

Changing Food Trends and Eating Habits among Youngsters

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Abstract

A study was conducted to understand the Changing Food Trends and Food Preferences among Youngsters in Pune city of India. The objective of this paper was to identify the key food trends and understand the way they are changing the food habits. The research was conducted using a questionnaire which was administered online. It was observed that the youngsters are getting more inclined towards eating fast food because of its taste, quick service, change from daily routine, emotional eating and follow food trends. However, the observations of the study indicate that consumption of home cooked food was preferred by youngsters during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Food Trends, Food Habits, Eating Behavior, Obesity, Fast Food Consumption

INTRODUCTION

The emphasis of Food in Human life is well explained by Hippocrates, when he said “*Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food*” (let food be your medicine and medicine be your food). The main factors affecting the food habits are fast paced work life, global impact, standard of living, taste and preferences, accessibility, time factor and affordability. Eating out in India has evolved from an occasion driven activity to an everyday activity and fast-food has become a significant symbol for the modern culture as it tends to satisfy customers in a relatively short time. These impact our dietary pattern and routine food consumption.

The Indian consumer segment is dominated by a large urban mass and the country has one of the youngest populations in the world. Indians spend a high proportion

of their incomes on food and groceries. The demand is expected to grow considerably in the coming years. In today’s hectic life, it is difficult to maintain the balanced diet for breakfast, lunch and dinner at the desired time. The irregularity is particularly predominant among the youths, especially college students and working youths. Many studies have shown that the food preference among the youths is for takeaway and fast foods. A survey conducted among the students of one of the universities has shown that 54% of students skip breakfast due to a variety of reasons. Many of the educational institutions do not have their own cafés or canteens where nutritious and subsidized food can be served for the students. In the ages between 20 and 40, the human body is more productive than any other time and needs nutritious food. Muscle strength, sensory abilities and cardiac functioning are at their most significant rates in this age. Insufficient intake of coarse cereals, pulses, fruits and vegetables, an increasing intake of meat products and salt, coupled with declining levels of physical activity due to rapid urbanization have resulted in escalating levels of obesity among the Indian population. The individual nutritional requirement in youngsters may differ for each individual, but the food intake increases due to the rapid growth and changes in body composition. Sufficient amount of nutrition is important for an overall balanced growth and physical, emotional and biological development. If the youths follow and adopt good and balanced eating habits it helps them to keep away the chronic illness in the future which including obesity, heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

Going back to the history of Fast Food, we observe that before the 1970s, eating out for pleasure was unheard of for the common population. The technological, socio-economic, and political changes in this period led to the

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rise of fast food. It was cheap and convenient for the working people. American fast food chains started to take its roots during this time. Wimpy was started in 1950 which used to serve hamburgers, fries, and milkshakes. McDonald's opened its first UK restaurant in 1974 and reached a staggering 1000 outlets by 1999. Indian and Chinese restaurants also started to take off in this period.

The youngsters prefer to eat out quite often. The changing food habits of Millennials are different from their parents. The per capita income of the Indians has increased, and there are more working people in each household. With more disposable income at hand, they have higher spending power on food. The work-life imbalance has also been instrumental in people eating out or exploring home food delivery options. They prefer to eat at premium restaurants, be mindful of what they eat and will select their places after thorough considerations.

Among the most observed food trends is the preference for organic food. The young generation wants to know how fresh or organic their food is, where their food is coming from, and if it is ethically sourced. They are environmentally conscious citizens and are not shy about advocating the cause through their lifestyle. The changing food habits of these youngsters are an impact in the rise of trends like Veganism, Intermittent Fasting and Ketogenic diet. The young generation wants to have healthy food and is calorie conscious. They prefer to choose their food places consciously and flaunt their social quotient.

As they are global citizens, they are more conscious of health trends going around the world. They are consciously changing their food habits and their diet is affected by changing global trends. They are more experimentative and eat different cuisines.

Another prominent food trend is to prefer to indulge in authentic, gastronomical experience and not merely consume food. Good service, warm ambiance, live performances, innovative menu, and wow factors are considered while choosing a place to consume food. Overworked and stressed out, consumers consider dining out as a way to unwind themselves. Restaurants are the places where they bond with family and connect with friends and enjoy the food experience. In cities, people also meet for a post-dinner drink. People wrap up dinner early and then nibble something when they catch up at parties.

