Convenience Food: Consumer Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The continuous growth in the economy and demand for convenience at a large is seen in the present consumers worldwide. One of the major conveniences that consumers look forward is in the convenience of food. The current paper is an attempt to examine the perspective of male and female consumers towards convenience foods. Many scholars have opined that variety of convenience food products have captured a sizable share of the food market since they are the most convenient alternatives to traditional fare. The study was undertaken with the help of structured questionnaire and various statistical tools were used for comparing the differences in preferences of male and female consumers and the results revealed that there is a large difference in the usage of convenience food.

Keywords: Consumers, Ready-to-eat, Ready-to-cook, Foods

INTRODUCTION:

The rapid urbanisation, cultural shifts, and socioeconomic transformations of recent decades have had a profound impact on traditional Indian diets and cooking practices. People favored low-maintenance cooking methods and ready-to-eat foods because of the time constraints of their hectic schedules (Malik, Saxena and Sonu 2018). People in the modern day have shifted their diet and cooking habits to accommodate the abundance of fast food options on the market and their preference for fresh, simple ingredients (Alvarez, Ponce and Moreira 2018). Foods that are "ready to eat" do not require any additional cooking time before consumption, while "ready to cook" foods require additional steps before they are ready to eat, such as heating or boiling.

The convenience of ready-to-eat (RTE) and ready-to-eat-now (REC) snacks has made them the fastest-growing food sector in the United States during the past five years. These foods attracted more attention from buyers because of their appealing characteristics price, flavour, appearance, texture, etc. (Patel and Rathod, 2017). Due to the convenience of these technologies, which eliminate the need for time-consuming processes like cooking and preparation in favour of a focus on appealing packaging, they have been widely adopted in the manufacture of RTE and RTC snack products. RTE products include a wide variety of foods, including those that are sweet, salty, fried, canned, fast food, baked, dried, preserved, extruded, etc. (Alvarez, Ponce and Moreira 2018). Bakery goods, extruded meals, instant snacks, fast food, breakfast cereals, biscuits, bars, and other similar items have largely replaced traditional cereals as the most commonly consumed forms of this food group. Because they are convenient to buy and store, are low in weight, and have improved nutritional value, these food compositions are well-liked by consumers and suitable for human consumption.

These days, ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook products have captured a sizable share of the food market since they are the most convenient alternatives to traditional fare. For their money, young buyers are most likely to invest in ready-to-eat and cook items. These meals are in high demand among young consumers, who are an easy mark for RTE manufacturers to attract thanks to their high levels of convenience, pleasing texture,

and consistent flavour throughout the product's shelf life. Consumers' attention was drawn to ready-to-eat meals and snacks because of their widespread availability, convenience, and snacking habits (Patheeparambil, 2020). Consequently, both Indian and international consumers are gravitating away from conventional cooking methods and towards ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook food products. Puffed and flake millets, pasta, noodles, baked products, extruded product, fermented food, and weaning food are just some of the many convenience foods that may be manufactured from cereals, pulses, and millets (Jaybhaye et al., 2014). Bakery foods, extruded foods, fermented foods, frozen foods, and weaning foods are all examples of significant types of food that are either ready to eat or just require minimal cooking (Borah et al., 2019). These foods are great for providing quick bursts of energy and nutrients, but they often only satiate hunger to a limited extent. Because of its small size and convenient packing, it is simple to manipulate and alter (Kumar et al., 2019). Fruits, vegetables, salad, processed meat, half cooked meat, processed fish, samosas, pizza, veg patty, shingara, etc. are only some examples of the ready-to-eat and prepare items that are commonly produced as snacks or frozen food (Hassan et al., 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 RTE or ready-to-eat food

Due to their convenience in storage, preparation and consumption, ready-to-eat food products have widespread public acceptance. Dairy goods, biscuits, soups, sandwiches, rolls, breads, chips, breakfast cereals, fruit and vegetable salad, etc. are all examples of ready-to-eat foods. Because new items fall under that category almost every day, this list has the potential to grow very extensive. The most crucial raw materials for the manufacturing of ready-to-eat foods are fruits, vegetables, and grains (Malik, Saxena and Sonu 2018). Ready-to-eat snacks and meals including cereal biscuits and bars, pav bhaji, mixed fruit salads, idlis, dosas, vegetable curries, chapatti and precooked meat items like chicken goods, sausage, ham and other instant food products dominate traditional diets (Lucera et al., 2017).

2.2 Products in the ready-to-cook (RTC) category

Ready-to-cook products, also known as convenience foods, are those that require minimal additional work beyond the normal cooking process. Humans' way of life and standard of living evolve as cities expand and the world becomes more interconnected. Consumers of RTC products tend to be young, metropolitan professionals who lead busy lives (Malik and Kajla, 2020). Several factors, including rising urbanization of domestic labor, a lack of free time, an increase in per capita income, and the rising purchasing power of the middle class, have contributed to a rise in the demand for ready-to-cook foods. The rising number of working women's mean that ready-to-cook meals are becoming popular as a convenient alternative to homemade cooking (Sathiyabamavathy and Sekhar, 2020).

