



## Chefs' Perception Towards Convenience Foods: an Exploratory Study

### KEYWORDS

convenience food, work environment, consumer

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**ABSTRACT** Restaurants have distinguishing features than other dining outlets available in present market. Restaurant operations and consumer demands are not limited to food quality and taste; moreover the order needs to be placed in minimum time period including both preparation and serving timings. To meet this demand various factors like skills of staff, work environment, convenience food, etc are been considered by the management of catering establishments. The present paper is an attempt to understand acceptability of convenience food by Chefs and to rank their perception that influences them to use convenience food in daily operations. The present study was conducted in various restaurants in UT, Chandigarh. The results reveal acceptability of convenience food in present market due to factors like consistent results, save time, etc.

### Introduction

India is world's second largest food producer after China and has potential of being the biggest within the food sector. The growth in this sector during past has diversified the product line. The impact of more women working and growth in single person household in present times has turned consumers towards convenient products and food and beverage is not at exception. Moreover the innovation towards safety and freshness of these products has retained the consumer demand towards convenience foods. In today's competitive era of providing food services up to the mark of consumer's expectations is the growing challenge for those in this business. Every restaurant operates keeping in mind the various factors responsible for overall dining experience of consumers (Johnny and Jaesun, 2006). Most importantly time of food preparation and service are been considered the most important of all factors from the employees as well as customers point of view. Keeping the same concern at the top most of the service delivery the concept of convenience food has been introduced by various categories of restaurants and in fact by other food and beverage outlets having a high demand in the market in context of food and beverage sales. Convenience food is such type of food that has come into existence generally to save the time of food preparation and as such the waiting time of consumers. Generally convenience food just requires little time for preparation. Further convenience food is designed for a long shelf life, so that they can be stored for a long time. Most of the managers often find it expensive. Any food partially or completely prepared or processed by the manufacturer or even it can be said that any packaged dish or food that can be prepared quickly and easily as by thawing or heating may be termed convenience food. Moreover, convenience food or tertiary processed food is commercially prepared food designed for ease of consumption. The increasing consumption of convenience foods is an international trend influenced by changing lifestyles (Belasco & Scranton, 2002). People have convenience food due to problems of scheduling everyday life. In modern times convenience food is directed towards labour saving and time saving but in this hypermodern world direction is towards time-shifting and moreover timing supersedes the problem of shortage of time (Alan, 1999).

### Literature review

Using convenience foods in kitchens is becoming the necessity of chefs due to its demand following factors like saving time, energy, consistent result, etc. Convenience foods are classified in four categories namely, ready-to-eat, ready-to-heat, ready-to-end-cook and ready-to-cook (Costa, Dekker, Beumer, Rombouts, and Jongen, 2001). Pepper and Milson (1984) revealed that customers mainly look for value for money and good presentation while establishing fifteen ideas for new products. Seeking new experience is connected with consumer's values towards convenience food consumption and convenience orientation in the food domain. Moreover, the consumers of convenience foods perceive of both positive and negative benefits through the consumption and relate convenience to be positive and health aspect to be negative (Costa et al., 2007). Jaeger and Meiselman (2004) established that the individuals differ with respect to convenience orientation in meal preparation.

Very meager literature is available in regard to perception of food producers in restaurants towards using of convenience food in their operations and more of consumer oriented perception studies have been taken in past. Hence the present paper aims to explore significant factors influencing Chefs perceptions towards using convenience food in restaurants in UT Chandigarh and ranking their perceptions accordingly.

### Methodology

This study is based on the results of a survey of 120 Chefs working in different restaurants located in Chandigarh. The restaurants were selected because of their similarity in type of food served and the type of service provided. The data was collected using questionnaires. The questionnaires were addressed personally to Chefs working in these outlets with more than five years of experience in food and beverage production. The data was analyzed using SPSS. The questionnaire was tested for reliability and internal consistency using Cronbach  $\alpha$ . This test calculates the reliability coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) if one variable is removed from the original set of the variables in the questionnaire. This test helps to determine the set of variables with high reliability based on the  $\alpha$  coefficient above 0.80. The survey in-

strument was comprised of two sections. The first section asked for respondent demographic data. The second section consisted of 11 variables identified from the literature review that influence the usage of convenience food in restaurants. The respondents were asked to rank these factors using a five-point Likert scale (range: 1 = not important to 5 = very important). Descriptive statistics percentage analysis, mean, standard deviation were used for analysis.

