

CONSUMPTION PATTERN OF CONVENIENCE FOODS AMONG CONSUMERS IN KANNUR DISTRICT, KERALA

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ABSTRACT

The consumption of convenience foods has been steadily increasing in recent years, making it important to understand the factors driving this trend. The present study examines the socio-economic factors influencing convenience food consumption patterns among consumers in Kannur district, Kerala, India. A total of 175 respondents, aged 18 to 75 years, including both males and females, representing various socio-economic strata, participated in the survey. The results of the study reveal that convenience food consumption was predominantly higher among individuals of the younger age group (35%), those residing in rural areas (33%) and people with higher educational qualifications (24%). Expenditure on convenience foods constitute less than 10% of their monthly income. The study also identifies social media advertisements and recommendations from relatives and friends as significant factors influencing the purchase of convenience foods. The frequent purchase of items such as biscuits and bread was a more common consumable among the subjects. This study revealed an increase in the consumption of ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook products in rural areas compared to other regions.

Key Words: Consumption pattern, Convenience food, Geographical areas, Monthly expenditure, Socio-Economic factors

INTRODUCTION

Convenience foods are those foods that save time in food acquisition and preparation and are often designed to provide a time-saving option for busy consumers who may not have the time or skills to prepare meals. The Ministry of Consumer Affairs in India designates convenience food as often prepared foodstuffs that can be sold as hot, ready-to-eat dishes, at room temperature and shelf-stable products, or as refrigerated or frozen food products that require minimal preparation. In India, earlier, there was a preference for consuming fresh foods directly from the farm,

with limited acceptance of value-added foods. The rise in the consumption of convenience food is a result of various factors such as urbanisation, digitalisation, time scarcity, sedentary lifestyles, high disposable income, ease and convenience of food preparation, lack of cooking skills and ability, acceptability across age groups and easy availability (Hena *et al.*, 2023). Statista Market Forecast (2023-2027) predicts that revenue in the convenience food market amounts to US\$ 448.69bn in 2025, and the world market is expected to grow annually by 6.05%. In the Indian scenario, the convenience food

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segment's compound annual growth rate is projected to be 20.93%. The convenience food market in India has grown rapidly and is expected to continue to expand in the coming years. India is the world's second-largest food producer, next to China and has the potential to overtake China and become the biggest food industry.

Convenience foods have been created to be more appealing to customers. The consumption of these foods has become increasingly popular in many countries worldwide, but the factors that influence this trend may vary depending on the local demographic context. Demographic criteria, such as age, gender, income, education, and cultural background, can influence consumers' preferences and behaviours regarding convenience food consumption.

Consumption patterns in Kerala have significantly changed in the last three decades, influenced by migration, investment, and cultural imagination (Mannathukkare, 2023). A study conducted among college students in Kerala found that convenience food consumption was high, with 94% of participants reporting that they consumed at least one type of convenience food on a weekly basis, and the most commonly consumed convenience foods were instant noodles, biscuits, and packaged snacks (Mohan *et al.*, 2019). This study was limited to a specific population in Kerala (college and school students). The present study conducted a comparative analysis of consumption patterns across urban, semi-urban, and rural areas in Kannur. The study evaluates the influence of demographic and socioeconomic factors on the consumption of convenience foods. The results indicate significant variations across population segments, underscoring the role of demographic determinants in shaping convenience food consumption.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study was conducted in the rural, semi-urban and urban areas of Kannur district, Kerala. Based on simple random sampling, 175 respondents were selected. Different areas were selected based on the Indian census data (2011). The study comprised 122 females and 53 males in the age group of 18-75 years. The respondents were from across all sections of society and included mainly students, employed and unemployed from various socio-economic groups and also from various geographic locations in Kannur.