Objective: To understand the difference and the perception of male and female regarding the usage of convenience food in their daily routine.

Hypothesis: There is no difference in the perception of male and female regarding the usage of convenience food in their daily routine

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The type of research was descriptive and based on a survey conducted using a structured questionnaire. The respondents were from different parts of North India. *Likert Scale* was part of the questionnaire framing. The data collected will include the demographics of the respondents.

The reliability test resulted in a Cronbach's Alpha of .860, which showed that the questionnaire was

adequate to generate a good result. According to (Griethuijsen et al., 2014), any value greater than or equal to 0.7 was adequate to show the reliability of the questionnaire.

Sampling method: The sampling method used was convenience sampling. Primary data was collected through a designed Questionnaire. The secondary data has been collected through literature review of various research papers, articles and books.

Sample Size: The sample size was 192 respondents from different parts of North India. Consumers of Popular Indian branded QSR Outlets namely Bikanervala, Haldiram's, Nirula's, Dosa Plaza, Burger Singh, Chaayos etc. are planned to be part of the study.

Data Collection method: A structured questionnaire designed using Google form was used for executing this survey.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The survey data was analyzed using the statistical package SPSS 23. The sample data was 192 respondents. Cronbach's alpha reliability test was done which generate an adequate value above .8. Based on this, further testing was done which included Mann-Whitney *U* test. Descriptive demographic data were also tabulated.

Table 1: Demographics Profile of the respondents

(N= 192)	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
20-30	80	41.7
31-40	64	33.3
41-50	32	16.7
51 Above	16	8.3
Gender		
Male	64	33.3
Female	128	66.7
Occupation		
Teaching	80	41.7
Non-Teaching	112	58.3
Education		
UG	64	33.3
PG	48	25.0
Ph.D	80	41.7
Marital Status		
Married	112	58.3
Unmarried	80	41.7

The respondents 20-30 years showed more interest to give feedback during the survey (41.7%). This showed that this sector has a major part of its Customer in this chunk. The next group who had a better rating of the Convenience food industry was 31-40 year Category which was (33.3%) of the respondents. Further the

next age group was 41-50 years which was 16.7% of the respondents. Furthermore, very fewer responses received from 51 above age group that is only (8.3%). Females were the major part of the survey group compared to their male counterparts who were only 33.3% of the total respondents to give feedback on this survey. The respondent was mainly from the Non-Teaching field. They formed 58.3% of the survey respondents. Further good responses also received from teaching background 41.7% of the respondents. Many of the respondents held PhD degree, 80 (41.7%), while 64 (33.3%) were graduates and 48 (25.0%) of the respondents were post graduates. Married (58.3%) was the major part of the survey group compared to the unmarried who were only 41.7% of the total respondents to give feedback on this survey.

Mann-Whitney U were applied to test the Hypothesis

To evaluate the perception difference between male and female for the usage of convenience food in their daily routine, Mann-Whitney U test was applied the test revealed significant difference in the convenience food usage perception of male (Median=5.0, N=128)) and female (Median=5.0 , N=64), (*U=1920.00, z=6.047, p=.000, r=0.49).* Hence Ho was not accepted. Hence, H1 was supported because the p value is less than 0.05 and the difference in the perception of convenience food between male and female are significant the difference is also calculated large.

Table 2: Mann-Whitney U test (Ranks) for Male and Female

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Overall consumer perception towards usage of convenience food	Male	128	79.50	10176.00
	Female	64	130.50	8352.00
	Total	192		

Table 3: Test Statistic

Mann-Whitney U	1920.000
Wilcoxon W	10176.000
Z	-6.047
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

Grouping Variable: Gender

Effect size (r) was calculated of perception difference also calculate through the following formula

r=Z/ √ N.

r=   6.047/√192

r=6.047/13.85

r=0.49

According to cohen (1998) criteria, .1=small effect, .3= medium effect and .5=large effect

Hence, on the basis of analysis it can be concluded that there is a large difference in the perception of male and female for the usage of convenience food in their daily routine

CONCLUSION

People in the modern day have shifted their eating habits to take advantage of the abundance of convenience foods availability. All variety of convenience foods have been in demand in recent past due to raising economies and twofold income of larger public. Many factors, including rising urbanization of domestic labor, a lack of free time, an increase in per capita income, and the rising purchasing power of the middle class, have contributed to a rise in the demand for convenience foods. The usage of these types of foods has been seen in food outlets as well as in households. Both males and females have been found to have positive perception towards convenience foods. Numerous advances and a wide range of technology are used in the production of high-quality, pre-prepared foods that are both healthy and convenient. The author infers that the demand for such variety of convenience food will increase in coming times globally.

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