

A Study on the Benefits of Convenience Foods to Working Women

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Abstract

The last decade and half has seen a remarkable growth in the working women segment in India and so has the manufacture of convenience food industry grown in the last decade. The working women in India who today are not only just seeking jobs but also are career oriented. Apart from their jobs, career, meetings and targets they are also a part of a family where a working woman needs to care of their meals too.

This study aims at finding out about the use of convenience food by working women and of their need to choose, the type of convenience food they generally prefer and what benefits they see by using such a convenient product.

The primary data for this study has been collected through questionnaire from women of various working segments and the same has been presented in graphical form for clear understanding while the secondary data has been collected through literature review of various research papers, articles and books.

Keywords: Convenience Food, Processed Food, Working Women

Introduction

Indian home food is all about the touch of mother's hand which gives 'THE TASTE' to our food. She knows everyone's likes and dislikes; she has the perfect knack or the perfect blend of ingredients into her preparation. She will spend her time in the kitchen cutting, grinding, mixing and blending to prepare the best of her preparations for her family. This has been her domain for years and she

has settled a routine for herself in this domain of hers. Nothing in the world can beat her taste!

Indian lifestyle has gone under a lot of changes in the last couple of decades. The term "mother is at home cooking food" seems to be diminishing and more of "mother is at her place of work" is heard. These mothers have now stepped out of their kitchens and homes to follow the path of their career. They too want to be independent, industrious and successful in the world outside their so called domain.

Many of these women still need to be at home for many of the reasons which included preparing for breakfast, lunch or dinner. This leaves them scurrying for their homes post duty hours so that dinner is prepared on time. So what will happen to one's beloved *dal*, *paneer* or *subzi* which the family look forward in their dinner, if the mother cannot find enough time in her kitchen?

Indian households today welcome food with convenience in cooking and purchase. Processed food and taste habits are no exception to this. The food industry has been very successful in replacing fresh and healthy food from consumers' diet with processed food. Over the years processed food has become one of the fastest growing industries in world as well in India. The market for processed foods is still in the early stages in a developing economy like India.

Food diversity in India is an embedded characteristic of India's diverse culture consisting of different regions and states within. Traditionally, Indians like to have home-cooked food – a concept supported religiously as well

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as individually. However, with times due to increasing awareness and influence of western culture, there is a visible shift in food consumption patterns among urban Indian families. It all started in the early 1990's when families started exploring outside food in the restaurants and moved on to accepting a wide variety of delicacies from world-over. Fast food is one of the major examples which gained acceptance of Indian palate after the multinational fast food players adapted the basic Indian food requirements viz. vegetarian meals and selected non-vegetarian options excluding beef and pork totally from their menu.

Convenience food is perceived expensive by people besides being out-of-way meals in Indian culture. In today's scenario, convenience food industry is getting adapted to Indian type of requirements and is growing leaps and bounds in India. Convenience food is gaining acceptance primarily from Indian youth and younger generations and is becoming part of day to day life. The working women also are not shy to explore these convenience foods into their kitchen. Keeping in view the working women and changing preferences towards convenience foods, this study has its focus to understand the benefits these working women would obtain through utilization of convenience foods.

Definition

Convenience food: Convenience food, or tertiary processed food, is commercially prepared food designed for ease of consumption. (Source: www.google.com)

Processed food: Processed foods have been altered from their natural state for safety reasons and for convenience. (Source: www.answers.yahoo.com)

Packaged food: Basically packaged food is food that can be shipped somewhere. And the reason that they are packaged is because so they can be safe and keep out germs. (Source: www.wikianswers.com)

Review of Literature

Alan Warde (1999) "*Convenience food: space and timing*", emphasizes that many people are constrained to eat what they call convenience foods as a provisional response to intransigent problems of scheduling everyday life. A distinction is drawn between modern and hypermodern

forms of convenience, the first directed towards labour-saving or time compression, the second to time-shifting. It is maintained that convenience food is as much a hypermodern response to de-reutilization as it is a modern search for the reduction of toil. Convenience food is required because people are too often in the wrong place; the impulse to time-shifting arises from the compulsion to plan ever more complex time-space paths in everyday life. The problem of timing supersedes the problem of shortage of time.

Anita Goyal and N P Singh (2007) in their research paper "*Consumer perception about fast food in India: an exploratory study*" indicate that the young Indian consumer has passion for visiting fast food outlets for fun and change but home food is their first choice. They feel homemade food is much better than food served at fast food outlets. They have the highest value for taste and quality (nutritional values) followed by ambience and hygiene.

