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Consumer's perception towards "Ready to Eat" food products in Nagpur city

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Abstract
The present study entitled "Consumer's Perception towards Ready-to-Eat Food Products in Nagpur City" was undertaken to study the socio-economic characteristics of consumers, assess their awareness regarding various categories of Ready-to-Eat (RTE) food products and analyse their preference for major brands. The study was based on primary data collected during 2025-2026 from 90 consumers, comprising 30respondents each from below 25 years, 25-50 years and above 50 years age groups. The data were analysed using simple tabular and percentage analysis. The findings revealed considerable variation in the socio-economic characteristics of consumers across age groups. Females constituted 56.67 per cent of consumers below 25 years and 70.00 per cent of those aged 25-50 years, whereas males constituted 66.67 per cent of consumers above 50 years. Post-graduates accounted for 70.00 and 90.00 per cent of consumers in the below 25 and 25-50 years groups, respectively.
Regarding RTE food categories, snacks were preferred by 33.33 per cent of consumers below 25 years, while RTE meals were preferred by 36.67 per cent and 33.33 per cent of consumers aged 25-50 years and above 50 years, respectively. Social media was the major source of awareness among consumers below 25 years 46.67 per cent, whereas advertisements were the leading source among consumers above 50 years 36.67 per cent. Regarding brand preference, Haldiram was preferred by 30.00 per cent of younger consumers, while MTR was preferred by 30.00 per cent and 36.67 per cent of consumers in the 25-50 and above 50 years groups, respectively.
Overall, the study revealed that convenience, changing lifestyles, brand familiarity and accessibility influenced consumer choices, while quality, price, nutritional value and healthiness remained important considerations. The study suggests that RTE food manufacturers should focus on improving product quality, nutritional value, affordability and transparent labelling to meet changing consumer expectations.

Keywords: Ready-to-Eat (RTE) Food Products, Consumer Perception, Consumer Awareness, Brand Preference, Consumer Behaviour, Convenience Foods, Food Consumption Pattern, Nagpur City

Introduction
The food consumption pattern in India has undergone significant changes due to rapid urbanization, changing lifestyles, increasing work and educational commitments, and the growing need for convenience. These changes have increased the demand for convenient food products that require less preparation time. Among these, Ready-to-Eat (RTE) food products have gained considerable popularity as they can be consumed with little or no additional preparation. The expansion of retail outlets, improved food processing and packaging technologies, and wider availability of branded food products have further supported the growth of the RTE food sector.
Ready-to-Eat food products include a wide range of products such as ready-to-eat meals, snacks, breakfast products, bakery products, frozen foods, and canned and retort foods. These products provide consumers with convenience, ease of preparation, portability and time-saving benefits. The growing participation of consumers in professional and educational activities has increased the importance of such products in modern food consumption. At the same time, consumers have become more conscious about product quality, nutritional value, ingredients, food safety, price and health implications, which may influence their purchase and consumption decisions.

Consumer perception plays an important role in determining the acceptance and market potential of RTE food products. Perception is influenced by several factors including age, gender, education, occupation, income, family structure, awareness, source of information, brand familiarity, taste, quality, price and convenience. Understanding these differences is important for food manufacturers and marketers to develop products and communication strategies according to changing consumer needs.

Nagpur City is an important urban centre of Maharashtra with a diverse consumer population and changing lifestyle patterns. However, there is a need to understand how consumers perceive different categories and brands of RTE food products and what factors influence their choices.

Therefore, the present study entitled "Consumers' Perception towards Ready-to-Eat Food Products in Nagpur City" was undertaken to study the socio-economic characteristics of selected consumers, assess their awareness regarding various categories of RTE food products, and analyse their preference for major brands. The findings of the study are expected to provide useful insights into consumer behaviour and help food manufacturers, marketers and other stakeholders in developing appropriate strategies to meet the changing needs and preferences of consumers.

Objective

1. To study socio-economic characteristics of selected consumers.
2. To know consumer awareness related to various categories of ready to eat food products
3. To analyze preference of consumers of major brands.

