

Determinants of Consumer Behavior in Buying RTE Foods

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Key Words

Ready to Eat (RTE), Ready to Cook (RTC), Consumer Behavior

Abstract

In this article a statistical approach is used to measure the relative importance of consumer motives of buying RTE foods. All items scored between one and five can be computed by averaging (un-weighted) item ratings per scale. Mean ratings of each motivation provides a clear picture that some determinants are rated highly by respondents, while others low. For consumers taste is the primary motivation to buy RTE foods. Though the first priority is sensory appeal, convenience has been given relatively more importance. Also, consumers are ready to spend more if the food is available at a convenient place and if it tastes, smells and tastes good. From the study it was found that the motives of purchasing RTE foods are sensory appeal, convenience, mood and price. Apart from this brand also plays a significant role in determining consumer behavior, the more the visibility of the brand more is the buying tendency for that particular brand.

Introduction

"Ready-to-eat" is defined as the status of the food being ready for immediate consumption at the point of sale. It could be raw or cooked, hot or chilled, and can be consumed without further heat-treatment including re-heating [1].

Ready to eat foods are food products that require no further processing to ensure their safety. They may or may not have been cooked: i.e. Fruits, sushi, some species of shellfish, spices. Foods such as luncheon meats, tuna salad, bakery products and cheeses are also considered RTE foods [2,3].

Categories within RTE Cereals

According to their different ingredients, RTE cereals can be categorized into five types, Corn Flakes, Shredded Wheat, Bran, Oats, and Hybrid.

[Source: <http://etd.lib.nsysu.edu.tw/ETD-db/ETD-search/getfile?URN=etd-0114108-170634&filename=etd-0114108-170634.pdf>]

The RTE Industry

There are five fundamental processes of producing RTE cereals (Nevo, 1998): granulation, flaking, shredding, puffing and extrusion. With the exception of Nestle, all the major RTE producers have their origins from the United States, and thus forming one of the most concentrated US industries today. Since the 1980's, the Federal Trade Commission has been investigating and prosecuting the largest three cereals makers on the charge of shared monopoly (Wall Street Journal, 1980). Advertising is the major means of competition in this industry, especially by television advertising (Ippolito & Mathios, 1990). The television advertising expenditure is second only to automobile producers. Advertising ratio to sales is about 13 percent, while the average in food industry is only 2 - 4 percent. Born with the convenience trend, the industry today, however, has undergone changes in customers' concern. Diet nutrition gradually replaces convenience as one of customers' most concerned factor when purchasing RTE cereals. More than half of men and women are reported to consider nutritional factors such as fiber, vitamins, and sugar content when purchasing RTE cereals. Women express the most concern about the amount of sugar and fat, while men are more interested in vitamin content.

Observation in Indian Context

The pioneer introduction of retorting technology in India has made the sale of 'Ready-to-Eat' food products commercially viable with great taste [7, 8]. In normal practice, the ready-to-eat food are consumed in a short span of time, but with the advancement in packaging technology, it is now possible to produce these items commercially and to extend the shelf-life up to a few years [10, 11, 12].