The data for the study was collected using a Google Form Demographic details were collected using the modified version of Kuppasamy's socioeconomic status scale. The modified Kuppasamy scale is one of the most widely used tools for assessing socioeconomic status (SES) in urban India, originally designed to evaluate individual SES but later adapted for family-level assessment. It comprises three index parameters—education, occupation, and total income (Javalkar *et al.*, 2024). The data collected using Google Forms can be easily exported and analysed using various statistical software. The Google form was forwarded to selected consumers, who were in the age group of 18-75 years. The different aspects included demographic details of the respondents, their consumption patterns, attitudes towards convenience food, monthly expenditure patterns for convenience foods, dining-out habits, sources of information about convenience food, and the frequency of purchasing selected ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat foods. Data gathered using the form is stored in a spreadsheet.

Statistical Analysis

The collected data were tabulated and analysed using the R statistical software tool. The results of the study were interpreted using frequency, percentage, and Chi-square tests.

Table 1. Demographic Details of the Selected Samples (n=175)

Demographic Characteristics				
Demographic Variables		Rural N (%)	Semi Urban N (%)	Urban N (%)
Age	Less Than 30	31 (18%)	22 (13%)	16 (9%)
	31-40 Years	20 (11%)	22 (13%)	8 (5%)
	41-50 Years	18 (10%)	11 (6%)	7 (4%)
	Above 50 Years	11 (6%)	6 (3%)	3 (2%)
Sex	Male	19 (11%)	20 (11%)	14 (8%)
	Female	61 (35%)	41 (23%)	20 (11%)
Education	High School	12 (7%)	4 (2%)	3 (2%)
	Intermediate/Diploma	5 (3%)	8 (5%)	3 (2%)
	Graduate	23 (13%)	20 (11%)	8 (5%)
	Professional Degree	20 (11%)	8 (5%)	6 (3%)
	Post Graduate	20 (11%)	21 (12%)	14 (8%)
Monthly Income	d" 6174	9 (5%)	4 (2%)	2 (1%)
	6175-18,496	18 (11%)	9 (5%)	1 (1%)
	18,497-30,830	11 (7%)	9 (5%)	4 (2%)
	30,831-46,128	13 (8%)	7 (4%)	3 (2%)
	46,129-61,662	7 (4%)	10 (6%)	9 (5%)
	61,662-1,23,321	12 (7%)	13 (8%)	8 (5 %)
	e"1,23,322	6 (4%)	6 (4%)	7 (4%)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of data is done from the results obtained from 175 subjects from the Kannur district. The result obtained from this is represented in tables. Table 1 shows the demographic details of the selected subjects across Urban, Semi-Urban and Rural Areas of Kannur district.

In this study, it was observed that a significant percentage of the subjects had attained a high level of education. Specifically, 31% of the subjects had completed postgraduate studies, 29% had undergraduate degrees, and 19% held professional degrees. And the majority of these subjects were categorised within the middle-income status.

The majority of individuals prefer to consume convenience food. This research indicates that individuals with higher incomes prefer convenience food to those with lower or middle incomes. Moreover, postgraduates demonstrate the highest percentage of consumption at 24%, while only 6% of individuals with intermediate or diploma prefer convenience food. The majority of individuals, despite rural or urban regions, spend less than 10 % of their monthly income on convenience foods. According to Engel's law of consumption, as household income (and expenditure) increases, the percentage that is spent on food decreases, but the absolute amount spent on food increases. This study

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics and Convenience Food Consumption (n=175)

Characteristics	Category	Yes (n, %)	No (n, %)
Monthly Income	d" 6,174	10 (6%)	5 (3%)
	6,175 – 18,496	18 (11%)	10 (6%)
	18,497 – 30,830	20 (12%)	4 (2%)
	30,831 – 46,128	18 (11%)	5 (3%)
	46,129 – 61,662	22 (13%)	4 (2%)
	61,663 – 123,321	26 (15%)	7 (4%)
	e" 123,322	16 (10%)	3 (2%)
Education	High school	12 (7%)	7 (4%)
	Intermediate / Diploma	11 (6%)	5 (3%)
	Graduate	44 (25%)	7 (4%)
	Professional degree	28 (16%)	6 (3%)
	Post graduate	42 (24%)	13 (7%)
Area of Residence	Rural	58 (33%)	22 (13%)
	Semi-urban	49 (28%)	12 (7%)
	Urban	30 (17%)	4 (2%)

confirms that people with different income levels spend a proportionate amount of their income on convenience food consumption. According to Sandri *et al.*, (2024), convenience food is more prevalent among young individuals with higher education, who typically exhibit a lower BMI, a higher healthy nutrition index, and reduced consumption of sugary beverages compared to their peers with basic education. Convenience food was more prevalent in rural and semi-urban areas than

in urban areas, with 33% of rural dwellers opting for convenience foods compared to 17% in urban areas.