Methodology

The present study was conducted to examine consumers perception towards Ready-to-Eat (RTE) food products in Nagpur City, Maharashtra. The study was based on primary data. Primary data were collected during 2025-2026 through a structured questionnaire administered via personal interviews with 90 consumers of Ready-to-Eat food products. The respondents were selected on the basis of three age groups which are as follows:

1. Below 25 years,
2. 25-50 years and
3. Above 50 years, with 30 respondents in each group.

The collected data were analysed using simple tabular analysis and percentage analysis to examine the socio-economic characteristics of respondents, consumer awareness, brand preference of Ready-to-Eat food products. Graphical representations, were used wherever necessary to present the findings clearly and facilitate meaningful interpretation.

Results and Discussion

The results of the present paper are presented as below. The results area arranged as per the objectives taken.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of Ready To Eat Food Consumer, (N=90) (Figures in parentheses indicate percentages to the total.

Variable	Categories	Age		
		Below 25	**25-50**	**Above 50**
Gender	Male	13 (43.33)	9 (30.00)	20 (66.67)
	Female	17 (56.67)	21 (70.00)	10 (33.33)
Education	School level	1 (3.33)	2 (6.67)	27 (90.00)
	Graduate	8 (26.67)	1 (3.33)	14 (46.67)
	Post-graduate	21 (70.00)	27 (90.00)	7 (23.33)
Occupation	Student	24 (80.00)	18 (60.00)	0 (0.00)
	Business	3 (10.00)	2 (6.67)	6 (20.00)
	Service	3 (10.00)	8 (26.37)	13 (43.33)
	Homemaker	0 (0.00)	2 (6.67)	11 (36.37)
Monthly Income	Below 20,000	24 (80.00)	19 (63.33)	14 (46.67)
	20,000-40,000	5 (16.67)	7 (23.33)	7 (23.33)
	40,000-60,000	1 (3.33)	3 (10.00)	7 (23.33)
	Above 60,000	0 (0.00)	1 (3.33)	2 (6.67)
Family type	Joint	8 (26.67)	6 (20.00)	15 (50.00)
	Nuclear	22 (73.33)	24 (80.00)	15 (50.00)

The socio-economic characteristics of the selected consumers revealed considerable variation across the different age groups. In terms of gender, females constituted a higher proportion among consumers below 25 years and those aged 25-50 years, whereas males were predominant among consumers above 50 years. Regarding educational status, post-graduates formed the major proportion among consumers below 25 years and those aged 25-50 years, while school-level education was predominant among consumers above 50 years. With respect to occupation, students constituted the major occupational group among the younger and middle-aged consumers, whereas service was the predominant occupation among the older consumers.

Regarding family type, nuclear families were predominant among consumers below 25 years and those aged 25-50 years, while both nuclear and joint families were equally represented among consumers above 50 years.

Overall, the findings indicate that the socio-economic profile of consumers varied across age groups, reflecting differences in their demographic, educational, occupational, income and family characteristics, which may influence their perception and purchasing behaviour towards ready-to-eat food products.

Table 2: Consumer awareness related to various categories of ready to eat food products (N=100)

Categories	Age Group		
	Below 25	**25-50**	**Above 50**
Ready to eat snacks	10 (33.33)	5 (16.67)	4 (13.33)
Ready to eat bakery products	7 (23.33)	5 (16.67)	5 (16.67)
Ready to eat canned & retort foods	5 (16.67)	3 (10.00)	3 (10.00)
Ready to eat frozen foods	4 (13.33)	2 (6.67)	1 (3.33)
Ready to eat breakfast	4 (13.33)	4 (13.33)	7 (23.33)
Ready to eat meals	0 (0.00)	11 (36.67)	10 (33.33)
Total	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)

(Figures in parentheses indicate percentages to the total.)

The age-wise distribution of consumers according to their preference for different categories of ready-to-eat (RTE) food products revealed considerable variation across the three age groups. Among consumers below 25 years of age, ready-to-eat snacks were the most preferred category, accounting for 33.33 per cent of consumers, followed by bakery products (23.33 per cent), canned and retort foods (16.67 per cent), frozen foods and breakfast products (13.33 per cent each). No consumer in this age group reported preference for ready-to-eat meals. In the 25-50 years age group, ready-to-eat meals were the most preferred category, reported by 36.67 per cent of consumers, followed by snacks and bakery products with 16.67 per cent each. Ready-to-eat breakfast products accounted for 13.33 per cent, while canned and retort foods and frozen foods accounted for 10.00 and 6.67 per cent, respectively.