Emotional eating is one of the many habits seen in youngsters. Emotional eating is using food to make yourself feel better by consuming your favorite food. Afterward, not only does the original emotional issue remain, but you also feel guilty for overeating.

Thus some prominent food trends seen in majority of youths today include lesser concern for nutritional food, very often eating out in restaurants, deterioration of the traditional style of meal, skipping full meals and picking snacks, increase in demand for fast foods, choosing branded food and increase in intake of soft and tickle drinks.

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the Food Trends among Youngsters.
- To check the Food Preferences and Food Habits of Young generation.
- To find out awareness of Youngsters about food habits.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Youngsters are in different stages of life, mostly studying in college, some still living at home; some have moved out on their own; and others have started their own families. Their lifestyles and values at the different life stages impact what they want or need, and are reflected in their leisure activities, understanding of politics and current events, and approaches to cooking, as well as how they snack and shop for food and beverages.

Author Aurora A. Saulo says that the youngsters prefer unique and interesting food and beverage experiences, and they like to flaunt these experiences on their social media. About 60% of Millennials claim that they do all the cooking in their household, preferring to use fresh ingredients, projecting characteristics of their previous generation. The Millennials are now a reliable barometer for tomorrow's food culture. Ready-To-Eat has been perceived as convenient but unhealthy and the food companies can no longer rely on convenience unless the implications of same on consumer's health are given equal importance.

The researcher, Asha Joshi observed that there a difference in consumer habits in different cities of India. The attention paid while purchasing food and reading the

food labels differ between men and women significantly for some parameters. The awareness level of consumers needs to be improved and the consumers want more transparency from food companies. There is a shift from opting to eat at home to opting to eat out. Also interestingly awareness about harmful effects of processed foods was high but the reason for consumption was attributed primarily to ease of purchase. The researcher stresses on the fact that key steps should be taken by public officials: such as a tax on unhealthy foods, subsidies for healthy food, and promotion of healthy norms. Also FSSAI guidelines need to strengthen to ensure that customer awareness increase and food companies opt for a more transparent communication platform.

Tripathi, A., in his research titled, “Interstate migration and changing food preferences in India” India has diverse food culture. Just as the geography, religion, and culture of India are diverse, so are the food habits. It was observed that there is regional heterogeneity in food consumption across the various states of India. The author shows that regional heterogeneity declined over the period and that both rural and urban consumers shifted their preference from cereals to non-cereals. However, the article also provides some evidence that regional disparities remain in India.

A case study by R. Anand explores the determinants impacting consumer’s food choices towards fast food in India. The key determinants for consumer’s food choices identified by the researcher are socializing, convenience for dual-income families, ambience of the eating outlet and choices of teenagers and youngsters in urban India. He also suggests that the fast food companies need to be transparent regarding the food labels and other food related regulations.

A study was conducted by the researcher Mahadevan, to explore the perceptions of the young women on the factors influencing their food habits upon immigrating to America. The results showed that the demanding careers, no support of families and managing their family’s nutritional needs at the same time, made the women shift away from cooking traditional healthy meals, and resorting to fast foods instead. Intervention strategies should be directed toward improving the barriers to eating healthy that were specifically identified within the confines of shifting gender roles and limited family support networks.

Author Susmitha in her research has analyzed that it is not only the children from poor class that are malnourished but also the children of middle class and upper middle class. The main reasons for such conditions are lack of knowledge among parents regarding nutrition, not using the locally available resources to meet the nutritional requirements, busy careers, negligence on nutritional needs by the parents and consumption of packed foods and junk foods. Most of the programmes of the government focus on Malnutrition of children, however, this paper focuses on the nutrition education to the parents and awareness among the public regarding the long term health impact of junk food.

While discussing the food habits of Asians, the author, Pingali observed that the current food consumption patterns are showing signs of convergence towards a Western diet. Global interconnectedness of the urban middle class is the driving force behind the convergence of diets. The diet transition is characterized by increased consumption of wheat, fruits and vegetables energy foods and high protein foods. As a consequence, Asian agriculture is moving away from the cereal crop production, especially rice, towards a production system that is becoming increasingly commercialized and diversified.

