

# A Study on the Fast Food Consumption Behavior of Generation Z in Shenzhen: A Case Study of the Tastien Brand

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## Abstract:

The development of the Chinese burger brand “Tastien” is of profound significance in the localization process of fast food culture. The mechanism of its success, however, are rarely studied in related fields. As Generation Z takes over as the strongest consumer force, this study focuses on the consumption behavior of young people in Shenzhen towards the Tastien fast food brand, attempting to explore its causes through questionnaire surveys, in-depth interviews, and rational analysis. The research findings show that: 1) Tastien took Generation Z as the main consumer target group and conducted suitable strategies. As a result, it has gained tremendous market growth in the past few years; 2) Tastien is widely favored because of its high cost-effectiveness and unique Chinese burger image. This reflects the distinctive consumption habits of Shenzhen’s Generation Z, which not only seek affordability, but also value the emotional fulfillment that they gained from their purchases. For these consumers, the concept of ‘emotional value for money’ plays a crucial role, as they gravitate towards brands that provide both economic and emotional satisfaction. The research results is important for helping fast food brands understand their service groups and accurate position on the market.

**Keywords:** Fast food culture; Tastien, Generation Z; Consumer behavior; Emotional value for money

## 1. Introduction

The concept of modern fast food, originated in the West, refers to food that can be served to customers immediately. Price believes that fast food has four characteristics: 1) high corrosivity; 2) low delivery time; 3) product packaging can be disposed of at

will; 4) relatively low product prices [1]. As a well-known fast food, burger entered the Chinese market in the 1990s. After that, burger, a typical symbol of fast food, experienced a transformation from imported food to so-called local goods. In addition to old Western burger brands such as KFC and McDonald’s, new Chinese burger brands represented by Tastien

have gradually attracted many consumers.

Generation Z refers to a group of people who were born between 1995 to 2009 [2]. The notion can traced back to American writer Douglas Coupland's 1991 novel *Generation X: Tales for an accelerated culture*, in which he came up with the notion of Generation X, referring to who born in the period of 1965-1980. From then on, the people who born in the next 15 years (1981-1995) were named as Generation Y. In conclusion, Generation Z is a continuation of the naming method [2].

As the post-1995s and post-2000s has gradually entered the labor market, Generation Z has become an emerging force in the consumer market. As a special economic zone and first-tier city of China, Shenzhen has a large group of young people. Their consumption behavior and preferences have a remarkable impact on the catering market, especially the fast food market. According to the *Blue Book of Development Trends of Chain Catering Brand Stores* (Data Source: GeoQ Data), in the first half of 2024, despite the suboptimal development status of most fast food establishments nationwide, the net increase in stores number of the Chinese burger brand Tastien ranked first among various fast food brands, reaching a total of 682. This article focuses on the counter-trend expansion strategy run by Tastien, as well as analyzes the fast food consumption behaviors and its underlying causes among Generation Z in Shenzhen by examining its market positioning and product strategy.

## 2. Literature Review

After searching from the CNKI database, it is found that most of the domestic stuides on fast food brands are used to pay attention to foreign fast food brands with certain accumulations, such as KFC and McDonald's. Even when it comes to native fast food brands, they seem accustomed to concentrating on the social hot spots such as precooked food. Frankly, there is no concern about the emerging Chinese burger brands. For instance, when using Tasiten and Hamburger as keywords for sentence retrieval, there are only 32 relevant papers.

### 2.1 Regular Fast Food Brands

In the existing literature under the theme of fast food brands, researchers show the same trend of adopting SWOT, PEST analysis or Porter's Five forces analysis theory, STP theory, 4P theory and other similar analysis models to make analysis. The evaluation of the internal and external environment, product marketing strategy and development status of the brand are the main arguments of these paper. The representatives include: In 2020,

Gao Hui studied the development status and strategy of McDonald's company through SWOT analysis, PEST analysis and Porter's Five forces analysis model and other multiple methods [3]. In 2022, Huang Wenchuan and Han Shenchao analyzed the localization marketing strategy of foreign restaurants in China based on the comparison of KFC and McDonald's brands [4]. In 2023, Huang Meng conducted a study on the marketing strategy optimization of local fast food Original Chicken under the background of digital economy through PEST and SWOT analysis [5]. This section of the study focuses on theory and data. They are good at market analysis from a top view, risk assessment and strategy summary from an enterprise perspective. However, this is also easy to become a paper that is lacking in market research or an unrealistic business plan. It is difficult to have a substantial impact on the production mode of enterprises effectively. What's more, the macro-level strategy is also more difficult to be demonstrated. Some articles with the theme of national strategy discuss the scope limited to the first and second tier cities actually, instead of involving the third and fourth tier.

