

Consumer Attraction Towards Ready-to-Eat Food Products

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INTRODUCTION

Ready-to-eat food is food offered or exposed for sale without additional cooking or preparation, which is processed and packaged on the premises where they are being sold and are ready for consumption.

Food processing is the set of methods and techniques used to transform raw ingredients into food or to transform food into other forms for consumption by humans or animals either in the home or by the food processing industry. Food processing typically takes clean, harvested crops or butchered animal products and uses these to produce attractive, marketable and often long shelf-life food products.

There is nobody in the world who is left out of the class of consumers. The consumer hood continues till one's last breath in the world. The consumer purchases a variety of goods and services to satisfy his wants and he is always influenced in his purchasing activities by some considerations which lead him to select a particular commodity or a particular retail store in preference to others.

The Indian retailing industry, which was traditionally dominated by small and family-run stores, has come of age. The retailers in India have to learn both the art and science of retailing by closely following how retailers in other parts of the world are organizing, managing, and coping up with new challenges in an ever-changing marketplace. Retailing consists of the sale of goods or merchandise, Retailing is a well recognized business function which compromises making available desired product in the desired quantity at the desired time. This creates a time, place and form utility for the consumer. Retailing includes all activities involved in selling goods or services directly to final consumers for personal, non-business use.

India has made lot of progress in agriculture & food sectors since independence in terms of growth in output, yields and processing. It has gone through a green revolution, a white revolution, a yellow revolution and a blue revolution. Today, India is the largest producer of milk, fruits, cashew nuts, coconuts and tea in the world, the second largest producer of wheat, vegetables, sugar and fish and the third largest producer of tobacco and rice.

Now, the time is to provide better food processing & its marketing infrastructure for Indian industries to serve good quality & safest processed food like ready-to-eat food. It is opening a new window in world scenario as far as taste & acceptance is concerned. Therefore, Indian Government is providing more infrastructures for this sector.

The processed foods do not require rehydration or cooking and can be consumed straight from the pouch with or without pre-warming, depending upon the requirement of the users and the weather conditions. These foods meet the specific needs of convenience, nutritional adequacy, shelf stability, storage, distribution to the centers and have become very popular after the Year 2002.

Concept

- Ready to Eat Meals like already cooked or prepared lunch & dinner are relatively new products which came in market only a few years back and are now sold through retail general stores in especially made sealed aluminum laminates.
- The sterilization process ensures the stability of the Ready-to-Eat foods in pouches, on the shelf and at room temperature. The application of sterilization technology completely destroys all potentially harmful micro-organisms, thereby making sure that the food product has a very long shelf life of over 12 months and needed no refrigeration.
- When customer needs to eat, the food item pouch is either put in microwave oven to warm it or keep in heated water for a few minutes and then serve to eat.
- Such ready to eat meals have been especially given to soldiers in army of many countries who require carrying their rations while on war front or while located far away from their main unit.
- The advertisements like, "Hungry Kyaa" are adding zest to the market by popularizing such food items which are pre-cooked and free from any preservative, and yet have a long shelf life of over 12-months.

LITERATURE REVIEW

India is the second largest producer of food and holds the potential to be the biggest on global food canvas, according to a Corporate Catalyst India (CCI) survey. The Indian food industry comprises of food production and the food processing industry whose sales volume comes primarily from retailing the food consumption, export and expected growth.

Food processing industry is one of the largest industries operating in India and operates across various segments that include Fruits & vegetables, Meat & poultry, Dairy, Marine products, grains and consumer foods (that includes packaged ready-to-eat food, beverages and packaged drinking water).

Value addition of food products is expected to increase from 8 per cent to 35 per cent by 2025. Fruit & vegetable processing is also expected to increase from the current level of 2 per cent to 25 per cent of total production by 2025, as per the CCI report. Dairy sector – that holds highest share in processed food market – holds large potential to be exploited. The report reveals that 37 per cent of the total dairy produce is processed, of which only 15 per cent is done by the organised sector. Hence, there lies a plethora of opportunity for investment and development.

Reason for Processing of Foods

Foods are usually processed to make them safer, keep longer, or more convenient.

Processing can kill harmful bacteria or other microorganisms. This is very important for food that travels long distances or sits in supermarkets for long periods – it needs to be preserved in order to be safe to eat. Processing can extend shelf life.

For Example, the natural fats in many whole foods go rancid within a few days, so removing them and replacing them with cheap, stable trans fats can extend shelf life by months. Convenience is a major driver for food processing. Foods like bread, buns, ready-made packaged meals and dried noodles are seen as ‘quick and easy’. But then again, so is an apple! Artificial additives are often also used to extend the shelf life of food products.