It is clear from table 3 that the majority of the subjects preferred to dine out among all age groups. The statistical analysis indicates a relationship between age and dining out preference, with younger individuals preferring food from outside sources over home-cooked meals.

Table 3. Age and dining out preferences of selected subjects. (n=175)

Age	Dining out preferences		P value
	Yes	No	
< 30 years	62(35%)	7(4%)	0.004
31-40 years	39(22%)	11(6%)	
41-50 years	25(14%)	11(6%)	
>50 years	11(6%)	9(5%)	

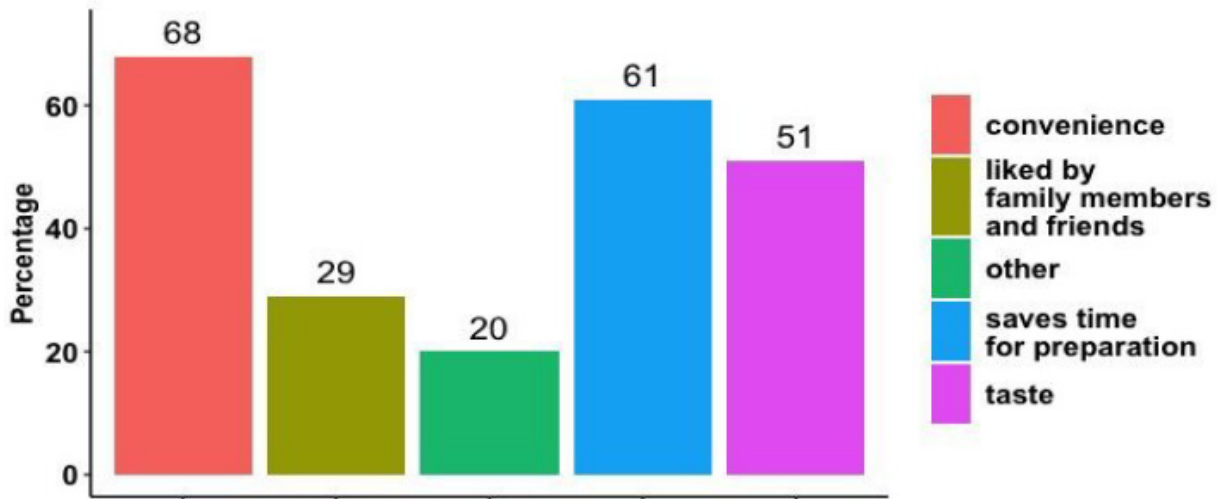


Fig. 1. Reasons for purchasing ready-to-eat products

The individuals with higher income and higher educational groups dine out more frequently than others. This study also revealed that rural dwellers opt for convenience food because of its easy availability. Urbanisation itself does not increase the quantities of food consumed. According to NIN-ICMR dietary guidelines (2024), unhealthy, highly processed, high-fat, sugar and salt foods have become more affordable and accessible than healthier alternatives.

Differences in average quantities consumed in urban, urbanising, and rural areas suggest that merely living in more urbanised areas is not associated with higher quantities of food consumed (Bhartendu *et al.*, 2020).

Determinants of Ready-to-Eat Product Purchases

According to Fig. 1, the primary motivations for purchasing ready-to-eat foods are convenience (68%), time efficiency (61%), and variety (51%). Ding *et al.* (2020)

