

**A STUDY ON PURCHASING ATTITUDE TOWARDS
READY-TO-EAT/COOK PRODUCTS BY HEALTH
CONSCIOUS CONSUMERS IN SOUTHERN INDIA WITH
RESPECT TO TIER-I CITIES.**

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to explore and study the purchasing attitude towards Ready-to-eat/cook products by health conscious consumers in Southern India. To find out what are all the major factors influences consumers in terms of awareness creation and decision making stages. Many hidden factors influence the consumer to go for healthy Ready-to-eat products based on their accumulated knowledge. These health conscious consumers are all literate and accessing various sources before taking any decision. This study will give insights about the level of awareness, technological implication and decision making process of these niche consumers. Deciding factors are based on Ingredients, brand awareness, packaging etc..The audience are all fall under niche sector and findings reveal these consumers are taking decision on the various technological sources and are all highly aware of the food and its impact on health.

Key words: Ready-to-eat, Lifestyle, Health awareness, knowledgeable consumers.

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Design/Methodology/Approach-

This study is totally a survey based model. The consumers are in the age group of between 20 to 40 are given questionnaire to get the feedback and some of the interviewed personally. Based on their input the analyses are done and results arrived. The literature reviews are done based on the secondary information's available in the well known articles from good publishers and internet sources.

Findings-

The results have shown the health conscious consumers buying these products mainly due to ingredients, brand awareness, calories content and package styling. The literature surveys have indicated there is a major shift in the eating habits of Indian's and there are many factors influence these changes. Information available in handy and media proliferation brings more awareness on the food products and this will give the knowledge to make decision in buying these products by the health conscious consumers.

Research Limitations /Implications-

Data obtained from the convenience sample and literature reviews has been generalized for inferring consumption patterns of Indian consumers (population). The numbers may not totally represent the whole section of the population because of different backgrounds. Although the study varies in male and female ration and family members and may not considered the collective opinion of the family.

Practical Implications-

This study focus on niche consumers ie;health conscious consumers in the Tier I cities across southern India. Based on their feedback on questionnaire & interview the results have arrived.

Introduction:

Indian cooking and lifestyle have undergone tremendous changes for the last 15 years. There are many major factors impacts this change are include, liberalization policy, dual income, separate living of couples, Innovative kitchen applications, Media proliferation etc.

The cooking style and eating habits in India varies drastically from southern part of India to northern part of India. Due to lifestyle pressure nowadays people prefer easy short way of cooking food rather spending too much time on spending in cooking.

Non-availability of raw materials to prepare masala and tedious process involved in doing so, has influenced people to choose such products. There is no specific category and market potential for these products. The product portfolio varies from noodles, pasta, chips, dairy products, fish & meat products, ready cooking dosa, parota items, masala dishes, pre cooked dishes etc.

There are peoples, who are migrating to cities for job and education and these people have find the Ready-to-eat products are comfortable to eat rather than depending on restaurants. Most of the dual income (both husband and wife are office goers) families want to spend much less time on cooking because of less availability of time. During weekends they want to spend time with their kids and outing, whereas in weekdays the office duration is large and these factos forced them to go for buying such products.

Other factors influences this products is availability of different flavours and dishes. Consumers who are looking for different dishes and flavours now depend on these products. This products brings variety to their eating's and palatable too. There is no conclusion which one precedes- whether the availability or taste or time constraint, all these factors complement each other in driving these products.

When India becomes the hub of many multinationals and there is a rapid change in people lifestyles. Modernization, majority of young population, Knowledgable consumers, will make an impact on these products. Due to raise in literary levels, proliferation of communication technology, consumers are becoming more aware of the foods they intake and they take decision based on the wealth of resources available.

There are datas available like India is becoming capital for heart patients and diabetic,there is a much stress given on lifestyle and food habits of peoples. Health conscious consumers are mostly well educated and can access to different information available on the internet, magazines, TV shows, and word-of-mouth information by their society people.

More than male,the female consumers shown much interest in knowing the level of calories,ingredients and certain product approval certificates in choosing the products. This shows a good sign of healthy generation in India,especially in the age group of 20-40. Females are also weight conscious and they decide the products based on their consciousness.

