

A Study on Gaining Popularity of Convenience Foods Among the Customers in Mumbai

Mrs. Sneha Bhandare and Mr. Ruzaib Pagarkar

Anjuman-I-Islam's Institute of Hospitality Management, Mumbai, India

Abstract: *Advancements in food processing equipment, methods, and packaging materials have sparked a significant transformation in the creation of convenient food products, tailored to meet consumers' needs for necessity, flavour, and nutritional value. Convenience foods offer consumers the ability to streamline various aspects of their food-related tasks, such as shopping, meal preparation, cooking, consumption, and post-meal activities. The research focuses on exploring the growing trend of convenience food adoption in Mumbai. Mumbai boasts a diverse range of convenient food options, and the research has further delved into the age demographics of those who are embracing these time-saving food choices.*

Keywords: Convenience food consumption, popularity in Mumbai, time- saving

I. INTRODUCTION

(Convenience food, n.d.)

Convenience foods are food products that have been processed and prepared in centralized processing units for quick and easy consumption. They are designed to save consumers time and effort in various aspects of their food-related activities. These foods often undergo industrial-scale processing in specialized facilities, resulting in products that are ready to eat, cook, or assemble with minimal additional work. Convenience foods come in various forms, such as pre-packaged meals, canned goods, frozen products, and instant snacks. Key characteristics of convenience foods include:

Time-Saving: Convenience foods are a time-efficient option for individuals with busy schedules or those looking to reduce the time spent on meal preparation.

Extended Shelf Life: Many convenience foods are designed to have a longer shelf life, thanks to various preservation and packaging methods.

Ease of Use: They are typically easy to store, prepare, and consume, making them suitable for people with limited cooking skills.

Wide Variety: The convenience food market offers a wide range of options, catering to different tastes and dietary preferences.

Nutritional Considerations: While some convenience foods may lack in nutritional value, there is a growing trend toward healthier and more nutritious options.

Consumer Convenience: These foods meet the demands of a fast-paced lifestyle, making it easier for people to access food on the go or at home.

It's important for consumers to strike a balance between the convenience of these foods and their nutritional value to maintain a healthy and well-rounded diet. In certain cases, the sale of convenience foods at retail outlets can yield greater profit margins for food retailers when compared to the profits generated from selling the individual ingredients found within those convenience foods.

(IGNOU, n.d.)

Convenience foods can be categorized into three groups:

Canned Foods:

In the canning process, prepared food is packed in airtight containers, which can be made of tin, glass, or suitable plastic that can withstand high temperatures. Examples of canned foods include tinned fruits, soups, and juices. After packing, the food is heated to a specific temperature to eliminate any present germs, and then the container is sealed.

Packed Foods:

Packed foods can be either dehydrated or dried. Dehydration involves the controlled extraction of water from food. To prepare these foods, water needs to be added (rehydrated). The taste of dehydrated foods closely resembles that of fresh products from which they are derived. Although the quantity of dehydrated foods is small, their volume increases four to eight times after cooking. Examples of packaged foods include soup cubes, chutney powder, instant dosa, vada, gulab jamun mix, custard powder, instant coffee powder, baby foods, and more.

Frozen Foods:

Frozen foods are preserved through the freezing method, where most of the water in the food is converted into ice, preventing the growth of microorganisms. While frozen foods are not as commonly used in some regions. They include a wide range of products such as various meats, fish, poultry, vegetables, fruits, cakes, puddings, ice creams, and more. It's important to purchase these items from stores with appropriate storage facilities to maintain their quality and safety. When purchasing convenience foods, there are several important factors to consider. These include:

Quality and Brand: It is crucial to ensure that the product is of good quality and from a reputable brand. Trustworthy brands often maintain higher standards for their products.

Certification Marks: Look for certification marks like FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India), Agmark, or FPO (Food Products Order) on the products. These marks are indicative of good quality and adherence to food safety and quality standards.