Bernard Cova, Stefano Pace, (2006) "*Brand community of convenience products: new forms of customer empowerment – the case "my Nutella The Community"*", states that The virtual community that gathers around a convenience product brand shows a new form of sociality and customer empowerment: it is not based on interaction between peers, but more on personal self-exhibition in front of other consumers through the marks and rituals linked to the brand. The company should play the role of non-intrusive enabler of these personal expressions, reducing its control over the brand's meanings.

Dixon, Hinde, and Banwell, (2006) "*Obesity, convenience and "phood"*" have emphasized that in Australia the growing consumption of convenience foods is contributing to upward trends in overweight. It is argued that the functional food sector is well placed in a context where consumers are being encouraged to embrace convenient food solutions, while also being concerned about the nutritional qualities of foods.

Gray, Armstrong, and Farley, (2003) "*Opportunities and constraints in the functional food market*" review that the main food choice trends driving consumer demand for functional foods and the constraints limiting market development. Considers previous research activity in the functional food arena and subsequently identifies paramount research priorities that may facilitate the development of products that will help satisfy consumer

demands for convenience, health and sensory pleasure.

Jabir A, Sanjeev K and Janakiraman M (2010) in their study “*Buying behaviour of consumers for food products in an emerging economy*” emphasize the preferences of the consumers clearly indicate their priority for cleanliness/freshness of food products followed by price, quality, variety, packaging, and non-seasonal availability. The consumers’ preference of marketplace largely depends on the convenience in purchasing at the marketplace along with the availability of additional services, attraction for children, basic amenities and affordability.

Janaína Costa, Rafael Claro, Ana Paula, Renata Levy (2013) “*Food Purchasing Sites: Repercussions For Healthy Eating*” have stresses that changes in the food system are associated with the increase in consumption of foods with low nutritional value in recent decades. Data on food purchasing for household consumption, collected from the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE - Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) Household Budget Survey (HBS) in 2002-3, were used to describe the contribution of food purchasing sites (FPS) to the diet of Brazilian families. All the 241 distinct FPS mentioned in the HBS were grouped into ten categories, according to the nature of the products available. Food acquisitions were organized into seven groups. Supermarkets and hypermarkets accounted for 49% of the acquisitions and were the main source of six out of the seven food groups. Street markets and greengroceries stood out in the acquisitions of fruits and vegetables, accounting for 39% of this market. The large contribution of supermarkets and hypermarkets to the diet shows the need for healthy eating promotion policies aiming at these locations.

Joglekar A and Kundle S (2013) “*Consumer awareness about convenience food among working and non-working women*” have opined that Convenience food is the result of modern technological advances in the field of food processing, preservation techniques and the invention of various newer food additives. Convenience foods minimise the working time but it doesn’t save us from consuming high preservatives, extra sodium and hydrogenated fats

Kara, Kaynak and Kucukemiroglu (1997) state in their study “*Marketing strategies for fast-food restaurants: a customer view*” that; in recent years, a major food

consumption trend in the USA and Canada is that more people are eating more meals outside their homes. It is predicted that this trend will accelerate in the future. As a result, fast-food markets will offer greater growth opportunities for marketers.

According to Ritu Anand (2011), “*A study of determinants impacting consumers food choice with reference to the fast food consumption in India*”, signifies the key determinants impacting consumers food choice are passion for eating out, socialize, ambience and taste for school and college goers and convenience for dual-income families in urban India. Findings indicate that fast food companies can no longer rely on convenience as USP in India, unless the implications of same on consumer’s health is given equal importance in the years to come.

Tiwari P and Verma H (2008) in their research paper “*Consumer Perception About Fast Food in India: An Empirical Study of Dehradun City*” point out that fast food is one of the world’s fastest growing food types. It now accounts for roughly half of all restaurant revenues in the developed countries, where it continues to expand. However, some of the most rapid growth is occurring in the developing world; where it is radically changing the way people eat. People buy fast food because it is cheap, easy to prepare, and heavily promoted.

According to the article featured on www.fbnnews.com, 11th October 2011 there has been a major shift in food habits in the metropolitan cities, about 86% of households prefer to have instant food due to steep rise in dual income level and standard of living, convenience, and influence of western countries, according to a survey undertaken by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham).