Often,house wives become the major influential factors in deciding the food products for the whole family. They now going for purchasing high fibre,low calories and nutrition rich products for their family protection. Advertisements about these products are also becomes a major factor in deciding these products. Level of obesity is on the rise of Indian population and on one side consumers are becoming awareness of the food they intake and on the other side consumers are carried away by advertisements information and packaging stylings.

Methodology:

An empirical investigation has been done to study the implications of Ready-to-eat consumption on health and healthy eating habits of the consumers using reliable data sources.The datas are collected by questionnaire and interview. Places are visited include,Chennai,Bangalore,cochin and Hyderabad. Online surveys are conducted to arrive at the result. The sample size is 200 nos.

Literature Review:

India is growing at an average annual rate of 7.6% for the past five years and it is expected to continue growing at an equal if not faster rate. The rapid economic growth is increasing and enhancing employment and business opportunities and in turn increasing disposable incomes.

As the benefits of growth trickle down, an increasing number of people are moving up from the economically weaker class to join the middle class.The middle class with its rising numbers and

incomes is thus becoming the biggest market segment. The affluent class too will continue to grow in terms of size and value, albeit, at a slower pace than the middle class.

MGI study prediction on the effect of economic growth on different classes, Middle class, defined as households with disposable incomes from Rs 200,000 to 1,000,000 a year comprises about 50 million people, roughly 5% of the population at present. By 2025 the size of middle class will increase to about 583 million people, or 41% of the population.

Extreme rural poverty has declined from 94% in 1985 to 61% in 2005 and is projected to drop to 26% by 2025. Affluent class, defined as earning above Rs 1,000,000 a year will increase from 0.2% of the population at present to 2% of the population by 2025. Affluent class's share of national private consumption will increase from 7% at present to 20% in 2025.

The Indian consumer market, which is primarily dominated by young generation, is becoming increasingly sophisticated and brand conscious. A typical upper middle class young consumer is beginning to look beyond the utility aspect of a product to seek intangibles like brand and lifestyle statement associated with the product. This modern consumer wants his purchases to reflect his lifestyle or at least the one he aspires for. As a result of this brand consciousness, the food and beverage segment of the FMCG sector is already witnessing a significant shift in demand from loose to branded products.

The Indian affluent class has always had a penchant for premium branded goods and this fetish will continue. A recent luxury brands survey conducted by The Nielsen Company, a global information and media research company, has ranked India third after Greece and Hong Kong in the list of most brand conscious countries in the world. Over 35% of Indian respondents said they spend money on luxury brands.

Generally speaking consumer awareness of fortified/functional products is low. A recent survey shows 80% of Indians agree that health considerations significantly influence their choice of food and drinks. Approximately 48% of these respondents feel that functional food claims play a significant role in their purchasing decisions for food and beverage products.

1) Products that reduce stress, prevent aging, help the heart and fight diabetes are all on a positive growth curve in India.

2) Dairy-based beverages such as reduced-fat flavoured milk drinks and sour milk drinks are expected to witness double-digit value growth over the forecast period of 2007 to 2015. India, the world's largest malt-based drink market, accounts for 22% of the world's retail volume sales, as they are traditionally consumed as milk substitutes. These drinks are marketed as nutritious and are mainly consumed by the old, the young and those who are ill. Sales got a boost by improved retail and distribution in recent years.

3) Cereal bars, digestive biscuits, and functional bread products have also found acceptance among Indian consumers. Cereals and cereal substitutes account for 38% of rural consumers' monthly household food spending. Wheat is the main cereal eaten in northern and western Indian states. Rice cereal is preferred in the southern and eastern states.

Vitamin and dietary supplement retail sales have doubled since 2001 totaling US\$563 million in 2008, and are expected to reach US\$749.4 million by 2013. In response to declining health and increased awareness of good health, India's over-the-counter (OTC) vitamins & minerals supplement market is growing rapidly. Nutraceutical sales in India for 2009 reached US\$1,323.2 million.

There is a marked difference in consumption between urban and rural consumers. Urban consumers represent 70% of the vitamin and dietary supplement market, versus 30% attributed to rural consumers. Indian consumers are spending more on nutritional supplements to combat the effects of stress. Protein supplements and items relating to muscle building are popular, due to the increasing fitness and bodybuilding activity among the urban elite. India consumes the largest quantity of tea in the world. Tea makes up 94% of out-of-home, per capita, hot drink consumption, and almost 70% of in-home consumption. Sales of coffee, tea and cocoa in India increased by 14% from 1995 to 2007. The availability of imported tea on retail shelves has increased and there has been growth in sales of tea bag and flavoured teas.

