



CONSUMER PREFERENCE TOWARDS READY-TO-EAT FOOD PRODUCTS IN ERODE DISTRICT

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Abstract

Consumer preference is defined as the subjective tastes of individual consumers, measured by their satisfaction with those items after they have purchased them. This satisfaction is often referred to as utility. Consumer value can be determined by how consumer utility compares between different items. In this research, consumer preference towards ready-to-eat food products in Erode district of Tamilnadu, India. For this 125 consumers were taken for this research. A structured questionnaire has been framed and collected the consumers' opinion towards preference of ready-to-eat food products. The collected opinion was subdued into tables with the help of percentage analysis, Anova analysis and correlation analysis. The article resulted as most of the young female consumers are preferred ready-to-eat food products mostly than male respondents. Further, urban area consumers are most likely to prefer the ready-to-eat food products. On the other hand, the respondents' preference may vary based on their usage period.

Keywords : Ready-to-Eat Food, Consumer Preference, Millet Mx, Gravy Mix, Spice Mix.

Introduction

Ready-to-eat food is food intended by the producer or the manufacturer for direct human consumption without the need for cooking or other processing effective to eliminate or reduce to an acceptable level micro-organisms of concern (N.C. Elviss and F. Jørgensen, 2012). In India, the most of the food consumption is still at home. But with the time, ready-to-eat food consumption is increasing due to increase in urbanization, breaking up of the traditional joint family system, desire for quality, shortage of time, increasing number of working women, rise in per capita income, changing lifestyles and increasing level of affluence in the middle income group had brought about changes in food habits. The high-speed and time-constrained lifestyle of many consumers has forced to the rise of the ready-to-eat food industry and its significant influence on society's food consumption behaviours. Consequently, the food industry in India will face a rising demand for ready-to-eat food products. Ready-to-eat foods can be defined as a food product which is beneficial to the customer during any of the meal preparation. The demand for ready-to-eat food in the India has been boosted by the elevated female involvement in the labour- force. The term 'mother is at home cooking food' seems to be disappearing because these mothers have now gone out of their kitchens and homes to get their career settled. Since providing meals and securing family health are traditionally been the responsibility of women, but their employment has reduced the time available for household work. The high work pressure felt by working women has resulted in more use of ready-to-eat food products. During weekdays, time would be one of the constraints in preparing food; hence ready-to-eat food would be the solution to the time constrained women.

The food consumption behaviour of each household not only varies by differences in the socio-economic characteristics and income structure, but also by the value of the homemaker's time. Food preparation and consumption occupy scarce time, and households may choose between prepared food at home and food away from home. The need of at-home ready-to-eat foods has been driven by the division of labour in food preparation. Traditionally, households cooked most of their food at home and consumed it at home. But now marketers are providing such type of foods to the consumers where most of the preparation work has been done outside home.

Review of Literature

Roberts and Wortzel (1979) studied the women's high levels of participation in the workforce and their changing lifestyles and consumption patterns. The objective of this study was to analyze the women's attitudes and behavior related to their traditional roles i.e. food shopping and food preparation. The results showed that traditional women want to provide high quality food for their families at a reasonable cost with little concern for food shopping and meal preparation time required, while the modern women were more concern with time and less with the cost. Redman (1980) found out the impact of women's time allocation of expenditure for meals away from home and prepared foods. The results indicated that characteristics of women, which affect the allocation of their time to households' production do significantly, influence their household expenditure on food requiring relatively little preparation time. Employed wives buy more away from home meals, while education appeared to decrease the demand for prepared foods. Jackson et al. (1985) indicated that working wives tended to have a great dislike for food shopping and cooking that seemed to stem primarily from time consideration. Working wives also exhibited a tendency to be less concerned with the impact of their food shopping and preparation activities with other family members as compared to their counterpart.