### 2.2 Domestic Burger Brand Tastien

About half of the literature concerning the Chinese burger brand Tastien are from business journals and newspapers. The remaining half of the papers primarily encompass two cases: Firstly, the Tastien brand is only referenced as a business case. For example, a study conducted by Guo Mei that examined the profit model of chain catering enterprises from the value chain perspective. Another local catering brand serves as the main focus. Tastien was only mentioned once for comparative purposes [6]. Secondly, these studies focus on the packaging design of Tastien products, and lacks of comprehensive research regarding its business model and consumer behavior. For instance, Liu Qian and Zheng Wei investigated the image-building strategies of fast food brands from an aesthetic standpoint, conducting parallel analyses of Tastien, McDonald's and Chongqing Xiaomian [7]. Additionally, Lu Shuning discusses the symbolic application of New Year imagery in ceramic decoration design, citing the packaging design of Tastien as an example without any market model related extension [8].

In conclusion, there is a discernible trend of template-based research on fast food brands in China, accompanying by an inaccurate delineation of the research scope. Meanwhile, the attention of Chinese fast food is far less pronounced compared to that of Western fast food brands, resulting in a relative scarcity of scholarly attention in this area.

### 2.3 Consumption Behavior of Generation Z

Currently, there is a certain basis for research on Generation Z consumption. According to the CNKI database, 203 scholarly articles have been published since 2018. The predominant focus of this research is discussing on the macro-level regarding product design and marketing strategies across various industries. However, there are seldom practical analysis that integrates specific brands and consumer behaviors. For instance, Wang Li observed that Generation Z increasingly values the integration of trend culture and tends to select domestic brands featuring traditional Chinese cultural elements as a means of expressing their individuality. Although her study mentioned brands such as Erke and MIXI ice cream&tea, it did not dive deeply into brand strategy but merely described objective phenomena [9].

Furthermore, the methodologies employed in examining Generation Z consumption behavior are relatively simplistic with small sample size. Tian Fangkun et al. conducted collaborative research about Generation Z based on Self-theory. Their approach relied solely on questionnaires and analyzed only 200 responses, resulting in a lack of depth in their findings [10].

Overall, academic research concerning Generation Z in relation to catering culture and brands is rare in academic community, with only 4 articles are witnessed in the CNKI database. This indicates a significant opportunity for further exploration and expansion of associations within related fields. Therefore, this research is devoted to the vacancies on the research of Chinese fast food brand, with Tastien as a case, focus on the brand in the city of Shenzhen development strategy and its influence. Eventually, the actual investigation and study to the young consumer groups will be take as data foundation for practical analysis.

## 3. Research Method

### 3.1 Online Questionnaire

This study designed and distributed questionnaires for Tastien brand consumers through online channels. A total of 401 questionnaires were collected. Data on consumer awareness, purchase frequency, taste preferences and price

sensitivity of Tastien were studied. The collected samples showed a balanced trend in gender, and 373 participants met the age limit of Generation Z. The sample data is in line with the purpose of the research and clearly depicts the general trait of the Shenzhen consumer groups of Tastien, which provides reliable data for the analysis of the consumption behavior and consumption habits of Generation Z in Shenzhen.

### 3.2 In-depth interview

Besides the questionnaire method, this study also conducted interviews with a loyal consumer of the Tastien brand and a member of Shenzhen's Generation Z who had never previously tried Tastien. Through two in-depth interviews averaging 45 minutes each, the consumers' motivations for choosing Tastien, their experiences during the consumption process, and their advice for the brand were gained. Ultimately, real consumer voices provided valuable market insights for implementing Tastien's brand strategy.

