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A Study on consumer buying behaviour towards ready to - cook food products in urban areas of Visakhapatnam

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ABSTRACT

The present study, entitled "Consumer buying behaviour towards Ready-to-cook food products in urban areas of Visakhapatnam," was conducted in 2024 to explore the buying pattern of consumers regarding ready-to-cook food products. The study was purposively carried out in the Visakhapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh, India. A total of 140 participants were randomly selected from four major retail stores in the city. Primary data was collected through a pre- structured interview schedule to assess consumer purchase behavior related of ready-to-cook (RTC) food products. Statistical tools such as mean, frequency analysis and chi-square test were employed to analyze the data. A significant portion (39.29%) of consumers reported purchasing RTC food products more than twice a month, with a similar percentage spending Rs.500 – Rs. 1000 monthly on them. The chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between income and expenditure at the 1% level. The findings show that 42.14% have been purchasing RTC products for 4–6 years, primarily from departmental stores like D-mart, Reliance Fresh, and Spencer's (64.29%). Convenience was a critical motivator, with statements like "saves time," "easier for limited cooking skills," and "easily available" resonating strongly. Over half (52.86%) of consumers reported making purchase decisions independently. Overall consumers appreciated RTC products for their convenience, long shelf life, and availability, with convenience being the most influential buying factor, scoring a mean of 69.01.

Key words: *Buying behaviour, Purchase pattern and Ready-to-cook.*

Ready-to-cook products are foods that have been processed or prepared to require minimal additional effort, making them a convenient option. These products are often referred to as convenience foods. Ready-to-cook food products entered the market only a few years ago and are currently marketed through general retail stores, departmental stores and supermarkets. The demand for Ready-to-cook food is rising due to several factors, such as the easy availability, cultural acceptance, nutritional value, minimal processing, urbanization of domestic labour, lack of time, convenience, increased per capita income and affordability for the middle class (Temgire *et al.* 2021). The India Ready-to-cook food market was valued at USD 490.85 million in 2023 and is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 16.2% during the forecast period from 2025 to 2029 (www.techsciresearch.com). Ready-to-cook meals can be considered the best alternative to home cooked meals and their consumption is increasing particularly due to the growing number of working women and urban consumers including bachelors and individuals with busy lives in cities. These meals have gained a lot of popularity because they satisfy the demands of convenience, adequate nutrition, shelf stability, ease of storage and transportation. Consumer buying behaviour plays a crucial role in shaping the success of any product or service in the market. Understanding the factors that influence consumer decision-making processes is essential for businesses to develop effective marketing strategies and respond to the evolving demands of their target audience. In the context of the food industry, the consumer buying behaviour of RTC products has gained significant attention due to changing lifestyle patterns, increasing urbanization and rising consumer preferences for convenient, healthy and diverse food options.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The current study was purposively conducted in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh state. The data collection was carried out in urban areas of

Visakhapatnam during the year 2024, research was descriptive in nature and using both primary and secondary data. From the selected city, four major retail stores were randomly chosen for the study and thirty- five consumers visiting each retail store were selected randomly,making total sample size of 140. The primary objective of this study is to examine the consumers buying behaviour towards ready-to-cook food products and provide valuable suggestions to the companies. Based on an exhaustive review of literature and expert's opinions a pre-structured interview schedule was developed to collect the primary data. Secondary data was collected from online sources, journals, etc. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS program, employing tools such as percentage analysis, mean, frequency analysis and chi-square test to derive meaningful results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Frequency of purchase of Ready-to-cook food products by sample consumers

Out of 140 respondents, a significant majority accounting for 39.29 per cent of sample respondents purchase the RTC products more than twice a month. 28.57 per cent of the sample's respondents purchase them occasionally.18.57 percent purchase twice a month and 13.57 per cent purchase once a week. It was found that the largest proportion (39.29%) of consumers purchase RTC products more than twice a month.

Monthly expenditure on Ready-to-cook food products by sample consumers

Out of 140 respondents, a significant portion of the sample 39.29 per cent of consumers falls into the category of monthly spending between Rs.500 and Rs.1000 on RTC. About 27.14 per cent of respondents spend between Rs.1000 and Rs.1500, while 20.00 per cent spend less than Rs.500 per month. In contrast, 9.29 per cent of consumers spend between Rs.1500 and Rs. 2000. Only 4.29 per cent spend above Rs. 2000 monthly. Therefore, is evident that majority (39.29%) of the consumers are spending between Rs.500 and Rs.1000 per month on RTC products.

Assessment of the significance of monthly income and the level of expenditure of respondents towards Ready-to-cook food products

The chi-square value was 29.05 and p-value for the Pearson Chi-Square test was less than 0.001, which is less than the typical significance level of 0.01. This indicates that there is a statistically significant association between income and expenditure.