Dieting is more prevalent than walking or cycling for weight-loss. Rising obesity levels and hypertension in India means that health will become an increasingly important focus for consumers, who will therefore seek out products that aid weight loss. In comparison to Western or European countries, sports do not play a dominant role in the Indian culture, which is

traditionally male dominated. However, young, urban adults are increasingly attracted to adventure sports, and this has led to growth in the popularity of river rafting, rock climbing and mountaineering clubs. This trend may lead to more market interest in reasonably priced sports nutrition products. Sport drinks comprise a niche category in India, with consumption largely centered in urban areas. High prices, however, discourage the average consumer from purchasing them. Energy-boosting drinks that are glucose-based (such as Glucon-D) are more traditionally used in India for rehydration.

Steptoe, M. Pollard and Wardle (1995) in their research work, titled "Development of a Measure of the Motives underlying the selection of food: the Food Choice Questionnaire" have developed a food choice questionnaire using Factor Analysis of responses from a sample of 358 adults ranging in age from 18-87 years. The authors have determined Health, mood, convenience, sensory appeal, natural content, price, weight control, familiarity and ethical concern as the prime motives of food choice and have also evaluated the differences in these motives with respect to sex, age and income.

Binkley (2006) in his research titled "The effect of demographic, economic and nutrition factors on frequency of food away from home" has used a model explaining visits to table service and Ready-to-eat restaurants that are estimated with nutrition variables added to standard demographic measures, wherein nutrition factors have less impact on table service. However the frequency of consumers very conscious of nutrition factors is significantly very less to table service and Ready-to-eat restaurants vis-a-vis others. Manchester and Clauson (1995) in their work titled "1994 Spending for Food Away from Home outpaces Food at Home" have analysed how food expenditure has significantly increased on eating out. Nayga and Capps (1986-1998) in their study titled "Determinants of Food away From Home Consumption: An Update" identified several socio economic and demographic characteristics of individuals who have consumed food away from home using 1987-1988 national food consumption survey. The analysis was performed using logit analysis. The significant characteristics have been race, ethnicity, employment status, food stamp participation, seasonality, household size, age, income and frequency of consumption.

Jackson and McDaniel(1985)in their research,titled “food shopping and preparation: psychographic differences of working wives and housewives” explores various psychographic characteristics exhibited by working wives as opposed to housewives in food shopping and food preparation by comparing responses of 246 working wives and 181 housewives to several food shopping and preparation related psychographic statements.Results have revealed that working wives have a greater dislike for food shopping and cooking and also exhibited a tendency to be less concerned with the impact of their food shopping and preparation activities on other family members vis a vis non working wives.

Roberts and Wortzel(1979) in their study, titled“ New Life-style determinants of women’s food shopping behaviour” have used life-style variables as predictors of food shopping behaviour. It has been concluded that women’s participation in the labour force have significantly focused attention on changing life-styles and consumption patterns.Schroder and .McEachern(2005) in their research ,titled “Ready-to-eats and ethical consumer value:a focus on McDonald’s and KFC” aims to investigate the effect of communicating corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives to young consumers in the UK on their fast-food purchasing with reference to McDonald’s and Kentuchy Fried Chicken (KFC) It has been concluded by the authors that Ready-to-eat has been perceived as convenient but unhealthy and therefore Ready-to-eat companies can no longer rely on convenience as USP unless the implications of same on consumers health is given equal importance.

Lowell (2004) in his work,“The food industry and its impact on increasing global obesity: A case study” has looked at the current crisis which is set to engulf both the developed and developing world using a variety of reliable sources like WHO (World health organization) and IOTF(International obesity task force). The author has plotted the global increase in obesity over the last two decades and points out the problems associated with childhood, adolescent and adult obesity with growing liking for Ready-to-eat and snacking. The author has also pointed a finger at the food industry particulary the “fast-food industry”,which over the few decades has perfected various marketing techniques which have been designed to make us eat more food (supersizing) and targeting more on schools and children.