## 4. Data analysis

### 4.1 Tastiens' Expansion and Target Market Selection

Generation Z in Shenzhen has frequent exposed to fast food categories and chain brands, which is the main force of fast food burger brand consumption. The Tastien brand has a clear positioning of the target customer group, which is an important reason for its expansion in recent years. Shenzhen is a part of Guangdong Province. According to Table 1, only approximately 30% of the participants were originated from Guangdong Province, while the rest significant portion came from various regions across China. In general, nearly half of the population came from southwest and southern China, which are about equal to those from central and northern China. The north and the south have entirely different eating habits: the south likes to eat rice and prefers a lighter diet, while the north likes to eat pasta and noodles with stronger and heavier flavor. Such objective conditions determine the inclusive food culture of Shenzhen, and deciding both western fast food and Chinese cuisine are common in the market.

**Table 1. Home place information**

Native place (Province)	Number	Proportion	Native place (Province)	Number	Proportion
Guangdong	113	28.18%	Yunnan	10	2.49%
Chongqing	26	6.48%	Gansu	9	2.24%

Hubei	23	5.74%	Shanxi	9	2.24%
Sichuan	22	5.49%	Fujian	7	1.75%
Jiangsu	16	3.99%	Liaoning	7	1.75%
Hainan	15	3.74%	Guizhou	6	1.50%
Heilongjiang	15	3.74%	The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region	6	1.50%
Hunan	15	3.74%	Qinghai	6	1.50%
Jiangxi	15	3.74%	Shanxi	6	1.50%
Anhui	14	3.49%	Hebei	5	1.25%
The Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region	12	2.99%	The Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region	3	0.75%
Henan	12	2.99%	The Tibet Autonomous Region	3	0.75%
Shandong	12	2.99%	Zhejiang	3	0.75%
Shanghai	10	2.49%	Jilin	1	0.25%

In an in-depth interview, an interviewee from Nantong, Jiangsu, mentioned that:

*“Well, it’s true that I’m still affected by the hometown appetite... the three years in Shenzhen actually get me less touch with the taste of hometown, and then I had to pick up some, you know, chain brands such as Green Tea... Shenzhen cuisine is all about putting together food from all over the world, and so is fast food.”*

Another respondent who was born in Shenzhen with parents from northern area of China mentioned:

*“Eating fast food is mainly because it is convenient and fast... Fast food can be an option in any scene of my life, probably unlike my parents, they ruled it out first.”*

Local cuisines and snacks are rare in Shenzhen, while chain brands and fast food culture flourish are well accepted among young Generation Z. At the same time, the pace of urban life and work in Shenzhen is swift. Consequently, when facing dining situation, fast food has naturally become the first choice for some young people. It can be seen that the local cultural environment in Shenzhen is the crucial factor affecting the diet consumption behavior of Generation Z, prompting them to choose chain fast food brands.

Another result of the questionnaire data also well confirms to the above views, indicating that generation Z consumers and even Shenzhen consumer groups have a very high degree of familiarity with the hamburger fast food category. All respondents between the ages of 15 and 30 (i.e., all respondents who meet the definition of Generation Z), referred to that they have some degree of awareness of the market burger brands. Only one participant under the age of 15 said that he/she did not know any mainstream burger brands at all. Of those over 30, 17 participants said they had only heard of McDonald’s, KFC and Wallace, while three said they had also heard of NewYobo or Hotties.

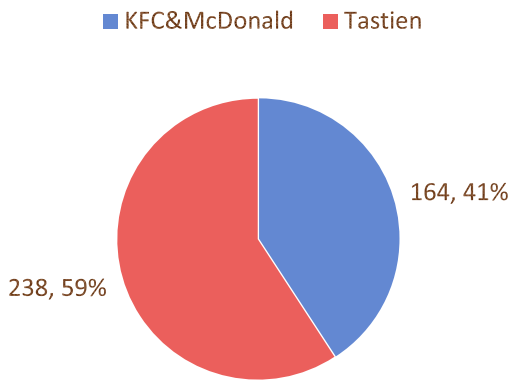
A significant number of respondents reported that they have a Tustin outlet near their university or workplace. It is obvious that the location of Tastien’s stores satisfied the requirement of the target market. Moreover, the brand concept in its official website also clearly states that it sticks to the young group in Figure 1. Arguably, the positioning of the target customer groups of Tastien fit in with the actual market situation. In conclusion, it is safe to say that the rapid expansion of Tastien in recent years is closely related to the accurate target market positioning.



