

Consumer of Processed Food in India: Barriers and Possibilities

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Abstract—Consumer behaviour has always been an area for the research, as it is diverse, dynamic and is affected by a number of factors. India, this situation is no special case. It is being a country of assorted societies and conventions, understanding the consumer purchasing design turn into a hard task. Processed food is the next big thing in the economy. The processed food is going to be a major component in the food basket of an average Indian household. Being the biggest producer in natural products like fruits, milk and tea, and the second largest producer of wheat, vegetables, sugar and fisheries, and the third largest producer of tobacco and rice, with such a vast range of raw materials available coupled with an increasing population, processed food is a potential answer to the increasing food demands of the population. Still processed food is not widely accepted in a traditional society like India, it comes with certain issues that a consumer is concerned about. The present paper is an attempt to identify the barriers concerned with the consumption of processed food in India. Also, an attempt will be made to give a picture of processed food consumption and the possibilities that are associated with it.

Keywords: *Processed Food, Consumer, Behaviour, Food Consumption*

1. INTRODUCTION

India is a country of ethics, values and diversities. Having a population over 1.3 billion, across 29 states and seven union territories. These states differ in their languages, culture, living standards, food habits etc. There is a vast disparity between the per capita incomes among these states. In a country like India religion also play a major role in determining the eating habits of people. The Indian consumers are noted for the high degree of value orientation. Such orientation to value has labelled Indians as one of the most discerning consumers in the world. Even, luxury brands have to design a unique pricing strategy in order to get a foothold in the Indian market. The current urban middle and upper class Indian consumer buying behaviour to a large extent has western influence. There is an increase in positive attitude towards western trends. The Indian consumer has become much more open-minded and experimental in his/her perspective. There is now an exponential growth of western trend reaching the Indian consumer by way of the media and Indians working abroad.

Some observers of India's economic scene are, however, highly optimistic about consumption growth potential, and believe that rising income levels, increasing urbanization, a changing age profile (more young people), increasing consumerism, a significant rise in the number of single men and women professionals, and the availability of cheap credit will push India onto a new growth trajectory. This segment of population is aware of quality standards and insists on quality and is willing to pay a premium for quality. But still a majority of Indian consumers have to sacrifice quality for getting affordable prices. By 2025, 40% of Indians are expected to be urban dwellers. Structural programmes and economic reforms have contributed to India's sustained growth, averaging 6% annually in last two decades. By April 2001 India following its WTO compliance removed all quantitative restrictions. Nonetheless imports are still discouraged by India, particularly, agricultural products with the use of high tariffs and non-tariff barriers. Import tariff although are declining but still in consumer goods which ranges from 36-50%. By the midst of the first decade of 21st century food processing industry in India experienced a growth between 7-13%. The food processing sector has emerged as a major driver in economic growth and expected to grow continuously in future.

The market for food processing industry, it is the collection of diverse activities that are taken together in supply of much of food energy to the consumer. The major drivers of consumer behaviour pattern in India especially in food processing sectors are:

- i. Rapid urbanization
- ii. Increased literacy
- iii. Rising per capita income

These factors have led to a change in demand patterns of Indian consumer, leading to explosion of new opportunities. Today Indian consumers are more literate and more urbanized so they are more focused on quality, availability and most importantly on the hygiene of the food products. This creates demand and supply gap which indicates an untapped opportunity in the packaged and processed food sector. But still the penetration of food processing industry is limited to

urban areas only. The rural parts of the country are still not much familiar with these processed food products.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kumar, Mruthyunjaya, & Dey, (2007), tried to analyse long term changes in Indian food basket and nutrition. The analysis was based on National Sample Survey data on dietary patterns and consumer's expenditure. They pointed out that increase in income, urbanisation and consumer perceptions regarding food quality and safety are effecting changes in the food consumption pattern and these are pervasive changes.

Ali & Kapoor, (2008) analysed the consumer perception towards fruits and vegetables in India. They argued that the processed fruits and vegetables are in an infant stage. With growth in hypermarket and super market there is a phenomenal growth in organised retailing of processed packaged food. The impact of economic development is reflected in higher disposable income available with the consumer, urban consumer is Ali, Kapoor, & Moorthy, (2010) analysed the buying behaviour of consumers for food products in an emerging economy lie India. Their findings clearly indicate that for Indian food consumers attributes like, price, variety, packaging, freshness, cleanliness are at highest priority. The authors also inferred that the food consumption pattern in India is rapidly moving from cereal based food to high value food products. With the growth in economy there is a rise in the disposable income of the consumers, they have shown concern towards health and hygiene.