Purchase history of consumers buying RTC food products

A significant portion of consumers with 42.14 per cent have been purchasing Ready-to-cook food products for 4 to 6 years. This is followed by 37.86 per cent of consumers have been purchasing ready-to-cook food products for less than 4 years. A smaller portion of consumers with 20 per cent have been purchasing these products for more than 6 years. Therefore, it is evident that majority (42.14%) have been purchasing these products for 4 to 6 years.

Preferred sources to purchase Ready-to-cook food products by sample consumers

Out of 140 respondents, a significant majority 64.29 per cent of the sample prefer departmental stores as their place of purchase followed by 17.14 per cent, 12.14 per cent and 6.43 per cent prefer supermarkets, online grocery stores and local grocery stores respectively. Thus, it is observed that most of the consumers purchase ready to cook food products from departmental stores like Dmart, more, reliance fresh, and spencer etc., followed by super markets.

The consumers stimuli towards purchasing of Ready-to-cook food products

By analyzing responses from 140 respondents, it was inferred that the most considered consumer stimuli for purchasing and consumption of Ready-to-cook food products were, 'Ready-to-cook food products saves time for cooking', 'Easier for persons with limited cooking skills', 'Easily available' and 'Variety of Flavors that are not easily made at home.' with a mean score of 2.83, 2.54, 2.46 and 2.18, respectively. On the other hand statements like 'Ready-to-cook food products are healthier option than convenient foods' and 'Ready-to-cook food products are tasty' were least considered with mean scores of 1.50 and 1.48 respectively. Hence, it can be concluded that the most influencial consumer stumili while purchasing ready-to-cook food products were 'Saves time for cooking', 'Easier for persons with limited cooking skills', and 'Easily available'.

Consumer preferences for variety of Ready-to-cook food products

It was inferred that maggie/noodles had the highest preference, with a mean score of 2.53. Oats ranks second with a mean score of 2.40. Idli/dosa batter were in third place with a mean score of 2.24. Instant roti/chapatti/paratha come fourth with a mean score of 2.23. Veg/Non-veg Soups ranked fifth with a mean score of 2.09. The category of desserts which includes gulab jamun mix was sixth place with a mean score of 2.04. Instant beverages (coffee, juices) ranked seventh with a mean score of 2.01. The category of Snacks was in eighth position with a mean score of 1.97. Sambar/Rasam powders were ranked ninth with a mean score of 1.83. Frozen Meat/Veggies ranked last with a mean score of 1.54. The study concludes that maggie/noodles are the most preferred RTC food product.

Purchase decision of the sample consumers in buying Ready-to-cook food products

A significant majority accounting for 52.86 per cent make the decision to buy Ready-to-cook food products themselves, followed by 26.43 per cent of consumers make the decision jointly with others. Finally, 20.71 per cent of consumers rely on another family member to make the purchase decision. The study indicates that the decision to purchase Ready-to-cook food products is primarily made by individuals themselves, highlighting the importance of personal choice in food selection.

Factors influencing the buying behaviour of Ready-to-cook food products

For the factors influencing the buying behaviour of Ready-to-cook food products, convenience of cooking was the most influential factor with mean score 69.01, followed by brand reputation which had mean score of 67.24. Price ranked third most important factor with mean score 50.63 followed by taste and variety ranked fourth with mean score 50.35. The quality of ingredients ranked fifth with mean score 46.57. Nutritional content ranked sixth with mean score 37.09. Availability was the least influential factor among those listed with mean score 30.06. Overall consumers buying behaviour for Ready-to-cook food products was primarily influenced by the convenience of cooking, brand reputation, and price.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the growing popularity and reliance on ready-to-cook (RTC) food products among consumers. A significant majority purchase these products more than twice a month, with spending concentrated between ¹ 500 and ¹ 1000. A strong association between income and expenditure underscores the financial aspect of consumer behavior. Departmental stores remain the preferred purchase source, reflecting both accessibility and consumer trust in these outlets.

Key motivators for choosing RTC products include convenience, time-saving benefits, and suitability for individuals with limited cooking skills, with Maggi/noodles being the most favored variety. The self-driven decision-making of consumers Along with their positive attitude toward RTC products as convenient, long-lasting, and readily available, underscores their overall value proposition. Ultimately, convenience emerged as the most influential factor driving the purchase of RTC food products.

SUGGESTIONS

The manufacturers should follow ethical and sustainable sourcing of ingredients from the suppliers and should display that information on packaging which can build brand trust and loyalty in the consumers.

The manufacturing companies should develop innovative products by introducing unique and exotic flavors, as well as fusion of cuisine options. Novel and exciting flavors can attract consumers looking to try something new.