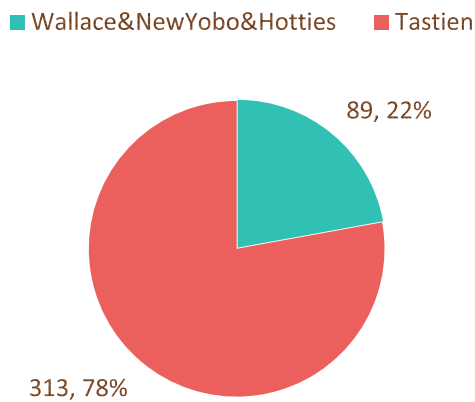
**Figure 1. Brand concept from Tastien official website [11]**

### 4.2 Shenzhen Generation Z Consumption Mentality

Among the commonly used delivery platforms in China, the average price of Tastien per capita fluctuates between 17 and 25, while that of KFC and McDonald’s is roughly 28 to 35. In a side-by-side comparison of burger brands, Tastien received 59 percent support in the face of the KFC and McDonald’s in Figure 2, while it gained 78 percent support compared with brands with similar pricing strategies in the markets in Figure 3.



**Figure 2. Supportive rates between KFC&McDonald and Tastien**



**Figure 3. Supportive rate between Wallace&New Yobo&Hotties and Tastien**

In order to explore the causes of this phenomenon, this study designed a series of situational questions in the in-depth interview:

- 1) Suppose you are eating in a restaurant and have a choice between a \$20 hamburger and a \$30 hamburger.
- 2) Suppose you order from a takeout platform, choose between a 20 yuan burger with no delivery fee and a 30 yuan burger with 10 yuan delivery fee.
- 3) Choose between two burgers priced at \$20, one of which has a distinct national brand.

One respondent noted:

*“I’m generally flexible with burger prices, ranging from 20 to 40 yuan, even up to 50 yuan... But I have never ordered KFC McDonald’s take-out, 9 yuan delivery fee is too expensive, I always go to the restaurant to eat... Yeah, I may want to try a burger with national characteristics, if I have to choose one of the 20 yuan price points. The appeal of Tastien lies not just in its price but in the unique experience and emotional satisfaction it offers as a national brand.”*

Another said:

*“It should be said that I can accept the total price of almost 40 yuan, but I will never pay for the extra 10 yuan food delivery fee... National characteristics will be a bright spot that will attract me to spend.”*

These two in-depth interview respondents showed similar attitudes in their answers. In the first question, they both showed wavering. Secondly, both of them chose the 20 yuan hamburger with free delivery fee. In the third question, both of them chose the national brand hamburger. This complements the cause of the survey results, suggesting that Gen Z consumers in Shenzhen may be more inclined to hamburger products that are cost-effective and have the characteristics of national brands, which can provide reasons for emotional consumption. Another result of the questionnaire also supports the above conclusion, showing that all respondents come into contact with the Tastien brand after 2020. It is worth noting that in 2023, Tastien’s brand slogan ‘Chinese stomach, Chinese Burger’ was established, which brought 55% of respondents said that they had first known or come into contact with Tastien in that year.

One response from the interview adds to reasons why people choose Tastien. As a big fan of Tastien, interviewee mentioned that Tastien’s burgers are made with unique Chinese dough just to her taste, and the soft texture makes her recall hometown cuisine.

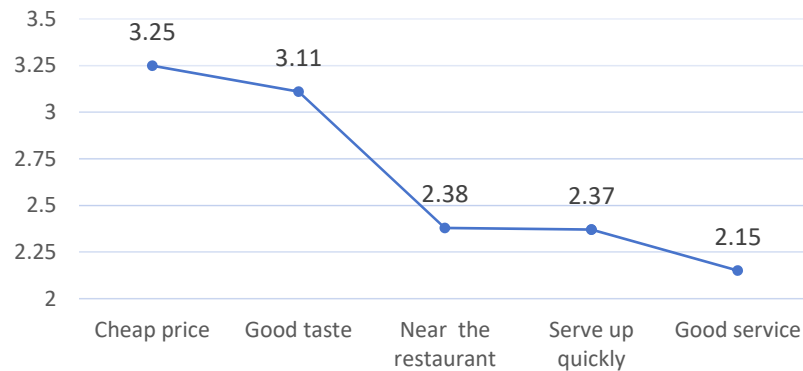
*“I was first attracted by the taste. To be honest, Tastien’s burger are more like Chinese snacks than simple western burgers. I don’t know how to find a better way to describe, maybe a kind of Chinese meat buns.”*