Nayga, R. M. (1996) estimated the demand for prepared meals by U.S households by using the 1987-88 NFCS, a Heckman two-stage procedure. Prepared meals were defined as those ready-to-eat and those ready-to-cook foods. The results showed that the households headed by younger, more educated, and time constrained managers were more likely to purchase prepared meals and also indicated that prepared meals and food-away- from-home were substitutes. The presence of teenagers in a house was positively associated with expenditure on prepared meals. Glanz et al. (1998) examined the self-reported importance of taste, nutrition, cost, convenience, and weight control on personal dietary choices and whether these factors vary across demographic groups, were associated with lifestyle choices related to health (termed health lifestyle), and actually predict eating behaviour. Results showed that taste was the most important influence on their food choices, followed by cost. The importance of nutrition and importance of weight control was predicted best by subject's membership in a healthy lifestyle cluster. The study suggested that nutrition concerns were of less relevance to most people than taste and cost. Grunert (2002) applied food-related lifestyles instrument developed by Grunert, Brunso & Bisp (1993) to understand and track changes in consumers' food related attitude and behaviours.

Statement of the Problem

A large number of companies had been engaging in production and marketing of ready-to-eat food products. Hence, the consumers had more variety of food products available for consumption (Jackson, McDaniel and Rao 1985). In this context, a study on consumer behavior was deemed to be important to understand the consumer's preference towards ready-to-eat food products. Understanding the consumer's preference would help the firms in formulating strategies to cater to the needs of the consumers and thereby increase their market share.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are as follows.

1. To study the socio-demographic profile of the consumers in Erode district.
2. To examine the preference level of the selected consumers towards ready-to-eat food product in the study area.

Research Methodology

The present study intends to examine the preference level of the consumers towards ready-to-eat food products in Erode district. Erode district purposively selected because of more committed work and life, most of the people are willing to take ready-to-eat food products and also the major ready-to-eat food produced companies belongs to Erode like Sakthi Masala, Milka's New Hope Food Industries Ltd. The primary data have been collected through the survey method with a structured questionnaire. The required primary data for the present study were collected from 150 sample respondents by using random sampling method. The collected data were organized into simple tabular forms with the help of simple statistical tools like percentage analysis, mean score analysis, Anova analysis and Correlation analysis.

Results and Discussion

This section has clearly explained about the preference of the consumers towards ready-to-eat food products. The results and discussions are given below.

Socio-Demographic Profile of The Consumers And Their Level Of Preference

The following table shows the socio-demographic profile of the respondents towards ready-to-eat food products in Erode district.

Table 1: Gender of the Consumers and Their Mean Preference

| No. | Gender | No. of Respondents | % | Mean Score |
|-----|--------------|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| 1 | Male | 61 | 40.7 | 3.8 |
| 2 | Female | 89 | 59.3 | 4.3 |
| | Total | 150 | 100.0 | |

It brings from the analysis that 41 percent of the respondents are male and remaining 59 percent of the respondents are female. The mean score analysis noticed that female respondents are preferred more ready-to-eat food products than male respondents.

Table 1: Age of the Consumers and their Mean Preference

| No. | Age | No. of Respondents | % | Mean Score |
|-----|----------------|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| 1 | Upto 25 Years | 42 | 28.0 | 3.8 |
| 2 | 26-35 Years | 59 | 39.4 | 4.2 |
| 3 | 36-45 Years | 26 | 17.3 | 3.9 |
| 4 | Above 45 Years | 23 | 15.3 | 3.5 |
| | Total | 150 | 100.0 | |

It is noted from the analysis that 28 percent of the respondents belongs to upto 25 years age category, 39.4 percent of the consumers belongs to 26 to 35 years aged, 17.3 percent belongs to 36-45 years aged and 15.3 percent belongs to above 45 years aged. Also, it is noted from the mean score analysis that between 26 and 35 years aged respondents have preferred more ready-to-eat food products than other age group of the respondents.