Despite huge obesity epidemic,fat consumption however is very high in the western world and is increasing in countries undergoing industrial development(Lands etal.,1990;Trichopoulou &

Efstathiadis, 1989). A lot of international research on changing consumption patterns and its impact on the western world has revealed that there is a relationship between the consumption of food ,particularly Ready-to-eat and the state of obesity.According to the US National Bureau of Economic Research 65% of obesity is caused by Ready-to-eat and snacks .

Jones&Sheers,Hilier,Comfort and Lowell(2003) in a study titled,“ Return to traditional values? A case study of slow food”outlines the origin of slow food and the challenges involved in pointing a finger at deeply rooted Ready-to-eat industry for global obesity. According to the report of Euromonitor International IMIS database “ The Changing Face of Eating Habits” Obesity has become a major global problem with changing food and eating habits and therefore a trend towards vegetarianism and organic food has come seen more in western countries. Ethical consumerism has become an issue in developed countries ,as the media increasingly highlights issues of exploitation ,food safety and environmental concerns.

Organic food consumption is expected to grow significantly in future.Western Europe is the largest regional market for packaged organic food.The leading markets for organic packaged foods in Western Europe are Germany, UK and Italy,with estimated sales of US \$1.9 billion, US\$1.6 billion and US\$1.5 billion respectively. The market for organic foods is still in the embryonic stage in the most developing economies like India and China and is negligible in Africa and Middle East.Many empirical studies on consumer perceptions towards organic food in UK,USA,Spain,Australia,Croatia,Greece and many more across the globe concludes gradual switchover of consumer demand from Ready-to-eat and processed to slow food and organic food.

Regmi and Dyck in their study titled,“Effects of Urbanization on Global Food Demand” have analysed how urbanization accompanied by economic development and income growth has not just drastically impacted consumption patterns in developed countries but significantly impacting developing countries as well. Huang and Howarth(1996) in their research titled “Structural Changes in the Demand for Food in Asia”have projected that Asian countries are undergoing transformations in their economies backed by rapid urbanization and this trend would continue in the years to come.

As a result changes in tastes and lifestyles backed by urban living will significantly impact food demand and consumption patterns.Goyal and Singh(2007) in their research work,titled

“Consumer Perceptions about Ready-to-eat in India:an exploratory study” have explored that the young Indian consumer has passion for visiting Ready-to-eat outlets for fun and change but they feel that home made food is better than convenience Ready-to-eat .Their findings have revealed that consumer acceptability for Ready-to-eat in the future would be decided only by the quality of food and customer service.

According to the findings of the latest on-line survey from ACNielsen 96% of the urban Indian consumes food from take- away restaurants once a month and 37% of this is adult Indian consumers doing so atleast once a week making India one of the top ten countries amongst 28 surveyed across the globe in terms of frequency of eating Ready-to-eat.Nichanj (2005) in her article “Urbanities in India junk health ,turn Ready-to-eaties” describes how changing lifestyle and work habits decides consumers food choice for Ready-to-eat .India has become one of the most promising markets for the international food manufacturing and retailing sector.According to Delhi Diabetes Research center,there are 33 million people with diabetes and India is forecast to have 75 million people with diabetes by 2025.

According to the WHO, India has been dubbed as Diabetic capital of the world with 37 million diabetics out of 150 million diabetics in the world. Raghavan (2003) in his research,titled “Food in a Globalised World” has concluded that food is a means of life but it has become meaningful investment for business. There is huge gap in food and health related research in Indian context despite obesity almost being an epidemic in metropolitant cities like Delhi, Mumbai,Bangalore,Kolkata and gradually rising in other urban areas too. It is an attempt of mine to analyse in Indian context the determinants and implications of consumers food choice particularly towards Ready-to-eat and discussing policy implications for the same.

Objectives of the study:

In view of changing food and eating habits in India and its implications on health and healthy eating among the consumers, the key objectives of my study are:

- a)To identify the purchasing attitude of health conscious consumers in buying ready-to-eat/cook products
- b)To study the awareness level on foods in which they are making decision on these products.

c)To find out the impact of technology proliferation in influencing decision of these consumers.

