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## A STUDY ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOR TOWARDS READY-TO-EAT FOOD PRODUCTS IN VELLORE DISTRICT

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### ABSTRACT

The Present study was aimed to know the consumer buying behavior towards Ready-to-eat food products. A total of 200 respondents were chosen to conduct the study in Vellore district. Selective sampling is used in this research. Reviews were collected from relevant literature. Statistical tools like Chi-square, ANOVA, Independent sample t-test, Correlation, and Mann-Whitney tests were used in this research to analyze the collected data. Consumers attitude, perception, awareness, variety-seeking/brand switching behavior were analyzed. Factors that influenced the buyer behavior were also examined. Results indicate that, Female are more aware about the product than male. Respondents perceive RTE food as convenient and easy to prepare. Price, quality, brand, taste, and promotional activities, influence the buyer behavior irrespective of their gender and marital status.

**Keywords:** Consumer buying behavior, Ready-to-eat, Variety-seeking, Promotional activities

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Ready-To-Eat food is a convenient food found in every household nowadays. Ready-to-eat food is something which is already prepared and ready to consume or might need water and/or heat for preparation. RTE food segment is growing rapidly with a target group of young and working people. Changing lifestyle, busy work schedules, need for time to spend with family, and staying away from home are the major reasons for preferring Ready-to-eat food. In south India, the acceptance level for Ready-to-eat food i.e. traditional food in convenient form is high.

Consumer Buying Behavior is the phase that consumers go through while deciding to buy a product. Behavior varies for each person and that too food everyone has their own taste. The consumer behavior is study to know the attitude, belief, perception, awareness, and buying behavior of the consumers, which is often influenced by cultural, social, phycological, and personal factors.

#### Ready-To-Eat food in India

India's RTE market segment is growing rapidly. New companies are entering the market targeting at young consumers. A recent forecast stated that the compound growth rate of Ready-to-eat food products would be recorded at around 7.3%. Some popular Ready-To-Eat brands available in India are, Nestle, ITC-Aashivaad, ITC-Kitchens of India, Gits, Kellogs, Amul, Haldirams, MTR, etc.

### 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Nowadays, most of the women are in working category and young adults stay away from home either for studies or for job, this intends them to cook on their own. Most of them prefer for a convenient option in order to save time and avoid kitchen and cooking hassles. Ready-to-eat is a perfect option for them. But the consumer buying behavior changes depending on the geographic location, psychographic aspects, and other socio-economic situations. In order to know the consumers attitude, perception, awareness, and buying behavior, the present study was carried out in Vellore district.

### 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

M.J.J.M.Candel (2001) conducted a study to analyze food related behavior. I was found out that, those who enjoy cooking did not prefer convenience food. Role overload made them to seek for variety and their involvement in food related behavior. The study also suggested that, working status does not influence the consumption of convenience food.



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**Ramaswamy et al. (2005)** conducted a study in Madurai to know the consumer behavior towards instant food. The study revealed that price and quality is the main concern of consumers. Most of the consumers look for good image of the product, packaging, and shelf life of the product. Consumers have their own opinion on brand of the product and they it influences their decision making while purchasing the product.

**Ana. I. de. A. Costa et al. (2007)** in her study stated that consumers prefer Ready-to-eat food to homemade food as it is a convenient option. Results indicate that, healthy options in the Ready-to-eat food products and its convenient features drive the consumers to choose the Ready-to-eat food.

**Selvarani and Zeenath Amman (2016)** in their revealed that quality, taste, and price influence the buyer behavior. Consumers even seek for other brands when they feel that the price is high, taste and quality is poor. People in high-income group buy more instant food products than low-income group people.

**Balaji et al. (2016)** conducted a study which revealed that TV advertisements and newspapers are the source of information which helps consumers in their decision-making process towards ready-to-eat food. Most of the consumers are brand loyal and rarely switch brand for lesser price.