In her research author Ireyna Printezis observed that the younger generation is willing to pay a premium price for organic food and local food, buy their food after a survey and are conscious of the sustainability concept.

In terms of its contribution to GDP, employment and investment, the food processing industry is an important part of India’s economy and will be a major driver of growth in India in the near future. It is suggested that the Government should integrate food laws, regulate the sale and import of food, and ensure the provision of safe and healthy food for human consumption.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Type of Research: A Descriptive research was used to study the various factors that influence youngsters to shift their liking from traditional local food to fast food.

Research Methodology: The sample size for the study was 100 respondents from various parts of Pune city. The responses had been collected from an age group of 16 to 30 years of age. To fulfill a sample size of 100

respondents a total of 135 questionnaires were circulated to the targeted respondents and 100 were received back.

Data Collection: The primary data is collected through the random and stratified survey based on a specially carved questionnaire filled by the local people of Pune city to understand the changing food trends. Secondary data was collected from various trade magazines, books, internet and other relevant records.

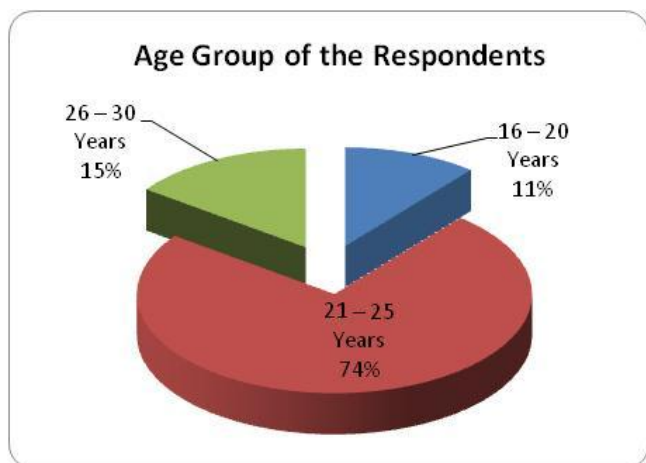
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data collected was analyzed using basic and advanced analytical tools. This also includes the detailed analysis of the data which was conducted with the purpose of attaining the set objectives of the research. Mentioned below is the analysis which is presented graphically and in tabulated form for better interpretation.

The Interpretation of the collected data was done by drawing inferences from the collected facts after the analysis of the study.

Table 1: Frequency Analysis - Age Group of the Respondents

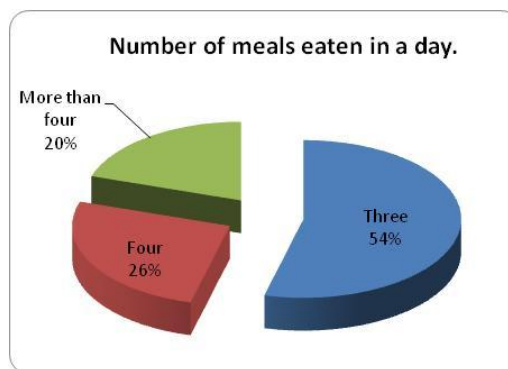
Frequency			Total
16-20 Years	21-25 Years	26 -30 Years	
11	74	15	100%



Observation: According to the above chart it can be stated that majority of the respondents i.e. 74% were found to be from the age group of 21-25 years, 15% were between 26-30 age group and 11% were belonging to the age group of 16-20.

Table 2: Frequency Analysis - Number of Meals Preferred in a Day

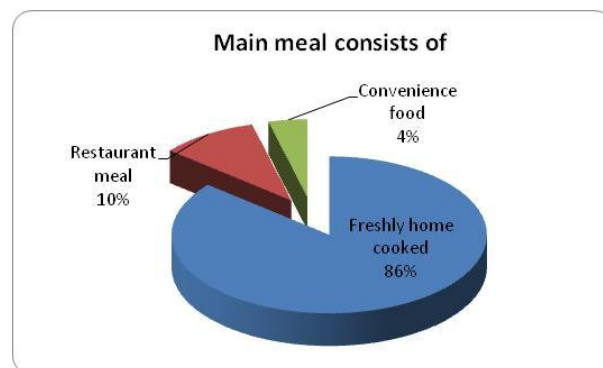
Frequency			Total
Three	Four	More than Four	
54	26	20	100%



Observation: According to the above chart it can be stated that majority of the respondents i.e. 54% were found to be consuming 3 meals per day, 26% of the respondents were found to be consuming four meals in a day and 20% were found to be consuming more than four meals in a day.