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the factors influencing the use of convenience foods by working women
2. To identify the various categories of convenience foods available for working women
3. To check the preference of various categories of convenience foods by working women
4. To explore the benefits of convenience foods for working women

Research Methodology

Data collection: The primary data required for the research was collected using the following techniques:

Personal interviews: The researcher conducted personal interview with women working in various fields.

Questionnaire: A questionnaire bearing straight forward and relevant questions was drafted and handed over to the sample to obtain their responses.

Sample technique: The population being “working women”, this study was conducted on 100 working women between the age group of above 25 to 55 years. All the samples were selected randomly from the various areas of Pune city.

Apart from the above mentioned tools the relevant secondary data for the research was collected from journals, books and internet.

Observations and Discussions

Factors Influencing the Choice of Convenience Food

A working woman is career oriented and tends to look for options to cook food when she has to play multiple roles in her family. Her work timings do not provide her with adequate time to do all the processes involved in the process of cooking which would involve various stages i.e. right from going to the market, pre-processing, processing, cooking, cleaning / clearing and serving of food. She often looks for ways in which she can reduce her cooking time be it for breakfast, lunch or dinner.

Certain ingredients are not always available at the place where one lives and due to likes and choices in the family a working woman does tend to look out for such ingredients which she can use in her cooking for her family. She would very easily pick up such ingredient that might be available somewhere distant from her place of living.

A working woman may also want to bring variety in her food preparation that would appease her family members hence her thought process on preparation of variety in her cooking is always ticking. She always plans her preparations hence making it a little easy for her to pick up the ingredients for the same. Here I would also like to add

that she always keeps in mind some kind of emergency situations that she might come across when she has to prepare food, for example a couple of guests might drop in or she might be delayed to the extent of not getting enough time to purchase anything; hence she keeps some convenience stuff handy at home for such situations.

She might also want to experiment on certain new preparations that is available in the market to appease her family or one could also consider that she might be completely lost with what recipe must she follow for preparing something new. Lack of knowledge of the recipe and its method of preparation can also lead in purchasing a convenient product from the store round the corner.

An additional point of observation one must realize that a working woman may also be tired from her duty and may not want to cook for that particular meal and hence she would surely want to skip the initial pre-preparation stages of cooking and prefer to use a convenient food instead. She may also look out for foods that may not involve any of the stages of cooking and may involve a short reheat process and nothing else. This gives her more time to relax and spend more time on other jobs of her.

A working woman may also find it boring to start any cooking process from scratch hence she would find herself lazy to start this process and moreover even avoid going to the market for any kind of purchased to be done. This pushes her in procuring convenient for food consumption.

Preference of Convenience Food

Convenience food is available in the market for a variety of products in a variety of forms and packaging. In the last decade one has seen a manifold growth in this sector. Convenience food manufacturers are also investing in a lot of advertising for their products and targeting various audiences.

The preference of convenience food is determined with most commonly available and purchased convenience products. The following list would indicate the various categories of convenience food that a working woman generally would purchase from the store:-

- Frozen – Non vegetarian products (chicken, fish, etc)
- Frozen – Vegetarian products (paneer, vegetables, etc)

- Frozen –Snack products (pizza, samosa, french fries, smily, etc)
- Ready to serve products – (dal makhni, paneer makhni, palak paneer, etc)
- Fresh cut vegetables – (carrot, cauliflower, etc.)
- Pre-processed products – (soups, gravy mixes, rawa idli mix, etc)
- Ready to eat snacks – (chips, farsan, sev, biscuits, etc)
- Canned products – (coconut milk, fruits, milkmaid, etc)
- Bottled products – (jams, sauces, syrups, mayonnaise, spreads, etc)
- Refrigerated products – (tofu, paneer, etc)

The above mentioned list was utilized into the questionnaire to obtain the preferences of working woman on their choice of categories during their purchases.

Benefits of Convenience Food

Time Saving: Convenience food reduces the time required for pre-preparation and to some extent even cooking time required. Hence, significant time can be saved where preparation from scratch for any meal can be avoided.

Variety: Due to the various techniques used in the convenience food manufacturing process one is able to get a lot of variety in the market. In fact the amount of variety available in the stores today does put a working woman in a fix on the choice that she needs to make. Another point to be noticed is that this variety remains constant in the market and does go off shelf citing seasonal reasons like the fresh fruits and vegetables do.

Healthy: One can read the contents and detailing on the packaging of the convenience product and decide to whether health aspects are preferred or not.

Convenience: these products are convenient to carry, stack and store them since their packaging are well planned considering various factors like consistency, texture, size and fragility.