Among consumers above 50 years of age, ready-to-eat meals were also the most preferred category (33.33 per cent), followed by ready-to-eat breakfast products (23.33 per cent), while snacks and bakery products accounted for 13.33 and 16.67 per cent, respectively. Canned and retort foods accounted for 10.00 per cent and frozen foods were least preferred at 3.33 per cent.

Overall, the findings indicated that younger consumers showed a greater preference for ready-to-eat snacks and bakery products, whereas middle-aged and older consumers showed a comparatively greater preference for ready-to-eat meals and breakfast products. This variation suggests that age plays an important role in shaping consumer preferences for different categories of ready-to-eat food products.

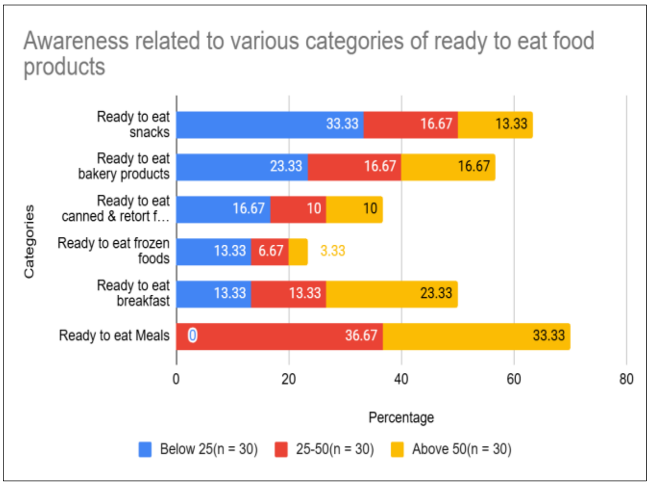

Fig 1: Awareness related to various categories of ready to eat food products

Table 3: Source of awareness among selected consumers

Source	Age Group		
	Below 25	**25-50**	**Above 50**
Social media	14 (46.67)	9 (30.00)	4 (13.33)
Friends	8 (26.67)	6 (20.00)	8 (26.67)
Retail stores	5 (16.67)	8 (26.67)	7 (23.33)
Advertisement	3 (10.00)	7 (23.33)	11 (36.67)
Total	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)

(Figures in parentheses indicate percentages to the total.)

The table indicates a clear difference in the sources of awareness about ready-to-eat (RTE) food products across different age groups. Among consumers below 25 years, social media was the major source of awareness, reported by 14 respondents (46.67%), followed by friends (26.67%), retail stores (16.67%) and advertisements (10.00%). This suggests that younger consumers are more influenced by digital platforms and peer communication.

Among consumers aged 25-50 years, social media remained the leading source of awareness at 30.00%, followed by retail stores (26.67%), advertisements (23.33%) and friends (20.00%). Thus, this age group obtained information through a relatively diverse range of sources, with social media still playing an important role.

In the case of consumers above 50 years, advertisements were the most important source of awareness, accounting for 36.67%, followed by friends (26.67%), retail stores (23.33%) and social media (13.33%). This indicates that traditional promotional channels were relatively more influential among older consumers, whereas social media was more influential among younger consumers.

Overall, the findings show that the source of awareness varied with age. Social media was particularly influential among younger consumers, while advertisements were more prominent among older consumers. Friends and retail stores contributed to awareness across all age groups, indicating that both interpersonal communication and point-of-purchase exposure also played an important role in creating awareness about RTE food products.

Table 4: Preference of consumers of major brands

Brand Preference	Age Group		
	Below 25	25-50	Above 50
MTR	7 (23.33)	9 (30.00)	11 (36.67)
Haldiram	9 (30.00)	7 (23.33)	6 (20.00)
Gits	3 (10.00)	6 (20.00)	7 (23.33)
ITC	4 (13.33)	4 (13.33)	4 (13.33)
Nestle	7 (23.33)	4 (13.33)	2 (6.67)
Total	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)

The age-wise distribution of consumers according to their preference for different ready-to-eat food brands revealed noticeable differences across the three age groups. Among consumers below 25 years, Haldiram was the most preferred brand, selected by 30.00 per cent of respondents, followed by MTR and Nestle, each preferred by 23.33 per cent. ITC was preferred by 13.33 per cent, while Gits recorded the lowest preference at 10.00 per cent. This indicates that younger consumers showed a relatively higher preference for Haldiram, possibly due to its wide availability, attractive product range and popularity among young consumers.