Table 3: Frequency Analysis - What does the Main Meal Consists of during the Pandemic?

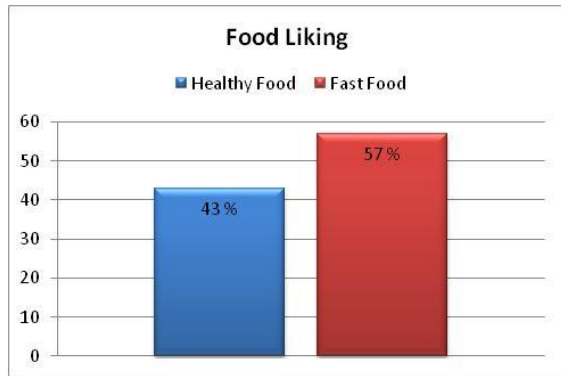
Frequency			Total
Freshly Home Cooked	Restaurant Meal	Convenience Food	
86	10	4	100%



Observation: According to the above chart it can be stated that majority of the respondents i.e. 86% were found to be preferring home cooked food as compared to restaurant and convenience foods during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4: Frequency Analysis - Food Liking

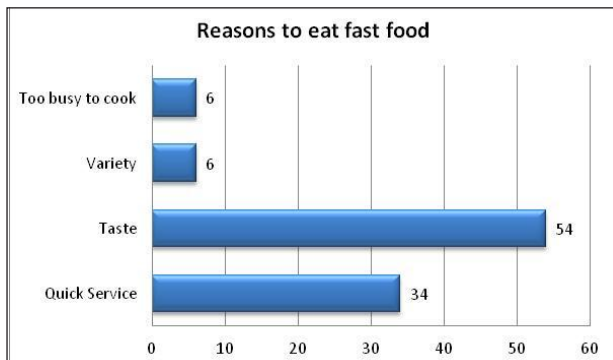
Frequency		Total
Healthy Food	Fast Food	
43	57	100%



Observation: According to the above chart it can be stated that majority of the respondents i.e. 57% were found to be having the liking towards fast food instead of healthy food, whereas 43% of the respondents were to be found to prefer healthy food over fast food.

Table 5: Frequency Analysis - Reasons to Eat Fast Food

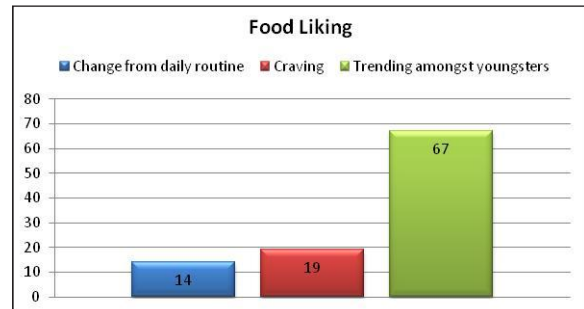
Frequency				Total
Quick Service	Taste	Variety	Too Busy to Cook	
34	54	6	6	100%



Observation: According to the above chart it can be stated that majority of the respondents i.e. 54% were finding the fast food tastier than the healthy food, 34% of the respondents are also of the opinion that the quick service is also one of the important reason, whereas the other factors like variety, too busy to cook, does not influence much.

Table 6: Frequency Analysis - Reasons to Choose Fast Food

Frequency			Total
Change from Daily Routine	Craving	Trending amongst Youngsters	
14	19	67	100%



Observation: According to the above chart it can be stated that majority of the respondents i.e. 67% were agreeing for the fact that fast-food is now trending amongst youngsters, other factors like change from daily routine and craving for a particular food were found to be comparatively less important.