Sellahewa and Martindale (2010) discussed the impact of growing population on environment and the role of processed food industry to attain environmental and economic sustainability. Authors suggested an integrated approach of the whole food supply chain including farm and post operations. They opined that, real sustainability will only be possible by reducing consumption. This will not be easy because of increasing global affluence and will only be possible by adopting behavioural changes by consumers so that good quality, nutritious food could be eaten in adequate quantities without imposing a burden on the environment, thus conserving our finite resources towards a sustainable future.

Kumari, (2012), described Indian customers as one who has a high level of significant worth orientation, with an expansion entrance of web and web-based social networking there is an emotional change in obtaining conduct. Author called attention to certain pattern in Indian markets which are affected by big name, internet shopping freebies and fame of eco-accommodating items. The real discoveries of study checked Indian purchasers as a standout amongst the most observing buyer on the planet, having a high level of family and esteem introduction.

Vijayabaskar & Sundaram, (2012), explored the influential factors that determine the market for ready-to-eat/ cook products in South India and tried to highlight the market

boundary and its potential for ready-to-eat products. The major findings of the study suggests that there is a greater demand for ready –to-eat food and major drivers for attraction towards these products are convenience availability, less time consumption to cook, and rare ingredients.

Kaur & Singh, (2014), made an attempt to find out the factor that lead to purchase of processed foods in Punjab state of India. The major proportion food in Punjab state of India. The major proposition that authors took was that changing life styles and growth in disposable income, rising double-income families and proportion of women in work force are the main fuel in rapid growth in demand of processed food. They also tried to find out the motive of consumer for their choice of food. Also inferred that increased income, choice of family members specially children's and ease of storage.

Kumar, Dangi and Vohra (2014) investigated the purchasing pattern of poor for FMCG in India. They identified poor as people whose income fall short of some predetermined poverty line. They also argued that FMCGs are low involvement purchases but poor spend a substantial amount of their income on FMCGs. The focus is not on FMCGs but on factors affecting purchase decisions. The authors argued that price consciousness, brand consciousness, quality consciousness, and brand loyalty are the major characteristics of poor consumers of FMCG products.

Madhvapaty and Dasgupta (2015) directed a review on changing food habits for Indian consumers. They pointed out that there exists a significant contrast in customer habits across the country. The consideration paid to food purchasing is contrast amongst men and women altogether.

3. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this paper are:

- i) To identify the various factors that act as motivators for the Indian consumers towards processed food.
- ii) To identify the various factors that act as barrier or inhibitors for the Indian consumers of processed food.
- iii) To come up with possible suggestions that may prove beneficial for improving the status of processed food industry in India.

4. PROCESSED FOOD AND INDIAN CONSUMER

Economic growth, urbanization, increasing labour force participation of women and associated changes in lifestyles have contributed to the rise of the food processing industry in comparison to other sectors. Food processing sector is indispensable for the overall development of an economy as it provides a vital linkage and synergy between the agriculture and industry. It helps to diversify and commercialise farming; enhance income of farmers; create markets for export of agro foods as well as generate greater employment opportunities. India is a country which is known for its diversity, and

generalising the behavioural aspect of consumers is a complex activity. India having a vast population of 1.3 billion, with innumerable ethnical, cultural, religious groups that have their own morals and values.

With the development of India's white collar class and changes in its way of life, the quality and amount of interest for retail of foodstuffs and day by day merchandise are experiencing critical changes. While conventional Kirana (little shops) hold influence over the business, representing over 90% of the market, present day conveyance stores, for example, general stores and hypermarkets of neighbourhood combinations are additionally extending quickly.

If on the basis of past studies we try to list out the characters of Indian food consumers, they are:

- i. **Age** is a major factor that affects the buying behaviour of Indian processed food consumers. The youth is a major consumer of processed food as they find this not only a convenient way of consumption but also a means of recreation and change of taste from conventional form of food. (Ali et al., 2008; Choi & Zhao, 2014; Jain, Sharma, & Khadke, 2016; Padel & Foster, 2015; Roy, Guha, & Biswas, 2015; Singh, 2012; Talas, Ucar, & Ozcelik, 2010).
- ii. Another attribute that have a prominent impact on buying behaviour of consumers of processed food is **income**. Income that too personal disposable income is a major indicator of economic development. There is a sharp rise in personal disposable income of consumer in India especially post economic reforms of 1990. As Engel's law states, with rise in income the consumer will move from conventional to processed food, this situation too is valid in case of Indian food consumer (Batt & Liu, 2012; Bryła, 2015; Deaton & Drèze, 2009; Durmaz & Durmaz, 2015; Goyal & Singh, 2007a; Huang & Fu, 1995; N. . Kumar & Kapoor, 2015; Moon, 2015; A. Singh & Kathuria, 2016; Srivastava et al., 2013; Verain, Sijtsema, & Antonides, 2016; Yadav & Pathak, 2016)
- iii. The next in the series is **level of education** of consumer. Studies have proven that an educated consumer is more concerned and aware. These educated consumers are more concerned about safety issues, nutritional information, packaging material, processing information etc. about the product. This characteristics of the consumer forces the processing organizations to be more transparent in the technology used and also to come up with regular innovation and improvements in the product (Ali et al., 2008; Baskar & Sundaram, 2014; C. Vignali, E. Gomez, M. Vignali, 2001; Hussain, 2011; Pankajray V. Patel, 2010; Samant, Crandall, & Seo, 2016; Sharma, Bhattacharya, & Sonwaney, 2012; Shine, O'Reilly, & O'Sullivan, 1997; Vadakepat, 2013; Vijayabaskar & Sundaram, 2012).