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Table 1. Purchase frequency of sample consumers (n=140)

S.No.	Purchasing frequency	Frequency	Per cent (%)
1	Occasionally	40	28.57
2	Once in a week	19	13.57
3	Twice in a month	26	18.57
4	More than twice in a month	55	39.29
TOTAL		140	100

Table 2. Monthly Expenditure of sample consumers on RTC Food Products (n=140)

S.No.	Monthly expenditure	Frequency	Per cent (%)
1	Less than ₹ 500	28	20
2	Between ₹ 500 and ₹ 1000	55	39.29
3	Between ₹ 1000 and ₹ 1500	38	27.14
4	Between ₹ 1500 and ₹ 2000	13	9.29
5	Above ₹ 2000	6	4.29
	TOTAL	140	100

Table 3.Monthly income Vs expenditure of the respondents towards RTC food products (n=140)

S. No	Income category	Level of overall expenditure			Total	Chi-square value	P-value
		Low (<1000)	Medium (1000-2000)	High (>2000)			
1	Under ₹ 25,000	8 (5.71)	3 (2.14)	0 (0)	11 (7.85)	29.05	0.001**
2	Between ₹ 25,000 and ₹ 50,000	43 (30.71)	15 (10.71)	1 (0.71)	59 (42.14)		
3	Between ₹ 50,000 and ₹ 1,00,000	28 (20)	16 (11.42)	1 (0.71)	45 (32.14)		
4	Above ₹ 1,00,000	4 (2.85)	17 (12.14)	4 (2.85)	25 (17.85)		
	Total	83 (59.28)	51 (36.42)	6 (4.28)	140 (100)		

The values in the parenthesis are percentages. **: significant at 1per cent level.

Table. 4. Purchase history of consumers buying RTC food products (n=140)

S.No.	Purchase history	Frequency	Per cent (%)
1	Less than 4 years	53	37.86
2	4-6 years	59	42.14
3	More than 6 years	28	20
TOTAL		140	100

Table 5. Preferred sources of purchase of RTC food products by urban consumers (n=140)

S.No.	Place of purchase	Frequency	Per cent (%)	Rank
1	Local grocery stores	9	6.43	4
2	Online stores	17	12.14	3
3	Departmental stores	90	64.29	1
4	Supermarkets	24	17.14	2

Table 6. Consumer stimuli towards purchasing RTC food products (n=140)

S. No.	Consumer stimuli for purchasing RTC food products	Total score	Mean score	Rank
1	Ready-to-cook food products saves time for cooking	396	2.83	1
2	Easier for persons with limited cooking skills	355	2.54	2
3	Easily Available	345	2.46	3
4	Variety of flavors that were not easily made at home	305	2.18	4
5	Ready-to-cook food products were healthier option than other convenient foods	210	1.5	5
6	Ready-to-cook food products were tasty	207	1.48	6

Table 7. Consumer preferences for variety of Ready-to-cook food products (n=140)

S. No.	Particulars	High		Medium		Low		Total score	Mean	Rank
		N	S	N	S	N	S			
1	Instant Roti/Chapatti/Paratha	64	192	44	88	32	32	312	2.23	4
2	Veg/Non-veg Soups	48	144	57	114	35	35	293	2.09	5
3	Desserts (Gulab Jamun Mix)	34	102	78	156	28	28	286	2.04	6
4	Maggie/Noodles	86	258	42	84	12	12	354	2.53	1
5	Frozen meat/ veggies	63	189	51	0	26	26	215	1.54	10
6	Instant beverages (Coffee, Ju	37	111	68	136	35	35	282	2.01	7
7	Snacks (Samosa/Pani-puri/Po	41	123	54	108	45	45	276	1.97	8
8	Sambar/Rasam powders	37	111	42	84	61	61	256	1.83	9
9	Idli/Dosa Batter	53	159	67	134	20	20	313	2.24	3
10	Oats	68	204	60	120	12	12	336	2.4	2

Table 8.Purchase decision of sample consumers in buying RTC food products (n=140)

S.No.	Purchase decision	Frequency	Per cent (%)
1	Self- decision	74	52.86
2	Shared decision	37	26.43
3	Someone else in the family	29	20.71
	TOTAL	140	100

Table 9. Factors influencing the buying behaviour of Ready-to-cook food products (n=140)

S. No	Factors influencing buying behaviour	Total garrett's score	GMS	Rank
1	Brand reputation	9414	67.24	2
2	Price	7088	50.63	3
3	Nutritional content	5192	37.09	6
4	Availability	4208	30.06	7
5	Convenience of cooking	9662	69.01	1
6	Quality of ingredients	6520	46.57	5
7	Taste and variety	7049	50.35	4

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