Various RTE brands in India

Brands	Description
Amul	Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF) is India's largest food products marketing organization. Apart from being known for its dairy products, Amul has ventured into the ready-to-eat industry and includes Processed Cheese, Pure Ghee, Shrikhand, Nutramul and Mithaee Gulab Jamuns among its offerings.
Gits	Gits produces the selected range of popular ready to cook and instant foods that cover a range of ethnic Indian cuisine-and where the recipes have "Global pallete acceptance".
Haldirams	The traditional Indian Sweet-Maker from a small set up has transformed into a full fledged processing food industry and taking its wares beyond the domestic frontiers to the Western World. Offers packaged Bhel puri chats such as Sev Puri, Chana Masala, Samosa, Pakoras, Alu Tikki, Pao Bhaji, Gol Gappa, Dhokla among others
Ethnic Kitchens	Offers packaged sweets,syrups,namkeens, cookies, pickles, aloo Masala, Bhujia, Bhelpuri, Chana Dal, Kajui Ladoo and many more items.
Kitchens Of India	ITC's Flagship brand 'Kitchens of India ' has begun to carry this exotic taste of Indian cuisine beyond the shores of India . Connoisseurs of Indian food in the US, UK, Switzerland, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Hongkong, Tanzania, Canada and Australia now have the opportunity to taste these delicious recipes.
ITC	Aashirvaad and Kitchens of India' products from the ITC stable of India include a wide assortment of ready to cook foods and dishes ranging from Bukhara (Uzbek recepie) to Murgh Methi and other exoctic cuisines and includes "regular" Biryanis, Curry Pastes and dishes.
MTR	Amongst the top five processed food manufacturers in India, the company claims to " <i>market and export a wide range of packaged foods to global markets</i> " that include USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore, UAE and Oman. MTR foods currently comprises twenty-two delicious and completely authentic Indian curries, gravies and rice.
Priyafoods	Priya has a range of popular traditional recipes starting from Dal Makhani, Navaratan Kurma to Palak Paneer, Paneer Butter Masala, Punjabi Chhole and Rajma Masala along with true southern delicacies like Andhra Veg Pulav, Mango Dal, Gongura Dal. Priya's products are available in USA, Canada, West Indies, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, U.K., New Zealand etc.
Rajbhog Foods Inc.	Specializing in Indian sweets and snacks in America, Rajbhog is capitalizing on this niche by franchising its model across the US and Canada, manufacturing and distributing sweets, snacks, savories, frozen foods, ice cream and beverages.
RainbowFoodsIndia	Exporters, manufacturers & suppliers of all types of Indian Frozen Vegetables, Meals & Snacks to USA and UK. They procure Frozen

	Vegetables, Meals, Fruits, Parathas, Punjabi Veg Curries, vegetables, fruits, pickles, pastes and Snacks. Reputed professionals from 5-star hotels. Supply of Indian Frozen Vegetables, Meals & Snacks foods. Products
Satnam Overseas Ltd	Kohinoor Heat & Eat Indian Curries are a range of ready - to - eat Indian delicacies. Kohinoor claims that "Heat & Eat range of curries use the well-established retort technology to offer extended shelf life to the products through steam sterilization."
Shana	Shana Frozen Foods specializes in ready to cook Ethnic foods. Shana is a popular brand in the frozen Asian Ethnic food segment in U.K. and Canadian market. Includes new South Indian Range of frozen Idlis, Vadas, Masala Dosas and Mini Uttapams.
Tasty Bite	Tasty Bite has a range of entrées and Ready Meals. They have exceptional retort pouches which was developed for the Apollo space program. Tested to withstand extreme temperatures and heights from well below sea level to as high as the moon, this retort packaging has made Tasty Bite a favorite with campers, mountain climbers, sailing expeditions, desert safaris.
Veekay Impex.com	Exporters of Fresh Fruit Juice, ready to eat food products; kairameen Moliee(Pearl-spot fish), Motha Fish curry, see Fish Curry, Chilly Chicken (boneless).
Ashoka Ready to Eat	The premier online Indian store, iShopIndian, creates a shopping experience with gourmet Indian grocery, music, DVDs and health products delivered right to your door. Ashoka-Aloo-Matar, Baigan-Bharta, Bhindi Masala, Carrot Halwa and lot more.
Vimal Agro Products	Vimal Agro Products with state of the infrastructural set up has the potential to manufacture more than 80 different food products ranging from canned vegetables, Fruit pulp and slices, Pickles, Chutney, papads and Ready to eat foods and supply products to the retail sectors in Canada, United Kingdom, United states of America under the brand name VIMAL and SWAD

PRODUCT CATEGORY ANALYSIS

There is some lack of clarity about differentiation between RTE and Ready to Cook (RTC) and both are commonly referred to as RTE. RTC products are mainly various pastes where a consumer adds vegetables or meat to prepare a dish. RTE products, on the other hand, normally come as a complete preparation in the frozen form or in the cans or in packets with inner pouch and what is referred here are part of meals in pouches and not the snack or other segments. RTE products have a shelf life of about 12-15 months. Thereafter the product may be safe but may lose colour and aroma [13].