The Ready-to-eat Industry in India and Consumers food choice:

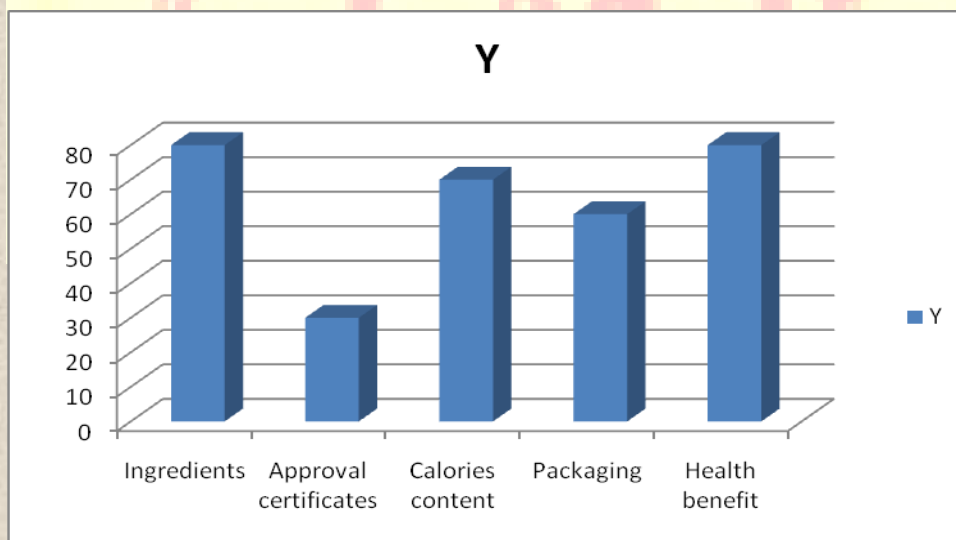
Due to Change in lifestyle and FII investment there is a drastic change in Indian culture and food habits. Most of the family members doesn't have time to cook the food in traditional way and most of the families are living in separate environment. Despite modern cooking devices, consumers still need ready-to-eat/cook food because it consumes very less time. The change in lifestyle and dual income consumers are preferring these types of products. The products may vary from noodles, pasta, masala packages, stuffed paratha,etc.. and many more..

Other than national player like nestle,pepsico,ITC,haldiram,cavinkare, there are many regional players who is making foray into ready-to-eat segment. Rapid urbanisation is also one of the reasons for people to buy such products. Nowadays people are also health conscious

Results and Discussion:

Purchasing attitude of Health conscious consumers in buying ready-to-eat/cook products

The below table shows the ingredients and health benefit of the products influences health conscious people to go for such products



Results analyses that the health benefit and ingredients are form the major impact on decision making of consumers in going for healthy Ready-to-eat products. Most of the consumers feel these products are come with different key ingredients which normally reduce the weight and keep them fit. Oats, Herbal tea,kelloggs are form the majority of their diet in keeping them fit and these routine intake feels them better and they become loyal to these products. Green tea replaces many of the traditional tea in these consumer segments. Dry fruits and nuts are also form the major diet in these consumers segment.

Due to rise in level of obesity,diabetic and heart diseases these consumers are much more aware in deciding the products. They also require food approval agencies certification and it also forms a one of the influencing factor in deciding these products. Most of the decision on food products are taken by the female members in the population and husband,children are considered as less influence in the decision making habit. Though the shopping experience is shared by all the members in the family, the majority of the decision are taken by female members in the family.

Calorie content, Packaging, fibre contents were form the major influential factors in deciding the products.Most of the consumers are diabetic conscious and want to avoid fat and high calorie products. Many of them are working for long duration hours so they are choosing less oily products to keep the stress level at minimum. The details shown in the package are on the key purchase decision made by the clients. They are all choosy and want to keep individual family members health at good level.

Interview shown they often want to try new products and use to choose celebrities endorsed brands. The celebrity's advertisement also forms an impact in going for these products. Location where the products get imported are form a little impact in choosing the products, if the packaging and detailed ingredients given importance in the products. Choosing the products at their convenience level and reading it thoroughly before taking any decision will form a regular habit of all of these consumers.

Trying out new verities is often an activity of these consumers. They are also ready to pay good price if the products carry good amount of nutrition and health is given due importance. The awareness on the brand is also a key differentiating factor in buying these products because of many regional players in the market. They used to give preference to national brands and imported brands during the purchase.