Table 7: Frequency Analysis - Western Fast Food Taking over Indian Street Food

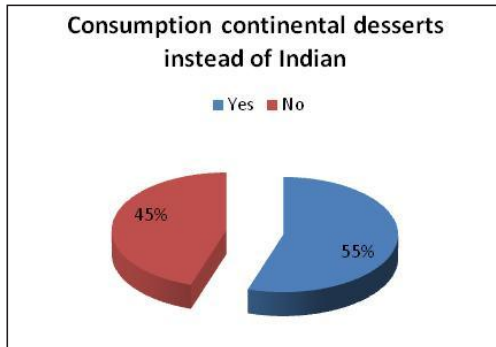
Frequency		Total
Yes	No	
88	12	100%



Observation: According to the above chart it can be stated that majority of the respondents i.e. 88% were agreeing for the fact that the cosmopolitan Fast food is taking over the Indian street food, the agreement percentage of the respondents also supports the same, whereas the percentage of the respondents disagreeing was 12% from the total respondents.

Table 8: Frequency Analysis - Consumption Continental Desserts instead of Indian Sweets

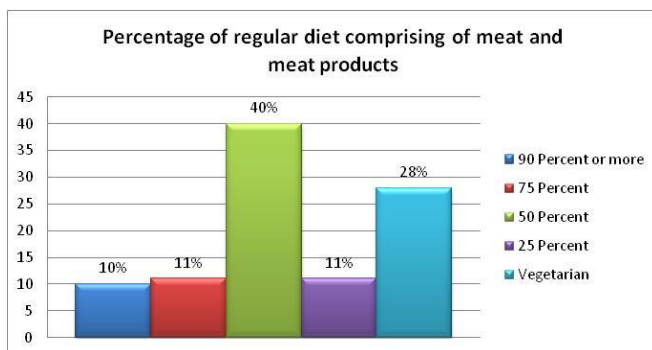
Frequency		Total
Yes	No	
55	45	100%



Observation: According to the above chart it can be stated that majority of the respondents i.e. 55% were agreeing for the fact that the consumption of continental desserts is slowly gaining popularity in the Indian market, whereas 45% of the respondents are not agreeing to the fact.

Table 9: Frequency Analysis - Percentage of Regular Diet Comprising of Meat and Meat Products

Frequency					Total
90 Percent or more	75 Percent	50 Percent	25 Percent	Vegetarian	
10	11	40	11	28	100%



Observation: According to the above chart it can be stated that 40% from the total respondents prefer to have 50% of meat and meat products and 50% other items, 28% from the total respondents prefer to have 100% vegetarian meal, 11% from the total respondents would like to have 75% of the meat products and 25% other items, 11% are also of an opinion to have 25% meat and meat products and

75% other and 10% from the total respondents would be wanting to have 90% of the meat and meat based products in their meal and 10% of the other items.

FINDINGS

- During the COVID-19 pandemic it was observed that home cooked food was preferred over restaurant and convenience food as it has more nutritive value.
- The youngsters are getting more inclined towards fast food instead of healthy food because fast food is found to be tastier than the healthy food; also fast food is prepared and served quickly.
- Fast food is found to be trending amongst the youngsters as compared to any other food; also it has changed the daily eating habits. It has also been found that craving for fast food is also one of the important concerns in youngsters.
- The western fast food had been found to be taking over the Indian street food because of its style statement. Also it has been found that the continental desserts are slowly gaining popularity in the Indian market as compared to the traditional Indian sweets.
- It had also been found that the meat and meat products were preferred more by the respondents as compared to the vegetarian and vegan diet.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

- There are multiple reasons for youngsters to go out and eat.
- Youngsters are open to variety of foods including meat and meat products.
- The awareness level of youngsters regarding the harmful effects of consumption fast food and junk food definitely has room for improvement.
- With increasing trend of fast food consumption, several health issues related to consumption of fast food had been reported.
- The fast food should be supplementary not alternative to normal meal as it Impact on health (BMI and obesity).
- Preference for fast food should be nutritive/calorific value, not on taste, convenience, and price or as a status symbol.

- Indian Fast Food should be preferred over Western Fast Food as these are comparatively healthier.
- The frequency of taking fast food should be occasionally once in a week or a month.
- The youngsters should not get attracted with promotional offers of fast foods.
- Self-cooking is the best way, one can maintain the proper hygiene, calorific, and nutritional values of fast foods

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