Working couples with changing life style and lack of time have led to growth of RTE products in the recent times. Some of the popular products in the market include dal makhani, palak paneer, dal tadka, rajma, navratan korma, paw bhaji, various rice preparations and host of others. Some entrepreneurs also have regional products and there are about dozen brands from some of the companies like ITC, MTR, Tasty Bite, Satnam Overseas, Capital Foods in the market with most of them exporting to the Middle East, Europe and North America successfully. Current production is estimated at about 20,000 T of which over 80% is exported.

RTE products are prepared in a large industrial kitchen like any other product but care is taken in formulating the product with respect to ingredients and cooking it just bare minimum as the product undergoes steam sterilization during processing. It is a specialized technology requiring alertness, high degree of precision, process controls and handling [14, 15, 16, 17, 18].

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Concepts of consumer behavior, factors influencing buying behavior, motivation

At the general level, it has long been recognized that food availability and cultural factors are dominant in food selection (*Steptoe et al. (1995)*). The system of provision, including food production and manufacture, marketing message delivery and sale, has also been shown to have a major impact on what people eat. In addition, access to supermarkets selling a variety of food more cheaply than local corner shops affects choice. The increasing trend of supermarkets located in the outskirts of towns has significant implications for those who do not have their own cars. At the individual level, taste or sensory appeal, likes and dislikes, and sheer habit are all relevant. A growing interest in studying the attitudes and beliefs with healthy eating, for example, has been witnessed in recent years. Weight control is a major determinant of food choice for individuals concerned about their body weight. The growth in environmental awareness during the past few decades has led to concerns about the use of natural ingredients and environmentally friendly packaging. All these factors indicate that **health** is one of many considerations relevant to food choice (*Keane and Willetts (1994)*). Food, is also self-referent part of the repertoire from which personal identity is forged. Changing one's diet can effectively redefine the self. For example, eating differently from the rest of the family is common in adolescence as a way of demonstrating independence. Priorities change throughout the life-cycle (*Ton Nu et al., 1996*). Popular concepts about gender also affect food choice. Ideas that men need more food than women, despite differential energy expenditure and metabolic rates, are still pervasive. The idea that women should not eat too much fuels the slimming industry. Surrounded by images of thin, successful and beautiful models, women are constantly policing their own food intake.

Increasingly, consumers not only want food products to be of **high sensory quality** but also to deliver specific benefits in terms of health, safety and environment quality (*Grunert et al., 1996*). It is, therefore, a crucial question to almost every marketing oriented organization to understand what consumers value in their product category, and to effectively and efficiently translate these consumer needs into concrete product offerings.

Credence attributes, such as **safety, environmental quality**, and health are recognized as important food choice motivations by consumers. Credence attributes are different from search (e.g. price, size) and experience (e.g. taste, convenience) attributes in that their "true" values cannot be verified by the average consumer not even upon normal consumption of the food (*Heuvel et al. 2007*). Consumers' credence motivations, particularly those related to health, environmental friendliness, safety, and naturalness are important determinants of consumer quality perception in-store. Increasingly, these "**societal**" considerations are a driving factor for consumer choice and a competitive weapon in food marketing. These societal considerations are linked with specific purchase motivations, such as well being, social relationships, enjoyment, and pleasure.

Convenience is also one of the factors that are increasingly important to consumers (*Buckle et al., 2005*). Different stages in the consumption process are: Planning, Shopping, Storage & Preparation of food, Consumption, Cleaning up and disposal items. Although the preparation stage is commonly regarded as most time and energy consuming, convenience has to be seen in the context of all the stages of the consumption experience. For example, a tendency to eat out may be driven by reluctance to clean up, rather than reluctance to cook (*Goften, 1995*).

Information source of food purchase in consumer behavior field

When looking at food choice, influence of media cannot be ignored. Advertising aimed at children is a particular concern, with a major content of food or drink (*Keane and Willetts, 1994*). Of these 75% are for products with a high sugar or fat content. Through the use of cartoon characters, media personalities can be effective in establishing consumer loyalty at a very young age. In the supermarket it is often difficult for a parent to resist the insistent demands of a child for a new food which they have seen on TV.