She said. The product taste of Tastien evokes a sense of familiarity among Chinese consumers, and this emotional connection to national identity directly influences Shenzhen’s Generation Z in their preference for Tastien. There is no doubt that emotion and price have a comprehensive impact on consumer choice, but which of the two is more decisive? Among the respondents who have heard of Tastien but have not tried it, the vast majority (75%) are more impressed by the brand image of Tastien’s Chinese burger and less aware of whether its price is favorable. Respondents who have eaten at Tastien initially chose the brand



due to its affordable price and value for money in figure 4, but they also noted that the brand's appeal goes beyond mere cost savings. The emotional value Tastien offers through its distinctive 'Chinese burger' image resonates

deeply with Generation Z consumers. This emotional connection enhances their loyalty and adds a layer of emotional value, which influences their purchasing decisions just as much as the price.



**Figure 4. The influence of various factors in the choice**

At the end of the two-part interview, the study designed questions about the Tastien brand proposal. The girl who has never tried Tastien so far, mentioned that in her mind, fast food is still synonymous with unhealthy diet. Despite being quite familiar with the Tastien as a national brand, she felt that there is lack of motivation to try, and suggested the brand to increase its publicity. The piece of advice evince that although the 'national brand' can be appeal to many consumers, it would not become the factor makes consumers choose Tastien immediately.

Most of the respondents are students and office workers, and nearly 80 percent of the respondents have a monthly income of less than 8,000 yuan. The majority of respondents who had eaten Tastien agreed that it was a Chinese burger with Chinese characteristics. The number of their income is at the same level as those agreed that it was cheap and affordable. Obviously, most of Tastien's customers have a sense of affinity and identity with Chinese burger, and have considerable recognition of Tastien's brand image. Nevertheless, the objective decisive factor may still be the product cost performance, which is in line with the objective state of respondents' income, with confirmation of the consumption habit and inertial logic of Generation Z.

## 5. Conclusion

After an in-depth analysis of the behavioral characteristics of Generation Z in Shenzhen on fast food consumption and their acceptance of Chinese hamburger brand Tastien as well as consumption motivation through research, the major findings are summarized: 1) Generation Z is the supreme force of fast food consumption. Tastien has successfully attracted a significant number of Generation

Z consumers in Shenzhen not only through clear market positioning and contrarian expansion strategies, but also by creating an emotional bond with young consumers. The brand's 'Chinese burger' identity taps into a sense of cultural pride and nostalgia, offering emotional value that complements its affordable pricing. 2) While Generation Z consumers display price sensitivity, their consumption choices are also heavily influenced by the emotional value they attach to the brand. The cultural relevance of Tastien as a 'Chinese burger' offers them more than just an affordable meal—it provides a sense of connection and identity, making them more inclined to choose Tastien despite minor price variations. Furthermore, when choosing Tastien, in addition to the main consideration of price factors, the brand's Chinese burger image will also be taken into account by consumers.

This paper aims to reveal the preferences and values of Generation Z consumers and the way they interact with the emerging Chinese fast food brands, so as to provide guidance and advice on marketing strategies for brands. Based on the responses collected in the questionnaires and interviews, this study believes that Tastien has already gained high market recognition as a national brand, which is worth learning. On the contrary, it also needs to be further strengthened in attracting new customers and enhancing the loyalty of existing customers. Given its cost-effective market advantage, Tastien may consider intensifying marketing efforts in the future, followed by increasing online advertising and media exposure, in addition to expanding stores offline. Moreover, excavating the characteristics of Chinese national burgers in product design could help to arouse the implicit emotional resonance of diners.

By providing empirical data for understanding the con-

sumption behavior of Gen Z consumers, this study reveals the potential of Chinese fast food brands in meeting consumer demand and emotional connection, and helps catering enterprises to better position the market and refine product pricing strategies.

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