Container Information: Check the information provided on the food container. It should include:

- i) Name of the food item
- ii) Brand Name
- iii) List of Ingredients
- iv) Directions for use
- v) Name and address of the manufacturer
- vi) Weight or quantity
- vii) Price
- viii) Batch Number
- ix) Manufacturing Date
- x) Date of Expiry
- xi) Any information about preservatives, artificial colours, flavours, etc. used
- xii) Standards (such as FSSAI, Agmark, or FPO)

Packaging Size: Purchase packaging sizes according to your requirement. Larger packages may be more cost-effective, but consider your consumption needs to avoid food wastage.

Storage Duration: Be aware of the storage duration of convenience foods. Dehydrated foods typically have a shelf life of six months to a year. Canned foods can often be stored for longer periods but should be used within the recommended timeframe to prevent spoilage.

Inspect Tins: When buying canned foods, carefully examine the tins or cans. Bulging at either end of the can may indicate spoilage of the contents, which could be a sign of bacterial growth or other issues. In such cases, it is best not to taste or consume the contents. Any noticeable changes in appearance, flavour, or odour should also raise concerns, as they may indicate spoilage or deterioration of the food.

These considerations are essential to ensure that the convenience foods you purchase are safe, of good quality, and meet your specific requirements. Being informed about the product and its packaging details helps consumers make wise and healthy choices.

(What is convenience food? Discover the trend that is changing the food industry?, 2020)

While these solutions are experiencing higher demand among younger generations, the latest trends in food packaging indicate that older individuals are also becoming more conscious of their health, both in terms of dietary choices and physical activity. This evolving awareness makes them potential consumers in this market.

Generation Z (Gen Z): Born well into the 21st century, these young individuals prioritize product quality over price. They also tend to do more of their shopping in physical stores compared to Millennials. Gen Z is known for their high expectations, desiring convenience foods with appealing packaging that is easy to carry.

Generation Y (Millennials): Born in the last two decades of the 20th century, Millennials are deeply concerned about the environmental impact of packaging. They often seek packaging that is eco-friendly and can be reused. Moreover, they are ideal consumers of convenience foods because they look for healthy options that can be consumed on the go. Seniors: Although the older generation generally prefers traditional dishes, they are increasingly looking for meals that require minimal preparation, such as simple reheating or mixing pre-portioned ingredients. Seniors also favour smaller packaging that is easy to open and handle.

Objectives:

- To understand the concept of convenience foods (Types and things to keep in mind while purchasing convenience foods).
- To understand the gaining popularity of convenience food in Mumbai.
- To learn the demographic attributes of customers purchasing convenience foods.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

(Singla, January 2020)

The convenience foods industry in India is rapidly adapting to cater to the specific requirements of Indian consumers and is experiencing significant growth. The busy lifestyles of Indian individuals, who often juggle home and work responsibilities, have led to a steady increase in the demand for convenient food options. Consequently, it is essential to educate consumers about the nutritional aspects of these foods and their impact on health and overall nutrition. The consumption of convenience foods has been identified as a major contributing factor to the rising incidence of non-communicable diseases worldwide. To address this concern, it is recommended that producers and manufacturers of convenience foods prioritize the inclusion of healthy and high-quality ingredients while minimizing the use of chemicals and preservatives. This approach aims to support and maintain better nutritional standards.

(Anna Botonaki, 2007)

The findings of this research hold significant relevance for both food marketers and policymakers in the food industry. They shed light on the distinctions between time-constrained consumers and others, highlighting how time pressures contribute to increased consumption of convenience food products. Moreover, the results underscore that the importance placed on health as a factor in food choices not only correlates negatively with the usage of convenience foods but also plays a pivotal role in shaping this behaviour. Companies that can introduce innovative food products that offer a combination of convenience, freshness, and minimal use of additives and preservatives stand to capture a substantial portion of the market. This approach takes into consideration the dual trends of health consciousness and the need for convenience that define the preferences of today's consumers.