Direct Mail (DM) is an important source and most commonly used for "direct marketing" focusing on driving purchases that can be attributed to a specific "call-to-action". DM permits marketers to design marketing pieces in many different formats and to send to

customers using the postal service. Advertisers often call it “targeting mailing”, mail is usually sent out following database analysis. To some extent, however, DM has been related to junk mail, especially in many developed countries where DM represents such a significant amount of the total volume of mail that wastes a large quantity of money and paper. The result demonstrated that when it came to food information, respondents valued DM sent by supermarkets and hypermarkets. In comparison, the Internet was regarded as an unimportant medium when obtaining food information. This could result from the low-involving characteristic of food purchase that customers would rather seek information in a quicker way (e.g. asking their friends and relatives) than spend time surfing the internet. Reflecting this, consumers are now more discerning regarding the food they eat. Effectiveness of company strategies depends on marketers’ understanding of the factors governing food choice.

Food related determinants

Needless to say, Health plays a profound role in food choice. Following Health is Mood. It suggests that people attached such an importance to breakfast that they expect it to be pepped up at the beginning of a day. Another important factor is taste or sensory appeal relevant to the product’s own property; other factors are Price, Convenience. Health & Mood are both defined as so called credence attributes that are different from search (e.g. Price) and experience (e.g. Sensory Appeal, Convenience) attributes in that their “true” valued cannot be verified by the average consumer not even upon normal consumption of food (Heuvel et al., 2007)

Brand attitude toward RTE cereal

The next step is determining which important drivers a brand can and should own. After that, marketers must build brand associations with those drivers, at key customer touch points such as channel, product usage, and customer support. The next generation of brand tracking aims to measure the brand’s ability to drive customers from awareness through purchase to advocacy, relative to the competition. It also aims to evaluate the effectiveness of marketing tactics in moving customers along this path [25]. Marketers must understand a critical component of brand tracking: the purchase funnel. There are important differences by category, in the steps customers take to decide on a purchase and in the order they take them. For example, it’s not surprising that consumers follow a different process for purchasing ready-to-eat (RTE) cereal than for purchasing personal computers (PCs). In the RTE cereal process, category dynamics suggest consumers move from awareness to consideration to trial. If they have a positive experience, then they make the brand part of their stable or “repertoire” of cereals. In the PC process, given the added risk and other category dynamics (e.g., high purchase price, channel intermediaries), consumers move from awareness to consideration to preference to purchase although they may not be able to afford what they prefer [25]. Marketers must discern what drives movement, or conversion, from one stage of the funnel to the next. Conversion drivers can range from tangible product or service attributes and benefits (e.g., customer service representatives know my name and my account, tellers always smile when they see me) to their abstract functional, emotional, and self-expressive associations (e.g., customer service is friendly). In RTE cereal, these may include the product’s texture, taste, packaging, and price. These may also be consumers’ perceptions of how wholesome or indulgent the product is, and how healthy it makes them feel [25]. In addition to these more product-based elements, conversion drivers can be dimensions of the brand’s personality, its symbols, and its user imagery: customer perceptions of the kinds of people likely to use the brand. In RTE cereal, these may be consumer perceptions of the brand’s authenticity, its heritage or point of origin, and its characters (e.g., Tony the Tiger, Cap’n Crunch). Ethnography, focus groups, and other forms of qualitative research are helpful in identifying the full set of potential conversion drivers [25].

Motivations to consume RTE cereal

The motives to consume RTE cereals are easy preparations, healthy foods, convenience, safety and cleanliness, taste, affordability and familiarity. People who are accustomed to eating breakfast at home, RTE cereal indeed provides great convenience, in that it only requires one preparation step, pouring milk into a bowl. In other words, it seems that it is not the products' own properties that are valued by users, but the value-added characteristics, e.g. it allows buyers to feel safe, to spend little time preparing and obtaining it, and it complies with their healthy eating habits or objectives. Consumers value the convenient and healthy properties of foods when buying RTE cereal; it is not all certain whether this reflects the actual decision-making process or just an aspiration. In other words, it may be that customers would like to choose foods with highly desirable healthy properties, even if price is more influential in determining purchase choices.