Shelf Life: Most convenience foods have a longer shelf life due to additives and the same is also mentioned on

the package hence the user is well informed of its usage period.

Storage: Storage of convenience foods is easy as they can be stacked up anywhere and can also help better utilization of the space available. Regeneration is also faster and better.

Labour Saving: Convenience food helps saving labour in the terms of going to market for purchase, pre-cleaning, pre-preparation and post preparation cleaning.

Food Safety: The new techniques used in the manufacturing and packaging of convenience like aseptic canning, rapid freezing, various methods of eradicating bacteria reduces its presence and also reduces spoilage of food to a great extent if stored properly.

Recipe Knowledge: Many a time the working woman does have requests from her own home or she herself wants to try preparing something of which recipe might not be known to her. Hence she looks out for such products for which she need not bother to know how to prepare it rather she would use the convenience of such available products.

Availability: Certain fresh products might not be available throughout the year due to their seasonal availability whereas convenience products are manufactured using stringent quality standards hence their availability besides being consistent also has consistent taste, texture and taste.

Findings

Analysis of data is done from results obtained from more than 100 women from different working segments. The result obtained from this is represented graphically.

Figure 1 shows the various factors that influence a working woman to purchase convenience food. It can be observed that non availability of certain ingredients is the major influencing factor followed by preparation of variety in meals.

Figure 2 indicates that working women prefer to buy bottled products followed by ready to eat snacks. Their choice for frozen non-vegetarian and frozen snack products is pretty low.

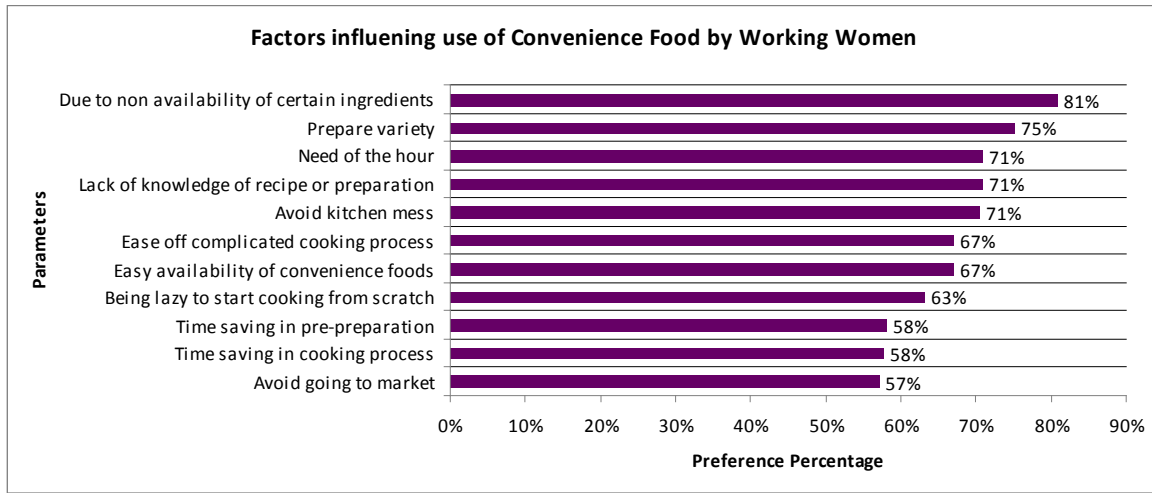


Figure 1:

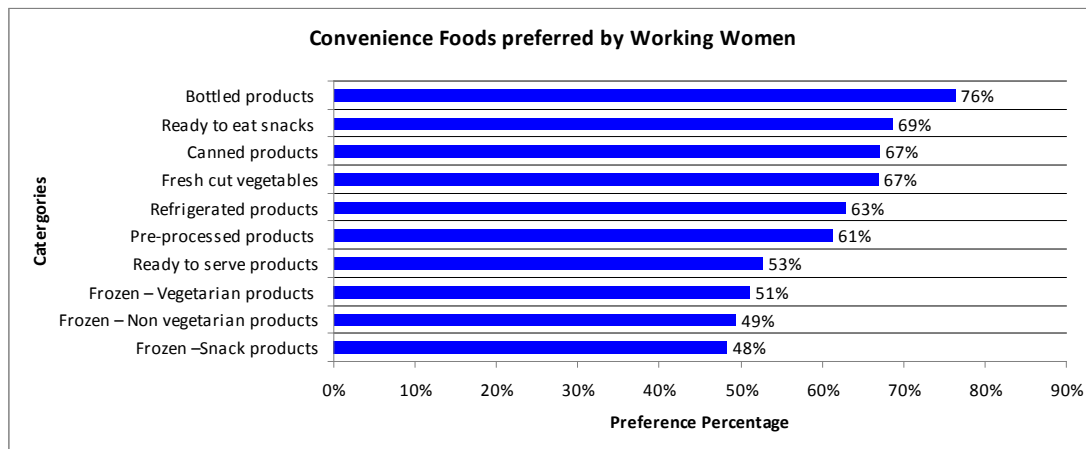


Figure 2:

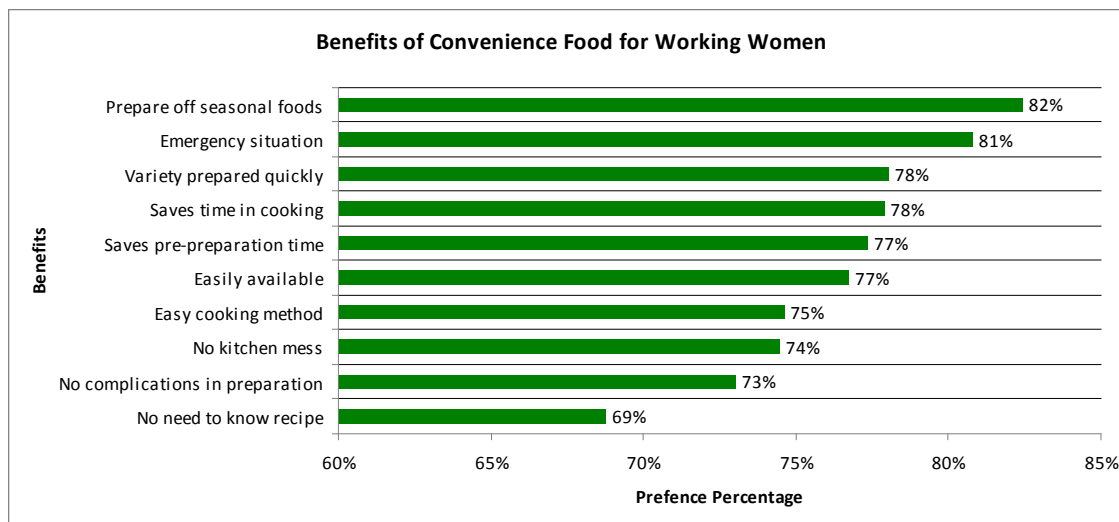


Figure 3:

Figure 3 shows what benefits the working women are able to obtain by using convenience foods. Preparing off-seasonal food and for emergency situation are the seen to be the most beneficial for working women.

Recommendations and Suggestion

1. It is suggested that whenever a working woman decides to purchase a convenience food she must try to read and understand the health benefits she might be obtaining by the use of that particular convenience product.
2. A working woman must also observe the storage factor of that particular convenience food as each convenience food has a different storage criteria or pre-requisites.
3. The study is conducted in the current scenario and the opinions, perception and expectations of the respondents may differ with time and does not differentiate respondents on basis of their demographic factors which may have an influence of their perception thereby identifying scope for further research.

Conclusion

There has been a tremendous growth of the convenience food industry in India in the last decade. Many minor and major companies have opened door to consumers to try out their convenience product. A lot of investment is done by these manufacturing companies in advertising their products through different media to attract more consumers. Convenience food is surely gaining popularity amongst all ages today. The working women are not left far behind in this.

It is very ideal that working women will surely tend to look upon such products which will help her to save time of her cooking process in some way or the other. Today's working women do not hesitate to go out to try a new convenient product that may be available in the market. They are well versed with what are the new convenient products that are available in the store nearby.

Convenience food is available in a variety of forms which may include products like pre-cut vegetables, bottled and canned products, frozen meat and snacks, ready to cook or ready to serve foods and many more. These products are well designed considering the requirement of the consumer. They are also made safe for consumption and

also hold a good shelf life. Their storage conditions are also mentioned to ensure proper utilization of product in case of it not being utilized completely.

The working women are adapting to use of convenience foods as they are realizing that they are able to save time by reducing preparation time and also are able to include some variety into their preparations. It is also noted that the working women have a tendency to use convenience food as a tool for emergency situation when quick meal needs to be prepared.

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