**Prity Gupta (2016)** carried out a study to know the consumers perception towards Ready-to-eat food products. Consumers perceive RTE food as hygienic, well packed, and of good quality. Change in life style has made more customers preferring Ready-to-eat food nowadays. The major factors that influence the buyer behavior were found out to be freshness, availability, price, and advertisements of the RTE product.

**Stranieriet al. (2017)** carried out a research among 550 consumers of instant food to know the factors that influence the food choices of the consumers. The results confirmed that, Gender, Income, and Knowledge of the product, positively influence the food choices of the consumers and other food-related concerns. Some consumers who were aware about food certification preferred more stringent environmental and agricultural certifications.

**SaloniSolanki and Simran Jain (2017)** carried out a research to know the perception of consumers and their consumption pattern with regard to Ready-to-eat food products. It was concluded that freshness of the product, quality, and health related issues were the major hindrance for consumers while choosing Reay-to-eat food products.

**Praveen BabuChiruthoti (2015)** in his study revealed that consumers always look for new varieties and taste in their food. Customers prefer a product based on the quality of the product, packaging, nutritional values, certification, ingredients, recipe presentation, and extent of presence of preservatives.

**Vijayeta (2015)** conducted a study in Odisha on purchasing behavior of consumers towards Ready-to-eat food. Convenient sampling was used and results were framed. It was indicated in the results that, Consumers who bought Ready-to-eat food products mostly planned their shopping earlier. It is often a planned decision. TV advertisements is the main source of information for the consumers.

**MeghaMandavia (2017)** in her article reported that, Ready-to-eat market is in a growth stage. Consumers today prefer recipes that is more convenient and quick. Many companies are entering in the Ready-to-eat food segment. The target group is young working population of the country. Since, majority of the people in working category prefer Ready-to-eat food as it is convenient, quick, and easily available even in a small retail shop.

**Rashmi Pratap (2014)** reported that there are many consumer categories in the Ready-to-eat food segment in India. Youngsters, working women, young people staying away from family, travelers, NRI's are the major consumers of Ready-to-eat food. Increase in income, long work hours, change in lifestyle, etc. intend them to choose Ready-to-eat food. Most of them feel that instead of hiring a cook RTE food would be a better option.

**Namrata Singh (2014)** stated that consumers who seem to prefer less time for cooking prefer Ready-to-eat food. Socio-economic trends have changed the consumer behavior and their food choices. Large work force,



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working women, high disposable income are the major factors which change the life style of the consumers and their food related choices.

### 4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) To study about the factors that influence consumers buying behavior towards Ready-To-Eat food.
- 2) To analyze the attitude/Belief of consumers towards Ready-To-Eat food.
- 3) To study buyer's perception about Ready-To-Eat food.
- 4) To know the extent of awareness among consumers towards Ready-To-Eat food products.
- 5) To analyze the variety seeking/ brand switching behavior of consumers of Ready-to-Eat food.

### 5. HYPOTHESIS

H<sub>1</sub> – Educational qualification has a statistically significant relationship with awareness on brand image.

H<sub>2</sub> – There is a statistically significant difference between Income and variety seeking behavior of the respondents-influence of price.

H<sub>3</sub> – There is a statistically significant difference between occupation and the importance for opening hours of the supermarket.

H<sub>4</sub> – There is a statistically significant difference between gender and the perception of respondents towards RTE food as a Wholesome food.

H<sub>5</sub> – Age has a positive influence on respondents' attitude towards the taste of the RTE food.

H<sub>6</sub> – There is a statistically significant relationship between gender and the parameters that influence buyer behavior.

### 6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling Method	Selective sampling method
Sampling Area	Vellore District
Sample size	200 Respondents
Data collection tool	Primary data: Survey-Questionnaire Secondary data: Journals, Newspapers, Reports, FSSAI, FDA, APEDA, and other websites.
Data analysis	SPSS, Version-21
Statistical tools	Chi-Square, ANOVA, Independent sample t-test, Correlation, Mann-Whitney test

### 7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has certain limitations. It is confined to Vellore district only. There are chances of personal bias of the respondents. As consumer behavior is likely to change according to the geographical location, care must be taken while generalizing the results.