OTHER DETERMINENTS

Effect of Modern Retail on Consumption of RTE Cereals

A "supermarket revolution" has been underway in developing countries including India since the early 1990s. Supermarkets (here referring to all modern retail, which includes chain stores of various formats such as supermarkets, hypermarkets, and convenience and neighborhood stores) have now gone well beyond the initial upper- and middle-class clientele in many countries to reach the mass market. Within the food system, the effects of this trend touch not only traditional retailers, but also the wholesale, processing, and farm sectors. The supermarket revolution is a "two-edged sword." On the one hand, it can lower food prices for consumers and create opportunities for farmers and processors to gain access to quality-differentiated food markets and raise incomes. On the other hand, it can create challenges for small retailers, farmers, and processors who are not equipped to meet the new competition and requirements from supermarkets. Developing-country governments can put in place a number of policies to help both traditional retailers and small farmers pursue "competitiveness with inclusiveness" in the era of the supermarket revolution. Some countries are already taking such steps, and their experiences offer lessons for others [26].

Questionnaire: Food Questionnaire Review

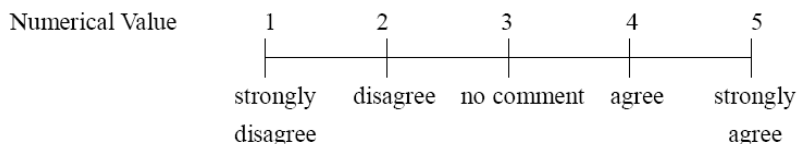
The motivation questions toward breakfast of present study are based on Food Choice Questionnaire (FCQ). Food choice questionnaire-36 items and 9 factors

It is important to me that the food I eat on a typical day:

Factor 1- Health
1. Contains a lot a vitamins and minerals
2. Keeps me healthy
3. Is nutritious
4. Is high in protein
5. Is good for my skin/teeth/hair/nails etc
6. Is high in fiber and roughage
Factor 2- Mood
7. Helps me cope with stress
8. Helps me cope with life
9. Helps me relax
10. Keeps me awake/alert
11. Cheers me up
12. Makes me feel good

Factor 3- Convenience
13. Is easy to prepare
14. Can be cooked very simply
15. Take no time to prepare
16. Can be bought in shops close to where I live or work
17. Is easily available in shops and supermarkets
Factor 4- Sensory Appeal
18. Smells nice
19. Looks nice
20. Has a pleasant texture
21. Tastes good
Factor 5- Natural Content
22. Contains no additives
23. Contains natural ingredients
24. Contains no artificial ingredients
Factor 6- Price
25. Is not expensive
26. Is cheap
27. Is good value for money
Factor 7- Weight Control
28. Is low in calories
29. Helps me control my weight
30. Is low in fat
Factor 8- Familiarity
31. Is what I usually eat
32. Is familiar
33. Is like the food I ate when I was a child
Factor 9- Ethical Concern
34. Comes from countries I approve of politically
35. Has the country of origin clearly marked
36. Is packaged in an environmentally friendly way

The approach taken in this survey begins with an examination of motivational factors governing breakfast-buying decisions which serve as basic needs to purchase RTE cereal for breakfast. The major questions of the questionnaire are measured on five-point Likert scale, allowing participants to choose from one to five- “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. It is relatively straightforward to understand and is in common usage: a statement is made and the respondents indicate the degree to which they agree/disagree with it. Participants are asked which of the five rating shown below:



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive statistics is used to describe the basic features of the data in a study. It provides simple summaries about the sample and the measures. In the present study, this statistical approach is used to measure the relative importance of all motives. All items scored between one and five can be computed by averaging (un-weighted) item ratings per scale. Mean ratings of each motivation provides a clear picture that some determinants are rated highly by respondents, while others low. Sample Size: the questionnaire was given to post graduate engineering and business administration students. The sample size is 93. Consumer behavior of youth has been primarily studied through this questionnaire.

The table below shows the mean score of each choice factor.