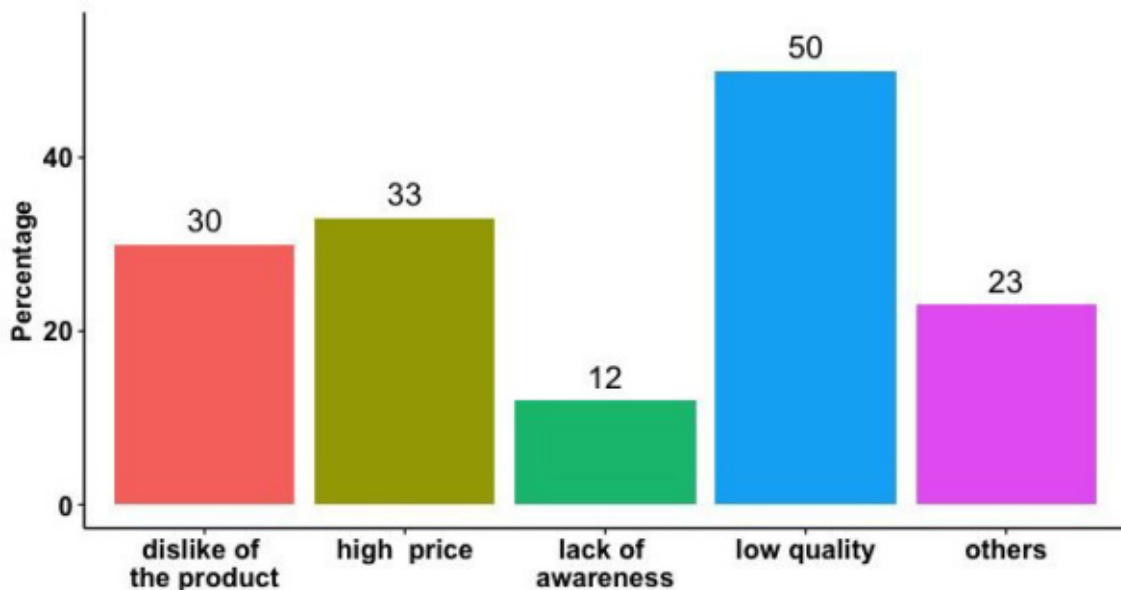


Fig. 2. Reasons for not purchasing ready-to-eat products

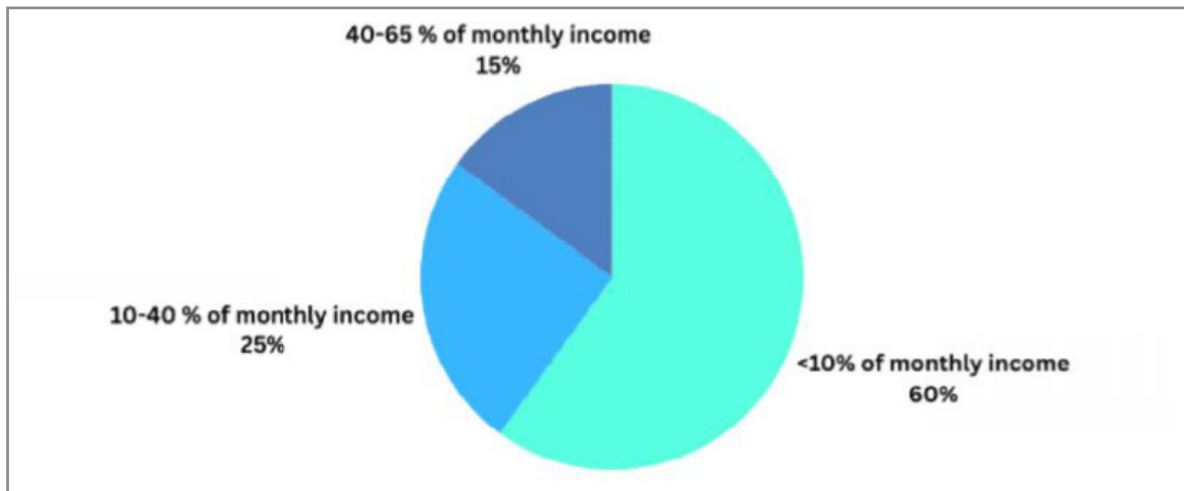


Fig 3. Monthly expenditure for convenience food

also supported that convenience was the primary factor motivating consumers to purchase ready-to-eat (RTE) foods.