Awareness level on foods in which they are making decision on these products

The below chart shows that many of in the age group between 20-40 agreed that they are making decision on high level of awareness on foods in market.

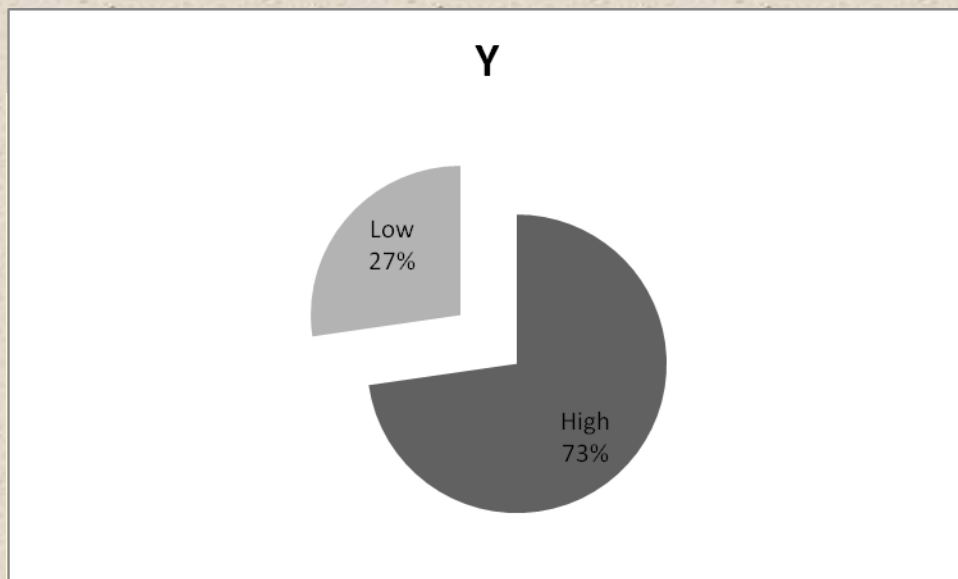


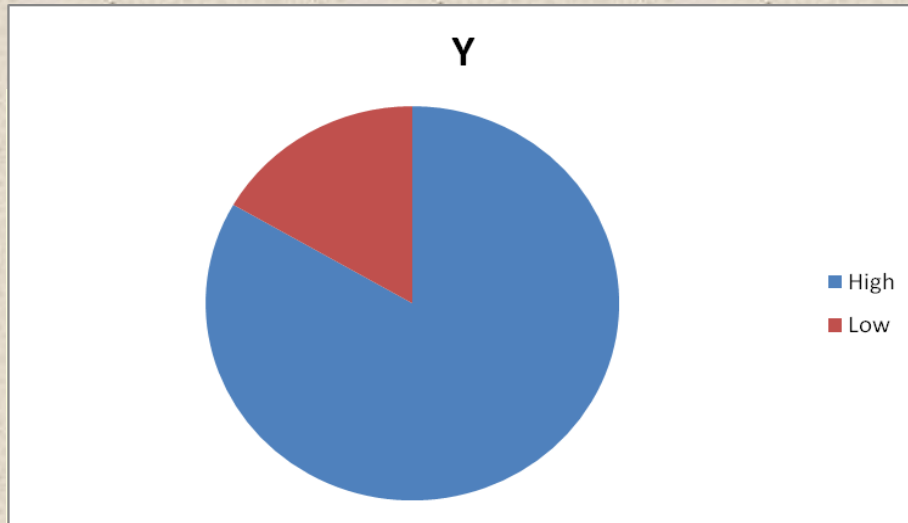
Chart above clearly indicates that the consumers are very well aware of the decision making process. There is another interpretation by seeing the above chart, like the communication reach is also very high because of modern technological advancement.

There is a lot of improvement in cold chain network, processing food and packaging. It have the capacity to replace the existing kitchen set ups of Indian families and on the other hand it improves the hygienic condition of foods.