Factor	Choice Factor	Mean
1. Health	Keeps me healthy	3.2366
1. Health	Is nutritious	3.1290
1. Health	Contains a lot a vitamins and minerals	3.0323
1. Health	Is high in fiber and roughage	3.0108
1. Health	Is high in protein	2.9355
1. Health	Is good for my skin/teeth/hair/nails etc	2.8065
2. Mood	Makes me feel good	3.6667
2. Mood	Cheers me up	3.5054
2. Mood	Helps me relax	3.2688
2. Mood	Keeps me awake / alert	3.1613
2. Mood	Helps me cope with life	2.9462
2. Mood	Helps me cope with stress	2.8817
3. Convenience	Is easily available in shops and supermarkets	4.1935
3. Convenience	Is easy to prepare	4.0430
3. Convenience	Can be bought in shops close to where I live or work	4.0215
3. Convenience	Can be cooked very simply	3.9677
3. Convenience	Take no time to prepare	3.8710
4. Sensory Appeal	Tastes good	4.2366
4. Sensory Appeal	Looks nice	3.7312
4. Sensory Appeal	Smells nice	3.7204
4. Sensory Appeal	Has a pleasant texture	3.4624
5. Natural Content	Contains natural ingredients	3.3441
5. Natural Content	Contains no additives	3.2581

5. Natural Content	Contains no artificial ingredients	3.1398
6. Price	Is good value for money	3.5806
6. Price	Is not expensive	3.3226
6. Price	Is cheap	3.2366
7. Weight Control	Is low in calories	3.1613
7. Weight Control	Is low in fat	2.8495
7. Weight Control	Helps me control my weight	2.7097
8. Familiarity	Is familiar	3.4301
8. Familiarity	Is what I usually eat	3.0108
8. Familiarity	Is like the food I ate when I was a child	2.8817
9. Ethical Concern	Is packaged in an environmentally friendly way	3.2366
9. Ethical Concern	Has the country of origin clearly marked	2.8925
9. Ethical Concern	Comes from countries I approve of politically	2.4731

Rank order of top ten most important breakfast choice factors

Factor	Choice Factor	Mean
Sensory Appeal	Tastes good	4.2366
Convenience	Is easily available in shops and supermarkets	4.1935
Convenience	Is easy to prepare	4.0430
Convenience	Can be bought in shops close to where I live or work	4.0215
Convenience	Can be cooked very simply	3.9677
Convenience	Take no time to prepare	3.8710
Sensory Appeal	Looks nice	3.7312
Sensory Appeal	Smells nice	3.7204
Mood	Makes me feel good	3.6667
Price	Is good value for money	3.5806

For consumers taste is the primary motivation to buy RTE foods. Though the first priority is sensory appeal, convenience has been given relatively more importance. Also, consumers are ready to spend more if the food is available at a convenient place and if it tastes, smells and tastes good.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDY

The study could be done by taking the responses from a greater sample size. There are no questions related to information search, brand preference. As a part of further study the following additions/changes can be made: Inclusion of gender; for the customers who have never consumed RTE cereal, asking them reasons why they do not buy RTE cereal;

understand from which source most consumers collect information regarding RTE cereal or food and evaluate the relative importance of their information sources, and enquire about respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, including questions on age, sex, income education, marriage, residence, etc, which serve as independent variables in examining their impact on breakfast and RTE cereal consumption motivation.

CONCLUSION

The Ready to eat foods though having a very ancient history of being carried as ration when food was carried for expeditions for long periods away from the main land, primarily by soldiers and merchants on ships, they have gained significance and prominence in recent times due to advent of newer technologies for storage and packing of the food items. With the advent of modern trade and increasing working population with higher disposable incomes ready to eat food categories have gained prominence in recent times. Thus it has become extremely important to know and understand the needs and expectations of consumers. This project basically studies various behaviors of consumer decision making process with respect to ready to eat food categories. From the study it was found that the motives of purchasing RTE foods are sensory appeal, convenience, mood and price. Apart from this brand also plays a significant role in determining consumer behavior, the more the visibility of the brand more is the buying tendency for that particular brand.

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