Fig. 2 illustrates the deterrents to purchasing ready-to-eat products, with the primary concern being their perceived inferior quality (50%), followed by high price (33%). These findings suggest that quality concerns and elevated costs are predominant issues, which may contribute to the reluctance of certain individuals to purchase convenience food products.

Monthly expenditure for convenience food

The percentage of subjects' monthly expenditures on convenience foods is depicted in Fig. 3.

The majority of the subjects (60%) allocate less than 10 % of their family income towards the purchase of convenience foods. Approximately 25% of individuals, irrespective of their income status, expend between 10 % and 40 % of their monthly family income on

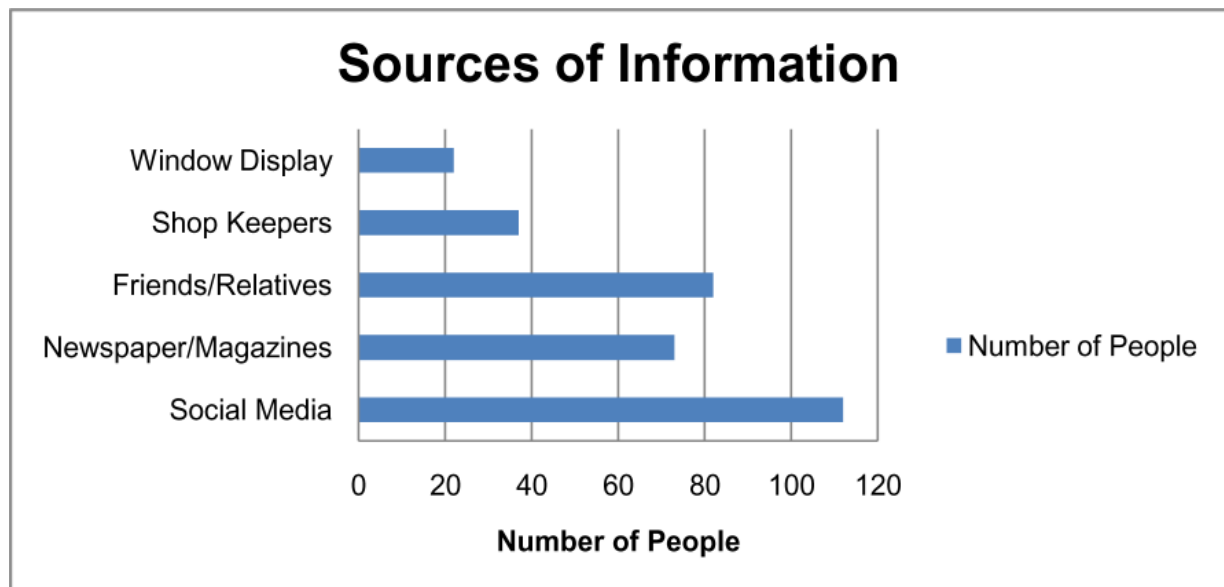


Fig 4. Source of Information

Table 4. Frequency of purchasing different food items

(n=175)