Table 3: Educational Qualification of the Consumers and their Mean Preference

| No. | Educational Qualification | No. of Respondents | % | Mean Score |
|-----|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| 1 | No Formal Education | 20 | 13.3 | 3.9 |
| 2 | School Level | 42 | 28.0 | 3.4 |
| 3 | College Level | 74 | 49.4 | 4.2 |
| 4 | Professional | 14 | 9.3 | 3.7 |
| | Total | 150 | 100.0 | |

It is observed from the analysis that 13.3 percent of the respondents are having no formal education, 28.0 percent of the respondents are having school level education, 49.4 percent of the respondents are educated till college level and 9.3 percent of the respondents are professionals. Further, from the mean score analysis that maximum of the consumers are preferred who educated till college level.

Table 4: Monthly Household Income of the Consumer and their Preference

| No. | Monthly Household Income | No. of Respondents | % | Mean Score |
|-----|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| 1 | Upto Rs.10,000 | 28 | 18.7 | 3.5 |
| 2 | Rs. 10,001 to Rs. 20,000 | 48 | 32.0 | 4.2 |
| 3 | Rs. 20,001 to Rs. 30,000 | 39 | 26.0 | 4.2 |
| 4 | Above Rs.30,000 | 35 | 23.3 | 3.8 |
| | Total | 150 | 100.0 | |

From the above table it is noted that 18.7 percent of the respondents are earning upto Rs.10000, 32.0 percent of the respondents are earning Rs.10001 to 20000, 26.0 percent of the respondents are earning Rs.20001 to Rs.30000 and 23.3 percent of the respondents are earning above Rs.30000. Also, it is identified from the mean score analysis that the respondents who earn monthly between Rs.10001 to Rs.30000 have preferred ready-to-eat food products in Erode district.

Table 5: Marital Status of the Respondents And Their Preference

| No. | Marital Status | No. of Respondents | % | Mean Score |
|-----|----------------|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| 1 | Married | 93 | 62.0 | 4.3 |
| 2 | Unmarried | 57 | 38.0 | 3.9 |
| | Total | 150 | 100.0 | |

It is explained from the analysis that 62 percent of the respondents are married and remaining 38 percent of the respondents are unmarried. Also, it is identified from the mean score analysis that married respondents are preferred ready-to-eat food products.

Table 6: Living Area of the Consumers and their Preference

| No. | Living Area | No. of Respondents | % | Mean Score |
|-----|--------------|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| 1 | Rural | 32 | 21.3 | 3.9 |
| 2 | Semi-Urban | 87 | 58.0 | 4.0 |
| 3 | Urban | 31 | 20.7 | 4.3 |
| | Total | 150 | 100.0 | |

It is identified from the analysis that 21.3 percent of the respondents are living in rural area, 58.0 percent of the respondents are living in semi-urban area and 20.7 percent of the respondents are living in urban area. On the other hand, it shows from the mean score analysis that the respondents who are living in urban area are preferred ready-to-eat food products.

Table 7: Preferred Type of Ready-To-Eat Food Products And Their Preference

| No. | Type of Ready Mix | No. of Respondents | % | Mean Score |
|-----|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| 1 | Rice Mix | 12 | 8.3 | 3.8 |
| 2 | Gravy Mix | 14 | 9.4 | 3.7 |
| 3 | Tiffin Mix | 18 | 11.7 | 3.6 |
| 4 | Spice Mix | 19 | 12.8 | 4.1 |
| 5 | Sweet Mix | 45 | 29.7 | 3.7 |
| 6 | Drinks Mix | 25 | 16.9 | 3.4 |
| 7 | Millet Mix | 17 | 11.2 | 4.3 |
| | Total | 150 | 100.0 | |

It is identified could be noted from the above table that 78 percent of the respondents are working as clerical cadre, 16 percent of the respondents are working as assistant manager cadre and 6 percent of the respondents are working as managers. Also, it is identified from the mean score analysis that the respondents who preferred millet mix at the maximum level followed by spice mix.