Key Growth Drivers of Food Processing Sector in India

- Increasing spending on health and nutritional foods
- Increasing number of nuclear families and working women
- Changing lifestyle
- Functional foods, fresh or processed foods
- Organised retail and private label penetration
- Changing demographics and rising disposable incomes

Key Opportunities in Food Processing Sector

- Processable varieties of crop
- Investments in infrastructure through Public Private partnership (PPP)
- Mega Food parks
- Integrated cold chain
- Food safety Management Systems

The processed food industry is, now, in the way with small package sizes in ready-to-eat format. To cash on this booming opportunity, smart players have entered and to enter the growing market with a high potential of retail Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

Development of the metropolitan cities due to increase in population, emergence of industries, evolution of various new factors, time factor, *etc.*, created the need for ready-to-eat foods in the market. Due to industrialization, the labour category is getting attracted to it because of better emoluments and hence there is shortage of home maid-servants. Due to this, the housewives, in order to save time started using ready-to-eat foods.

As the literacy rate is increasing among the women, a large number of them in our country are taking up jobs to setup their own status in the society and to use the extra income generated. These are creating the need for ready-to-eat foods. Earlier times, a single family consisted of many people *i.e.*, a group of several nuclear families were living in a single place. Hence, larger quantities of the food were used to be prepared. But as these joint families started disappearing due to various reasons, each single family started using these ready-to-eat foods in order to save time and energy.

Due to establishment of multi- national companies in India, the lady of the house also started working, because of which there is no time to prepare food at home. Hence, this created the need for using ready-to-eat foods. The standard of living is also changing due to raise in income level, influence of western countries, more global trade, traveling *etc.*, hence, people are changing their taste to ready-to-eat foods more compared to the old traditionally prepared foods.

This study will facilitate the processed food industry to understand, serve and satisfy the consumers of ready-to-eat food in a better manner.

Need of the Study

The reasons behind the study are as –

- ❖ Globalization of Indian food and its culture are the core factors for popularization of ready to eat foods.
- ❖ Main motivation for these ready to eat foods is fast growing foreign market.
- ❖ Retail outlet culture is now growing rapidly in India.
- ❖ Shelf life of these foods is at least 12-18 months.
- ❖ Quality, Taste and Flavor of these foods remains as good as fresh up to the expiry date.
- ❖ Women wanting to spend more time out of the kitchen.
- ❖ More working bachelors staying away from homes.
- ❖ Cost effective in comparison to the Indian cuisine served by the restaurants in foreign countries.

SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Research has been primarily concerned with explaining consumer behaviour that is concerned with applying these findings to business at a practical level. Many of the results from this study are aimed to be of practical benefit to retail industry, particularly at a time when the market has become increasingly competitive.

The scope and significance of the study are as follows:

1. A fundamental understanding of consumer behavior in ready-to-eat food underpins all marketing activity and is a necessary prerequisite to organizations being marketing orientated and, thus, profitable.
2. Ready-to-eat products end up in households even though they will pass through a number of steps on their way from producer to end user. Understanding consumer behaviour is not only important for the producer but for all the other actors in the chain.
3. To understand decision-making by the consumers for ready-to-eat foods, two other factors that need to be taken into account for study are involvement and habit formation. Involvement refers to the subjective. Alternatively, many decisions can be based on habit, habit formation being a prerequisite of brand loyalty.
4. Appropriate marketing strategies ensure the long life of the product, and so of the organizations that can only be ascertained by the study of consumers' behaviour and taste.
5. Study of consumers' behaviour gives clues to the marketing manager to understand the changing taste of the consumers that is crucial for the survival of the organization.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The researcher intends to analyze topic in the following areas as the objectives of the proposed study includes:

1. To ascertain the awareness of consumers towards branded ready-to-eat food products.
2. To study the purchase behaviour of ready-to-eat food products.
3. To evaluate brand preference of the consumers.
4. To study the factors influencing brand preference.
5. To evaluate alternative purchase plans of the consumers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research is “systematized effort to gain new knowledge.” It is an act to collect, record, and analyse data relating to any situation or problem. The methodology which will be used for carrying out the report will be used as follows: -

1. For present research work, primary as well as secondary data will be used. For primary data, Observation, focus group approach, expert Opinion, and survey method will be used. Sources like news papers, journals, books, magazines which contain meaningful data will be used to collect the secondary data.
2. For sampling, appropriate sampling design will be used.
3. Sampling units will be taken from users of ‘ready to eat’ food in Lucknow.
4. The collected data shall be analyzed and interpreted using appropriate and suitable statistical techniques.

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