#### Analysis of data

To address the objectives of the study, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with 11 factors from their operational experience at various restaurants, using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = not important to 5 = very important). As shown in Table 1, the gender composition of the participants was 17 females (14.2%) and 103 males (85.8%). The largest represented age group was respondents who were among the 36-45 year-old age group (35.8%) and lowest were among the 26-35 year-old age group (10.8%). Many of the respondents held an undergraduate degree, 57 (47.5%), while 54 (45%) were graduates and 09 (7.5%) of the respondents were post graduates. Most of the respondents had experience, 66 (55%), while 31 (25.8%) had 10-20 years and 23 (19.2%) had 5-10 years of experience. Majority of respondents 112 (93.3%) agreed of using convenience food in their daily operations, while just 08 (6.7%) denied of using the same.

**Table-1 Demographic Profile of sample population (n=120)**

Demographic Variables		Total	Percentage
Gender	Male	103	85.8
	Female	17	14.2
Age	26-35	13	10.8
	36-45	43	35.8
	46-55	26	21.7
	56 above	38	31.7
Education	Under graduate	57	47.5
	Graduate	54	45
	Post graduate	09	7.5
Work Experience	5-10 years	23	19.2
	10-20 years	66	55
	20 years & above	31	25.8
Do you use convenience food in your outlet	Yes	112	93.3
	No	08	6.7

#### Ranking Factors Influencing the Selection of Restaurants

The calculated mean and standard deviation (SD) of various factors responsible for influencing the Chefs to use convenience food in their daily operations of food and beverage lies between 4.85-2.68 as can be seen in Table-2. Gives consistent results has the highest mean (4.85) with 0.20 SD while it is easy to store has the lowest mean (2.68) with 1.24 SD. Further the variables are ranked as per the mean value achieved by each factors according to importance given by the respondents. Can be stored for

emergencies is given (9); it saves energy (6); it is easy to store (11); it is easy to prepare (3); it is easy to transport (8); wastage is less (5); it saves time (2); gives consistent results (1); available in wide variety was ranked (7); may have extra nutrients added (10); it is easy to use (4). It is clear from the table 1 in terms of importance given to each item in choosing convenience food by Chefs that there is no coherence among all the items in terms of their mean and SD. In other words there is a fluctuating mean value among all the items. The results show that gives consistent results was thought to be the most recommended followed by it saves time and it is easy to prepare. Very less importance has been given to it is easy to store, may have extra nutrients added and can be stored for emergencies.

**Table-2 Ranking of descriptive statistics for using convenience food in restaurants**

Variables	Mean	SD	Rank
Can be stored for emergencies	2.79	1.38	9
It saves energy	3.44	1.26	6
It is easy to store	2.68	1.24	11
It is easy to prepare	4.19	0.70	3
It is easy to transport	3.16	1.38	8
Wastage is less	3.47	0.98	5
It saves time	4.70	0.45	2
Gives consistent results	4.85	0.20	1
Available in wide variety	3.28	1.24	7
may have extra nutrients added	2.76	1.13	10
It is easy to use	3.65	1.09	4
Based on 5-point scale(1=Not Important, 2=Least Important, 3=Fairly Important, 4=Important, 5=Very Important)			

#### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine if the Chefs working in various restaurants used convenience food in their daily kitchen operations and the main reasons that influenced them to use convenience food items. The study illustrated that there were indeed statistically significant difference in influential factors between individual respondents. It can be concluded that differences in the mean are caused by different needs and requirements among different Chefs and the characteristics of the restaurant. Most adaptability of convenience food is considered of its easy availability, cost, time saving and ease of preparation. Many authors have even shown correlation of convenience food with service timing also. Disadvantages like cost, chances of nutrient loss, small serving may vary from restaurant to restaurant. Using convenience foods may not only benefit restaurant operators but even consumers if nutrition and production style is taken into deep consideration. A very few studies have been conducted in this regard and more empirical studies may be conducted to analyze advantages and disadvantages of convenience food for restaurant operators and consumers.

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