(Silky Verma, September, 2020)

The review study reveals that consumers are becoming increasingly tech-savvy and discerning due to modern technology. India has experienced a rapid growth in the convenience food sector, with various manufacturing companies making substantial financial investments in product promotion. These advertisements are geared towards enticing consumers to purchase more convenience food items, reflecting the growing preference for such products. Individual factors like household size, income, the presence of children, and meal preparation habits have a significant impact on convenience food choices. Additionally, external factors, such as social responsibilities, have played a vital role in promoting the adoption of packaged foods. Numerous well-established food companies have made successful inroads into the Indian food market, reaching both urban and rural kitchens to a considerable extent.

Convenience foods are particularly valuable to working individuals as they save a significant amount of time. They are thoughtfully designed to provide ease and simplicity for consumers. The primary driving force behind the consumption of convenience foods is, indeed, their "convenience" factor. This has alleviated much of the pressure, stress, and time constraints faced by the working population. The demand for convenience foods, along with their advancements in food production technology, is on a steady rise

(Lee, 2013)

The findings of the research indicate that the presence of children within a household contributes to an increased demand for convenience foods, particularly in households with children spanning different age groups. Additionally,

the results demonstrate a positive relationship between the consumption of a greater number of end dishes and the demand for convenience foods. Primary consumers of convenience foods tend to be individuals who are non-Black, single, and possess higher income levels.

The environmental concerns related to single-serve packaging are primarily centred around the extensive use of plastics and their subsequent impact on solid waste management. These concerns have been raised by various environmental advocacy groups and organizations. Here's an elaboration on these concerns:

Plastic Waste Pollution: Single-serve packaging, especially those made of disposable plastic materials, significantly contribute to the growing problem of plastic waste. These items are often used once and then discarded, ultimately ending up in landfills or, unfortunately, as litter in natural environments. The slow decomposition of plastic materials poses a long-term threat to the environment, as it can take hundreds of years for plastics to break down. This leads to unsightly litter, clogged waterways, and the ingestion of plastic by wildlife, which can have devastating consequences.

Resource Consumption: The production of single-serve plastic packaging consumes valuable natural resources, such as petroleum, and requires significant energy. This not only contributes to resource depletion but also contributes to greenhouse gas emissions from the manufacturing process.

Health Implications: Health organizations have indeed voiced concerns about the nutritional content of many products packaged in single-serve containers. These products are often loaded with high levels of salts, fats, sugars, and preservatives to enhance flavour, extend shelf life, and maintain product quality. The overconsumption of these unhealthy ingredients can lead to various health problems, including obesity, heart disease, and other diet-related illnesses. The high availability of such products, particularly in Western and developing nations, has been linked to the rising rates of obesity and associated health epidemics.

In response to these concerns, there have been efforts to reduce single-serve plastic packaging through initiatives promoting the use of more sustainable materials and encouraging recycling and proper disposal. Additionally, there is a growing demand for healthier, more balanced food options and increased transparency in labelling to help consumers make informed choices about their food purchases. These environmental and health concerns surrounding single-serve packaging highlight the need for more sustainable and health-conscious choices in the food industry to mitigate the negative impacts on both the environment and public health.

III. CONCLUSION

Upon the conclusion of our research study, it became abundantly clear that the residents of Mumbai have a strong inclination towards consuming convenience foods, even after being aware of the adverse effects of the same. These food options are favoured for their time-saving attributes, requiring minimal preparation, and facilitating easy cleanup, which aligns well with the fast-paced lifestyles of many metropolitan cities. Individuals ranging from 12 to 60 years old are actively partaking in the consumption of these time-efficient food choices.

In fact, convenience foods have gathered a widespread following in Mumbai, with a significant portion of the population embracing these products. Moreover, this affinity for convenience foods extends beyond individual consumption; people in Mumbai often recommend and prefer them for their family and friends. The convenience and simplicity offered by these foods make them not only a personal choice but also a convenient option for gatherings and shared meals, highlighting their growing popularity and impact on the city's food culture.

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