### 8. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

*Table: 1*  
*Demographic profile of the respondents*

Demographic profile		No. of respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	95	47.5
	Female	105	52.5
Age	Under 20 years	20	10
	21 to 30 years	69	34.5
	31 to 40 years	68	34
	Above 40 years	43	21.5
Marital Status	Single	66	33
	Married	134	67
Educational Qualification	Hr.sec	25	12.5



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	Diploma	19	9.5
	Under Graduate	91	45.5
	Post Graduate	63	31.5
	Others	2	1
Household Income	Less than Rs. 20,000	35	17.5
	Rs. 21,000 to Rs. 30,000	52	26
	Rs. 31,000 to Rs. 40,000	72	36
	More than Rs. 40,000	41	20.5
Occupation	Working	104	52
	Home maker	45	22.5
	Business	49	24.5
	Others	2	1

Interpretation: From the above table, it is clear that 52.5 % of the respondents are female and 47.5% of them are male. 34.5% of the respondents belong to the age group of 21-30 years, followed by 34% of them in the age group of 31-40 years. 67% of the respondents are married and 335 are single. 45.5% of the respondents are under graduates, followed by 31.5 % of them who are post graduates. 36% of the respondents fall in the income group of Rs. 31,000-Rs. 40,000 and 26% are in income group of Rs. 21,000-Rs. 30,000. Around 52% of the respondents are in working category, and 24.5% are in business category, this is followed by 22.5% of them who are home makers.

**Table: 2**  
**Educational Qualification \* Brand image Crosstabulation**

Educational Qualification	Brand image					Total
	Highly aware	Moderately aware	Neutral	Less aware	Not aware	
Hr.sec	2	2	19	0	2	25
Diploma	0	7	2	10	0	19
Under Graduate	21	16	19	31	4	91
Post Graduate	4	42	0	6	11	63
Others	0	0	0	2	0	2
Total	27	67	40	49	17	200

$H_0$  – Educational qualification does not have a statistically significant relationship with awareness on brand image

$H_1$  – Educational qualification has a statistically significant relationship with awareness on brand image

**Chi-Square Tests Educational Qualification \* Brand image**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
<b>Pearson Chi-Square</b>	<b>133.836<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Likelihood Ratio	137.303	16	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.111	1	0.292
N of Valid Cases	200		



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**Interpretation:** In the above table, Chi-square test is used to test the hypothesis between Educational qualification and brand image. The Pearson Chi-square value is 133.836 and p value is 0.000 ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ). Hence, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Therefore, there is a statistically significant relationship between educational qualification and awareness on brand image, which proves that educated people are more aware and brand conscious.

**Table: 3**  
*Income and Variety seeking behavior of respondents-influence of price*

Household Income	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Less than Rs.20,000	35	1.3429	0.59125	0.09994	1.1398	1.5460	1.00	3.00
Rs.21,000 to Rs.30,000	52	2.5962	1.14206	0.15838	2.2782	2.9141	1.00	4.00
Rs.31,000 to Rs.40,000	72	1.5000	0.87210	0.10278	1.2951	1.7049	1.00	4.00
More than Rs.40,000	41	2.5366	1.41594	0.22113	2.0897	2.9835	1.00	5.00
Total	200	1.9700	1.17730	0.08325	1.8058	2.1342	1.00	5.00

$H_0$ – There is no statistically significant difference between Income and variety seeking behavior of the respondents-influence of price.

$H_2$  – There is a statistically significant difference between Income and variety seeking behavior of the respondents-influence of price.

