such an item during a gambling session in the early 1770s. The debate concerning the origin of fish and chips, whether it derived from London or from Mossley in Lancashire, only serves to underline the European dimension.

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| **Country of Origin** | **Types of Foods** |
| Russia, Germany and Ancient Rome | Hamburger |
| Ancient Rome | Pizza |
| England | Fish and chips |
| England | Sandwiches |

**Country of Origin**

What is attributable to the United States is the standardized chain-owned fast-food concept, the subsequent innovations that improved the efficiency of these operations, and their growth through franchising from 1925. Frederick Harvey, an Englishman, is noted as the pioneer who, in 1876, created the uniformity in signs, décor furnishings, and service staff attire that has become the hallmark of modern fast-food retailing. These

features were also apparent in the development of the cafeteria in the 1890s, and later in the opening of Horn and Hardart’s first automat restaurant in 1902. Within the fast-food market, the origin of the standardized chain is attributed to the White Castle company, when Walter Anderson and Edgar Ingram opened their first store in 1921. The emphasis on standardization has attracted criticism because it has served to reduce labor skills and thereby reduce wages; it has also been cited as the primary cause of the decline of independently owned and operated fast-food businesses and as an example of US cultural imperialism.

**Recent trends**

Fast food has become one of the fastest-growing segments of the hotel and catering industry. This growth has not only been fueled by consumer demand but also through the expansion of the supply base through diversification. This diversification has taken four forms.

**Population**

**Product diversification**

While fast-food menus have been traditionally limited in breadth and depth of product mix, as the market has matured, so increased variety has become the norm. For example, the major hamburger chains offer not only pizza, chicken, baked potatoes, sandwiches, and salads, but also different variations of these foodstuffs. Their provision means that the chains can offer a new experience to their existing customers and possibly

appeal to a new customer base. In the United States, product diversity has taken a branded route, with companies supplying complementary products, and forming strategic alliances to create dual-branded stores.

1. This firm opened a branch in Pinelands in 2002 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)