Category	Food Item	Daily	Fort- night	Once a Week	Twice a Week	Occasi- onally	Never
Ready-to-eat Foods	Sweets	5(3%)	13(9%)	47(32%)	24(16%)	52(35%)	8(5%)
	Biscuit	14(9%)	14(9%)	70(44%)	31(19%)	24(15%)	6(4%)
	Bread	4(3%)	22(14%)	51(33%)	32(21%)	40(26%)	7(4%)
	Cakes	0(0%)	10(7%)	24(17%)	16(11%)	87(60%)	8(6%)
	Fried Snacks	15(10%)	23(16%)	28(19%)	22(15%)	53(36%)	7(5%)
	Fried Chicken	1(1%)	22(15%)	30(20%)	13(9%)	53(36%)	29(20%)
	Ice Cream	3(2%)	20(13%)	16(11%)	16(11%)	76(51%)	18(12%)
	Pickles, Dry Chutney	11(8%)	16(11%)	17(12%)	8(6%)	56(39%)	35(24%)
	Ready To Drink Beverages	3(2%)	10(7%)	13(9%)	11(8%)	50(36%)	52(37%)
	Ready To Serve Beverages Like Squash	1(1%)	11(8%)	12(9%)	8(6%)	48(36%)	55(41%)
Ready-To-Cook Foods	Packed Rice	7(5%)	20(14%)	30(20%)	30(20%)	27(18%)	34(23%)
	Flour	3(2%)	19(13%)	45(27%)	35(22%)	7(4%)	40(29%)
	\Packed half cooked chapatis	8(6%)	21(15%)	36(25%)	19(13%)	41(29%)	17(12%)
	Oats, Break-fast Cereals	10(7%)	0(0%)	10(7%)	5(4%)	11(8%)	98(73%)
	Grated Coconut	3(2%)	1(1%)	5(4%)	7(5%)	14(11%)	107(77%)
	Cut Vegetable Packet	1(1%)	4(3%)	5(4%)	5(4%)	38(28%)	83(61%)
	Karkidaka Kanji Packet	1(1%)	0(0%)	5(4%)	6(5%)	34(26%)	86(65%)
	Cake Mixes	12(8%)	19(13%)	32(22%)	15(10%)	38(26%)	30(21%)
	Rice flours (Idiyappam, appam)	14(9%)	26(17%)	46(29%)	21(13%)	36(23%)	13(8%)
	Masala Powders	2(1%)	4(3%)	36(25%)	55(38%)	15(10%)	34(23%)
	Noodles, Pasta						

these items. There is a statistically significant relationship between income status and the purchasing behaviour of convenience food ($p=0.003$)

Sources of information regarding convenience foods

Fig. 4 indicates the various reliable sources which influence the selection of convenience foods.

Dynamic marketing and advertising are being done by convenience food manufacturers so that the customers are attracted towards the product (Srinivasan and Shende, 2020). Food labelling is critical in disseminating information about food products between the customers and the food producers. Information about the ingredients on food labels helps consumers to better understand and make healthier food choices (Perumal *et al.*, 2022). The study concluded that advertisement through social media was most influential, with 112 respondents citing it as their primary source by selecting of different branded convenience foods. Friends and relatives also play a significant role, with 48 percent of respondents reporting them as an influential source. Newspaper and magazine advertisements were mentioned by 73 respondents, while shopkeepers and salespersons were reported by 37 respondents. Interestingly, window displays were the least effective source, with only 22 respondents considering them for brand awareness.

Frequency of purchasing ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook products

Table 4 indicates the frequency of different food items summarising the consumption frequency of selected ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook food items among the respondents.

The tabulated data in table 4 illustrates a clear preference for ready-to-eat high-sugar

high-fat foods over ready-to-cook products among consumers. Specifically, biscuits and bread stand out as the most frequently purchased items, with 44% and 33% of respondents indicating a preference for these products weekly, respectively. Following closely behind the packed half-cooked chapatis, which garnered a significant 27% of the respondents' preference in weekly purchases. Additionally, masala powders were noted as being frequently purchased, with 29% of respondents expressing a preference for them. Junk food such as noodles, pasta, fried chicken, ready-to-drink beverages and ice cream are preferred to buy twice a week or occasionally. Frequency of purchasing different food ingredients, such as ready-to-cook and ready-to-use, and consuming high-fat, sugar and salt-convenience food is more frequently bought than healthy food choices. Biscuits and bread are the most frequently purchased items. The packed half-cooked chapatis were bought weekly. Masala powders and breakfast ingredients were noted as frequently purchased.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies the food consumption patterns in Kannur district, Kerala, with a growing preference for convenience foods across various socio-demographic groups. The primary drivers of this trend are convenience, time efficiency, and variety. Higher-income and better-educated groups are more likely to dine out frequently, while rural residents are influenced by the easy availability of convenience foods. Despite the widespread consumption, convenience foods account for less than 10% of monthly income for most individuals, consistent with Engel's law of consumption. Marketing and advertising, especially via social media, significantly influence consumer choices. Additionally, the frequent purchase of items such as biscuits, bread and masala powders highlights the

increasing reliance on ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook products. This shift underscores the necessity for heightened awareness about the nutritional quality of convenience foods and the potential health consequences of their increased consumption.

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