*One-way ANOVA-Income and Variety seeking behavior of respondents-influence of price*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	63.220	3	21.073	19.428	0.000
Within Groups	212.600	196	1.085		
Total	275.820	199			

**Interpretation:** In the above table, ANOVA is used to test the hypothesis. Here,  $F=19.428$  and p value is 0.000 ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ) hence we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Therefore, there is statistically significant difference between Income and Variety seeking behavior of respondents-influence of price. This interprets that respondent’s variety seeking behavior depends on their income level.

**Table: 4 Occupation and Importance of Opening hours of super markets**

Opening hours of super markets	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Very Important	26	1.0000	0.00000	0.00000	1.0000	1.0000	1.00	1.00
Important	91	1.3516	0.75091	0.07872	1.1953	1.5080	1.00	3.00
Neutral	36	2.3333	0.67612	0.11269	2.1046	2.5621	1.00	4.00
Less Important	45	2.5333	0.50452	0.07521	2.3818	2.6849	2.00	3.00
Not Important	2	1.0000	0.00000	0.00000	1.0000	1.0000	1.00	1.00
Total	200	1.7450	0.86238	0.06098	1.6248	1.8652	1.00	4.00

$H_0$ – There is no statistically significant difference between occupation and the importance for opening hours of the supermarket.

$H_3$  – There is a statistically significant difference between occupation and the importance for opening hours of the supermarket.



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### One-way ANOVA for Occupation and Importance of Opening hours of super markets

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	70.048	4	17.512	43.809	0.000
Within Groups	77.947	195	0.400		
Total	147.995	199			

**Interpretation:** In the above table, one-way ANOVA is used to test the hypothesis. Here,  $F=43.809$  and  $p$  value is  $0.000$  ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ) hence we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Therefore, there is statistically significant difference between occupation of the respondent's and importance of Opening hours of super markets. Hence, consumers who are working feel that opening hours of the supermarkets are of more importance as they prefer shopping after their working hours especially during evenings, while home makers and those who do business feel opening hours as less important or not important.

**Table: 5**  
*Gender and Respondents Perception on RTE food as a Wholesome food*

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Wholesome food	Male	95	3.4000	1.01478	0.10411
	Female	105	2.4095	1.28374	0.12528

$H_0$  – There is no statistically significant difference between gender and the perception of respondents towards RTE food as a Wholesome food.

$H_4$  – There is a statistically significant difference between gender and the perception of respondents towards RTE food as a Wholesome food.

### Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	17.744	0.000	6.010	198	0.000	0.99048	0.16480	0.66549	1.31546
Equal variances not assumed			6.080	194.577	0.000	0.99048	0.16290	0.66921	1.31174

**Interpretation:** In the above table, independent sample t-test is used to test the hypothesis between gender of the respondents and respondent's perception on RTE food as a Wholesome food. Here,  $F=17.744$  and  $p$  value is  $0.000$  ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ) hence we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Therefore, there is statistically significant difference gender of the respondents and respondent's perception on RTE food as a Wholesome food. This proves that female consumers perceive RTE food as a Wholesome food and prefer the same for weight loss.

**Table: 6**  
*Age and Respondents attitude on RTE food tastes good Descriptive Statistics*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Age	2.6700	0.92487	200
Tastes good	2.8550	0.91551	200

$H_0$  – Age does not have a positive influence on respondents' attitude towards the taste of the RTE food.

$H_5$  – Age has a positive influence on respondents' attitude towards the taste of the RTE food.



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## Correlations

		Age	Tastes good
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	0.281**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	200	200
Tastes good	Pearson Correlation	0.281**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	200	200

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Interpretation:** In the above table, Correlation is used to test the hypothesis to know whether Age has a positive influence on respondent’s attitude towards the taste of RTE food. Here, Pearson correlation value is 0.281 and p value is 0.000 (0.000<0.05). Hence, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Therefore, age has a positive influence on consumers’ attitude about the taste of RTE food. Young adults agree that taste of RTE food is good especially snacks, while consumers of age more than 40 feel that they do not agree with the statement that taste of RTE food is good.