In the 25-50 years age group, MTR emerged as the most preferred brand, accounting for 30.00 per cent of consumers, followed by Haldiram (23.33%), Gits (20.00%), and ITC (13.33%). Nestle was the least preferred brand in this age group, with 13.33 per cent of consumers. The preference for MTR among this age group may be associated with its variety of convenient and traditional ready-to-eat products, which cater to the needs of working and family-oriented consumers.

Among consumers above 50 years, MTR was again the most preferred brand, with 36.67 per cent of respondents, followed by Gits (23.33%), Haldiram (20.00%) and ITC (13.33%). Nestle recorded the lowest preference at 6.67 per cent. The comparatively higher preference for MTR among older consumers may be attributed to familiarity with the brand and its range of traditional Indian food products.

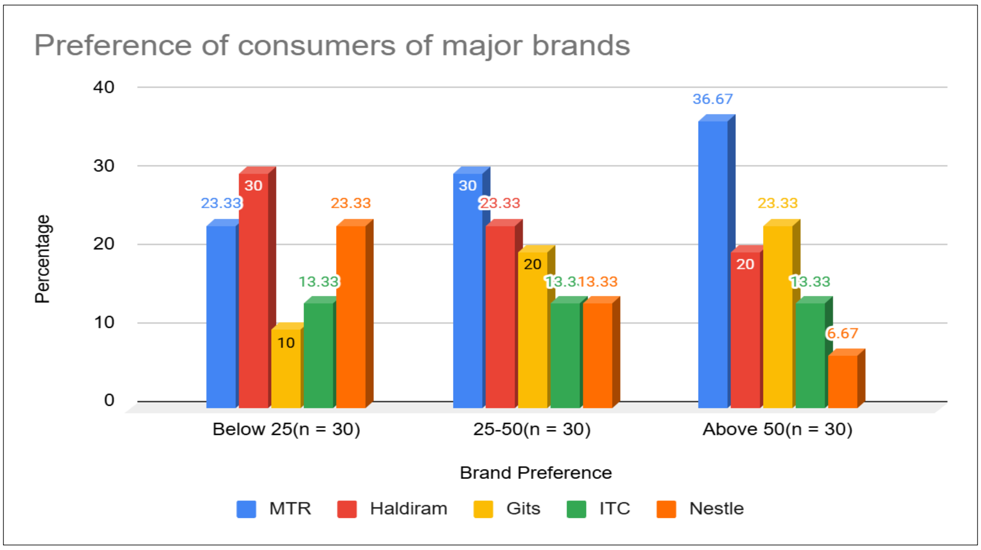

Fig 2: Preference of consumers of major brands

Conclusion

The study on "Consumers' Perception towards Ready-to-Eat Food Products in Nagpur City" concludes that ready-to-eat food products have become an important part of consumers food choices due to changing lifestyles, time constraints, convenience and easy availability. Consumers were aware of various categories of ready-to-eat products, including snacks, meals, breakfast products, frozen foods, canned and retort foods, and bakery and confectionery products.

The findings indicate that consumer awareness and preferences varied across different age groups. Younger consumers showed greater inclination towards modern sources of information, particularly social media, whereas older consumers relied comparatively more on traditional sources and personal recommendations. Brand preference also differed among age groups, reflecting the influence of familiarity, taste, quality, availability and consumer experience. Consumers generally considered ready-to-eat products convenient and time-saving, while factors such as price, healthiness, nutritional value and quality remained important considerations in their purchasing decisions.

Overall, the study reveals that convenience is a major factor driving the consumption of ready-to-eat food products in Nagpur City, but consumers are increasingly concerned about product quality, nutritional information, health implications and price. Therefore, food companies should focus on improving product quality, nutritional value, transparent labelling, affordability and healthy product alternatives. Effective awareness and communication strategies can further help consumers make informed choices. The study concludes that the ready-to-eat food sector has considerable growth potential in Nagpur City, provided that consumer expectations regarding convenience, quality, health, safety and value for money are adequately addressed.

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