Table 7: Period of Using the Ready-to-Eat Food Products and their Preference

| No. | Period of Using | No. of Respondents | % | Mean Score |
|-----|-----------------|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| 1 | Upto 5 Years | 38 | 25.3 | 3.9 |
| 2 | 6-10 Years | 43 | 28.7 | 4.2 |
| 3 | Above 10 Years | 69 | 46.0 | 4.1 |
| | Total | 150 | 100.0 | |

It brings from the analysis that 25.3 percent of the respondents are using the ready-to-eat food products for upto 5 years, for 6-10 years using respondents as 28.7 percent and above 10 years using respondents as 46.0 percent. Further, the mean score analysis noticed that 6-10 years using period of the respondents are highly preferred the ready-to-eat food products.

Consumer Preference towards Ready-To-Eat Food Products (Anova Analysis)

In order to examine the relationship between selected independent variables of the selected sample consumers and their preference towards ready-to-eat food products, a hypothesis framed and tested by using Anova analysis.

H_0 : There is no significant difference between selected independent variables and their preference on ready-to-eat food products.

| No. | Variable Name | 'F' Value | 'p' Value |
|-----|--|-----------|---------------------|
| 1 | Gender | 1.254 | 0.368 ^{NS} |
| 2 | Age | 7.608 | 0.000* |
| 3 | Educational Qualification | 0.375 | 0.807 ^{NS} |
| 4 | Monthly Household Income | 11.524 | 0.000* |
| 5 | Marital Status | 2.873 | 0.091 ^{NS} |
| 6 | Living Area | 0.245 | 0.913 ^{NS} |
| 7 | Preferred Type of Ready-to-eat food products | 1.299 | 0.299 ^{NS} |
| 8 | Period of Using | 1.078 | 0.358 ^{NS} |

From the above analysis, it is observed that among the eight hypotheses, two hypotheses are rejected and 6 hypotheses are accepted. It indicates that the preference level of ready-to-eat food products is differed by the various categories of the respondents with respect to their age and monthly household income. On the other hand, it is identified that the preference of ready-to-eat food products are not differed between the categories of gender, educational qualification, marital status, living area, preferred type of ready-to-eat food products and period of using the food products.

Findings and Suggestions

1. It is found from the percentage analysis that majority of the consumers belongs to female, 26-35 years aged, qualified with college level, earning between Rs.10001 to Rs.20000 monthly, married, living in urban area, prefer sweet mix and using above 10 years.

2. It brings from the mean score analysis that majority of the consumer are highly preferred the ready-to-eat food products who belongs to female category, 26-35 years aged, college level educated, earn between Rs.10001 and 30000, married, living in urban area, prefer millet mix and using the ready-to-eat food product around 6-10 years.
3. From the research most of the female are using ready-to-eat food products because of their work and life commitment. When using the ready-to-eat product continuously, everyone face some health issues. So, it is recommended to the female consumers that they have not use the ready-to-eat food products continuously.
4. It is found from the Anova analysis that the selected sample respondents' preference towards ready-to-eat food products are not equal based on various categories of the respondents' age and monthly household income. On the other hand, the various categories of the respondents are equally preferred the ready-to-eat food products based on their gender, educational qualification, marital status, living area, preferred type of ready-to-eat food products and period of using the food products.
5. From the anova result, it is noted that different age group of the respondents are not equally preferred the ready-to-eat food products and also youngsters are mostly preferred the ready-to-eat Food products. So, middle and old aged, ie., more than 35 years aged consumers are not having more interest to use ready-to-eat food products due to increase of health issue awareness. So, it is recommended to the youngsters that they may verify the past results of using ready-to-eat food products and take necessary food whichever give health safety.

Conclusion

In this article, the researcher is mainly focused on to examine the preference level of the ready-to-eat food products in Erode district of Tamilnadu. From the research, female youngsters are mostly preferred and used the ready-to-eat food products due to their less awareness about the health issues while using the food regularly. So, the researcher has found the issues and their preference level and offer some valuable suggestions and recommendations. The researcher is recognized when the suggested recommendations implemented by the recommended group consumes in the study area.

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