**Table: 7**  
*Mann-Whitney Test Gender and the parameters that influence buyer behavior.*

H<sub>0</sub>– There is no statistically significant relationship between gender and the parameters that influence buyer behavior.

H<sub>6</sub>– There is a statistically significant relationship between gender and the parameters that influence buyer behavior.

	Price	Ingredients	Promotional activities	Quality	Taste	Brand	Product volume
Mann-Whitney U	3946.500	1180.500	4326.500	3660.500	2424.000	4377.500	3927.500
Wilcoxon W	8506.500	6745.500	8886.500	9225.500	6984.000	8937.500	8487.500
Z	-3.024	-9.781	-1.683	-3.425	-6.437	-1.516	-2.800
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	0.000	0.092	0.001	0.000	0.130	0.005

Grouping Variable: Gender

**Interpretation:** From the above table it is interpreted that, there is statistically significant difference between gender of the respondents and parameters like price, ingredients, quality, taste, and product volume that influence buyer behavior towards RTE food. The significant value for price is 0.002, ingredients is 0.000, for quality is 0.001, for taste is 0.000, for product volume is 0.005, which is less than 0.05. But in case of promotional activities and brand there is no significant relationship with gender, as the significant value for these are 0.092 and 0.130, which is greater than 0.05.

## 9. FINDINGS

The findings of the study are as follows:

- Most of the respondents who buy Ready-to-eat food are in the age group of 21-30 and 31-40 years.
- Educated people are aware about the brand image and are brand conscious. They also prefer same brand.
- Variety seeking behavior is influenced by the income level of the consumers. High income people do not seek for variety even if there is an increase in price, while low-income people seek for variety when the price increases.
- Consumers who are working feel that opening hours of the supermarkets is of more importance as they prefer shopping after their working hours especially during evenings, while home makers and those who do business feel opening hours as less important or not important.



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- Female consumers perceive Ready-to-eat food as Wholesome food and are more health conscious while choosing the product. They also consume it for weight loss, while male consumers perceive it as a convenience food and use it as they do not like cooking or as they are always in a rush.
- Young adults agree that taste of RTE food is good especially snacks, while consumers of age more than 40 feel that they do not agree with the statement that taste of RTE food is good.
- Consumers in high income group definitely buy same brand of RTE food product, while consumers in low-income group probably will switch to another brand or may not buy same brand always.
- There is a statistically significant difference between gender of the respondents and parameters like price, ingredients, quality, taste, and product volume that influence buyer behavior towards RTE food.

### 10. SUGGESTIONS

- RTE products should be made available in all sizes of packs, as most of them want to take a trial before their actual purchase.
- Manufacturers should focus on the health issues and efforts should be taken to provide nutritional food.
- Good word of mouth is the best source of information and respondents feel it as a trusted source and are more loyal to a particular brand or product if there is a good feedback about the product. Manufacturers and marketers should focus on this aspect.
- Price, quality, taste, brand, and promotional activities, influence the buyer behavior. Manufacturers and marketers should see that these factors are to the acceptance level of the customers.

### 11. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Consumer behavior changes in this dynamic environment. It differs according to the geographic location, psychographic factors, and other socio-economic factors hence, further studies can be carried out in other regions. Post purchase behavior of the consumers can be explored.

### 12. CONCLUSION

Ready-to-Eat food is gaining importance day by day. Products that are labelled as healthier, low fat, calorie free, are not the same. Health issues are still a concern. Consumers should be aware about the food they consume. Checking only the expiry date is not enough they should also check for labels and certificates. Busy life style, staying away from family, increase in working population are the main reasons for consuming Ready-to-eat food.

The Attitude and Perception of consumers is the convenience factor of Ready-to-eat food. Awareness is still low among the consumers. Price, ingredients, and availability, are the major factors driving the consumers to seek for varieties or to switch brands. Opening hours of the super markets, staff service and display of the products are very important aspects. Advertisements are the major source of information and they change the perception of the consumers towards the product

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