- iv. In the 21st century one cannot ignore the **gender** factor. One major impact of rapid urbanization is increasing female working population. This has shown a sharp shift of the female consumers from conventional food to processed food. As most of the female consumers apart from nutrition and health factors prefer processed food as it is easy to cook, save time in both cooking as well as pre-preparation, ease of availability, off seasonal availability of certain foods etc. (Beardsworth et al., 2002; Fernandes & Londhe, 2015; Musaiger, 2014; Nasir, 2012; Raman, 2014; Samant et al., 2016; Srinivasan & Shende, 2015).
- v. A major factor that affirmatively impacts the buying decision process of consumers of processed food is **role of friends and family**. In a normal Indian household the choice of family especially children's taste and preferences are given priority. This is not only limited to family choices but social groups like friends and relatives also play a considerable role in consumer's decision making process (Chamhuri & Peter, 2015; Fernandes & Londhe, 2015; Hand, 2006; Jan & Akhtar, 2008; S. Krishnan & Valle, 1979; Nasir, 2012; R. Singh, 2012; Srivastava et al., 2013).

Apart from these there are certain other factors that have a plausible impact on buying decision of consumer of processed food in India like **marital status** (Bashir, Hussain, & Sarki, 2013; Baskar & Sundaram, 2014; Gittelsohn et al., n.d.; Goyal & Singh, 2007), **cultural, religious and social norms** (Ali et al., 2008; Goyal & Singh, 2007b; A. Krishnan, 2016; Roy et al., 2015; Siddiqui, 2014), **social status** (Baskar & Sundaram, 2014; Devi, 2014; Fernandes & Londhe, 2015; Kathuria & Gill, 2013).

5. BARRIERS OF PROCESSED FOOD MARKET IN INDIA

Being a WTO signatory Indian market is open for both imports and exports. India is the second largest producer of food, the produce of the country stands nowhere in the global market in terms of quality and standard. With the entrance of MNCs in the domestic market, domestic producers face a much higher competition in the domestic market in terms of price as well as the quality and standard. The promotion strategy adopted by the MNCs is highly intensive that it shadows the domestic products.

Apart from being the largest producer for raw materials the food processing industry suffers from certain institutional barriers that hurdles the overall growth of the processed food market in India.

A prominent section of Indian consumer still prefer conventional food over processed food. The major reason behind this lack of trust is religious constrains (Cojocar, Bragăru, & Purcaru, 2011; Goyal & Singh, 2007; Rajitha, 2012).

A larger section of the processed food market is in unorganised sector. Though these led to improper processing conditions and sometime these conditions compromises with the safety and hygiene of the food.

6. POSSIBILITIES OF PROCESSED FOOD MARKET IN INDIA

The demographic dividend of India favours youth, Census 2011 shows that there are 604 Million people below the age of 24 (Mohammad, 2016) makes this a very potential market for the processed food products. This gives a vision of immense growth in the market size of processed food in India.

With rapid urbanization coupled with increasing share of women in labour force processed food is definitely going to be the next big thing in the economy.

Changing life styles have motivated the consumers to move towards more health oriented processed food.

With increasing super market and hyper market culture, the consumers are exposed to a vast range of international brands and products that somewhere activates the latent demand of the consumers towards processed food products.

7. CONCLUSION

India has a wide and diverse population which is 2.4% of the total world population. This makes India a market of 1.3 billion consumers. Food is a sector which will never face recession. With growing population the demand of food increases and processed food also increase. This rising demand is a serious challenge for the marketing firms as they have to come with a wide range of products that could satisfy such a huge size of market. Competition of marketers is a delight for the consumers. This delight is flavoured with various factors like changing tastes and preferences, increased urbanization, increasing working population among women.

Though there are certain institutional constraints that may prove hurdle in growth.

Still processed food sector is a sunrise sector in growth of economy as well as a major expenditure in of the household of an average Indian consumer.

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