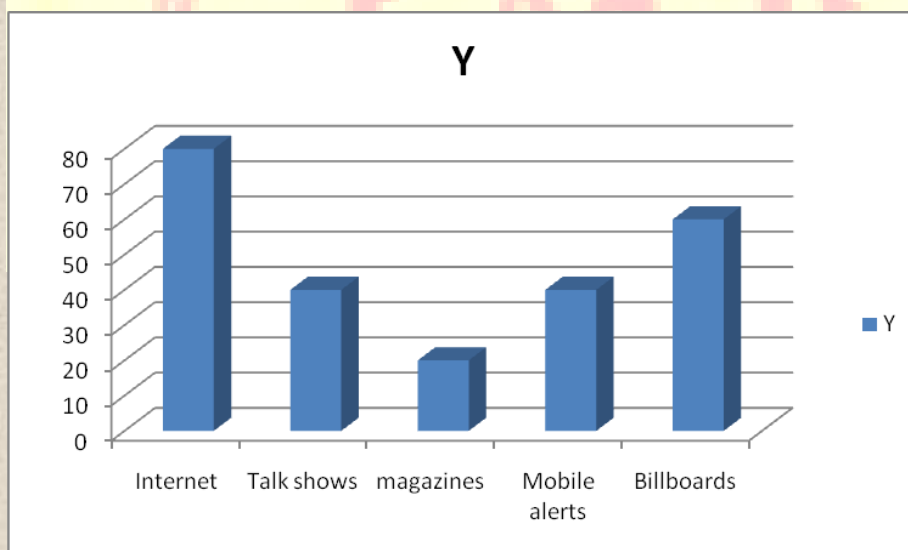
Dairy products become the epitome of processed foods in India. All the dairy products are hygienically packed and by products are processed properly and it is reaching the many distant places from the procurement area. When is the leading country for Dairy products and cattle field, processing the products and keeping it hygienic is a good sign that the food processing sectors are in healthy stage.

Impact of technology proliferation in influencing decision of these consumers

The below pie-diagram shows the people in the age group of between 20-40 responded that the technology plays a major role in making decision of such products.



The below chart shows the people in the age group of between 20-40 responded that the Internet plays a major role in making decision of such products.



With increasing affordability of PCs and internet penetration, India is all set to have 121 million internet users by December 2011, a study by internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and IMRB has said. According to the annual I-Cube Report jointly published by IAMAI and IMRB, India's internet population is expected to grow to 121 million users by December 2011 from 100 million in September this year. Out of 121 million, 97 million are expected to be active Internet users, who access Internet at least once in a month. "A 100 million internet users is considered a critical landmark for the country. With this internet use in India is expected to enter a critical period of growth with the possibility of becoming the largest internet using country in the world in this decade," the study said.

Internet resources are used widely to get information and most of the people are relying on this information to take decision on any products or services. The people we have targeted are highly educated and can access all type of resources and they are all well aware of new technologies. The results have also shows the internet resources are widely used technology to access information. Moreover there is plenty of availability of processed food in this modern world.

All the resources are accessed by these people have shown that there is a tremendous Influence of technology in making decision in buying processed foods. There is a huge potential for processed food to replace existing traditional eatables sales. In future the processed food is available to all section of peoples and it will be easily consumed by all section of peoples.

Concluding remarks on Ready-to-eat consumption and its implications

This study shows that the consumers targeted are well aware of the purchasing products and they choose products based on the calorie content, ingredients and packaging. Internet technology plays a major role in influencing these consumers to go for the processed products. There is major contribution from industries like, food processing industry, packaging industry and transporting industry to connect various locations. All these sectors contribute to the growth of processed foods in India. Information technology also plays a vital role in connecting suppliers, processors, dealers and end consumers. The food processing sector is progressing well. The average growth has doubled from 7% in 2004 to 14% in 2010. The Vision 2015 Document

has set the goal of tripling the size of the processed food sector. A number of schemes are already under operation in the sector and some more are in the pipeline to achieve the goal.

Limitations of the study:

This study is exploratory and has some limitations that however doesnot liquidate the purpose of study.Data obtained from the convenience sample and literature reviews has been generalized for inferring consumption patterns of Indian consumers (population).Young & Middle age consumers in the age group of 20-40 from Bangalore,Chennai,cochin, and hyderabad, frequently visiting the grocery & shopping malls are given questionnaire and interviewed personally. The covered people may not represent the whole population and most of them represent female genders. The cities targeted also many not represent whole south Indian population.

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