

CONSUMER PREFERENCES AND PERCEPTION TOWARDS READY-TO-EAT FOODS AMONG URBAN CONSUMERS IN BERHAMPUR CITY, ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

Rapid urbanization and evolving lifestyles have significantly increased the consumption of Ready-to-Eat (RTE) food products in developing cities. This cross-sectional study examines the availability, popularity, nutritional perceptions and consumer preferences regarding RTE foods in Berhampur City, Odisha. A structured questionnaire was administered to 100 respondents selected through random sampling from urban and semi-urban areas. Results revealed that 55% of consumers occasionally consume RTE foods, primarily driven by convenience (50%) and taste (45-50%). While 45% of respondents perceived RTE food availability as neutral to adequate, 35% considered these products popular in the local market. Notably, 36% of consumers preferred healthy/organic RTE options, indicating rising health consciousness. However, 46% expressed skepticism about the balanced nutritional value of RTE foods, with 37% rating nutritional quality as poor. The study identifies convenience, taste and affordability as primary purchase drivers, while health benefits and brand reputation exert minimal influence. These findings provide valuable insights for manufacturers, retailers, and policymakers to balance convenience with nutritional quality in the growing RTE food sector.

Keywords: Berhampur, Consumer preferences, Food consumption patterns, Market dynamics, Nutritional value, Ready-to-Eat foods

INTRODUCTION

The global food industry has witnessed remarkable transformation in recent decades, with Ready-to-Eat (RTE) food products emerging as a significant segment driven by urbanization, lifestyle changes, and increasing workforce participation Asioli *et al.*(2017). In India, the RTE food market has expanded substantially, particularly in tier-2 and tier-3 cities where traditional eating patterns are

gradually shifting toward convenience-oriented food choices (Temgire & Borah, 2021).

Berhampur, known as the “Silk City” of Odisha, represents a typical example of urban transformation in southern India. With a population of approximately 421,000 and a literacy rate of 90%, the city serves as an important commercial and educational hub Census of India (2011). The increasing student population, working professionals, and

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nuclear families have contributed to growing demand for convenient food options. During emergencies such as cyclones and floods-common in coastal Odisha-RTE foods serve as essential food sources, further highlighting their significance in the regional context.

RTE foods encompass a wide range of products including packaged snacks, instant noodles, frozen meals, pre-cooked dishes, and microwaveable products that require minimal preparation before consumption. While these products offer undeniable convenience, concerns persist regarding their nutritional adequacy, high sodium and preservative content, and potential health implications. Understanding consumer perceptions, preferences, and purchasing behavior is crucial for developing healthier RTE options that align with both convenience needs and nutritional requirements.

Despite the growing RTE food market in India, limited research has examined consumer behavior and market dynamics in smaller cities like Berhampur. This study with the objective to analyze consumer preferences and factors influencing purchasing decisions and examine consumer perceptions regarding the nutritional value of RTE foods, addresses this gap by investigating the availability, popularity, nutritional perceptions, and factors influencing RTE food consumption in Berhampur City, providing insights applicable to similar urban centers in developing regions.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A descriptive study was conducted in Berhampur City, Odisha, during 2024-2025. The study employed a mixed-method approach combining quantitative data collection with qualitative insights. A total of 100 respondents were recruited through random sampling from various locations across urban (55%) and

semi-urban (45%) areas of Berhampur City. The sample included students, working professionals, and homemakers representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire comprised five sections:

1. Demographic information (age, gender, income, occupation, residential area)
2. RTE food consumption patterns and availability
3. Factors influencing purchase decisions
4. Nutritional awareness and perceptions
5. Consumer preferences and trends

The questionnaire included both closed-ended and multiple-choice questions utilizing Likert scales for rating responses. Data were collected through social media platforms and personal networks, ensuring diverse representation across demographic segments. Collected data were compiled and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution and percentage analysis. Results were presented through tables and graphical representations (bar graphs and pie charts) to facilitate interpretation of consumer behavior trends and market dynamics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Demographic Profile

The demographic analysis revealed (Table 1) that the majority of respondents (69%) belonged to the 18-24 age group, indicating predominant participation by young adults, particularly students and early-career professionals. Male respondents constituted 64% of the sample. The middle-class income group represented 53% of respondents, followed by lower class (29%) and upper class (18%), reflecting the socio-economic

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (n=100)

Demographic Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18-24 years	69
	25-34 years	26
	35-44 years	2
	45-54 years	2
	55+ years	1
Gender	Male	64
	Female	35
	Others	1
Income Level	Upper class	18
	Middle class	53
	Lower class	29
Residential Area	Urban	55
	Semi-urban	45

composition of Berhampur City. The distribution between urban (55%) and semi-urban (45%) areas ensured adequate representation from different residential zones.

Consumption Patterns and Availability of RTE Food

Frequency of Consumption : From fig.1, among respondents, 55% reported consuming RTE foods “sometimes,” while 25% consumed them “rarely.” Only 5% never consumed RTE foods, and 12% consumed them “often.” This indicates moderate consumption patterns with occasional usage being most prevalent, similar to findings by Tam *et al.* (2017) among university populations.

Availability Perception: Regarding RTE food availability in Berhampur City (Fig. 2), 45% of respondents rated it as “neutral” (neither low nor high), while 30% perceived availability as “high.” Only 13% considered availability “low,” suggesting that RTE products are reasonably accessible through supermarkets, local stores, and online

platforms, consistent with the expansion of modern retail formats in tier-2 cities (Jena & Palta singh, 2023).

Popularity Assessment: When asked about RTE food popularity, 35% of respondents considered these products “popular,” 26% remained neutral, and 15% rated them as “very popular.” Only 1% viewed RTE foods as “not popular.” (illustrate from Fig.3) This indicates growing acceptance and market penetration, though awareness and adoption could be further enhanced.

Factors Influencing Purchase Decisions

Fig. 4 illustrate the primary drivers for purchasing Ready-To-Eat (RTE) food among consumers in Berhampur City are centered on sensory appeal and practicality. Taste emerged as the most influential factor, cited by 29% of respondents. This is followed closely by Convenience (26%) and Affordability (24%), which represent the core utility of RTE products for the urban consumer.

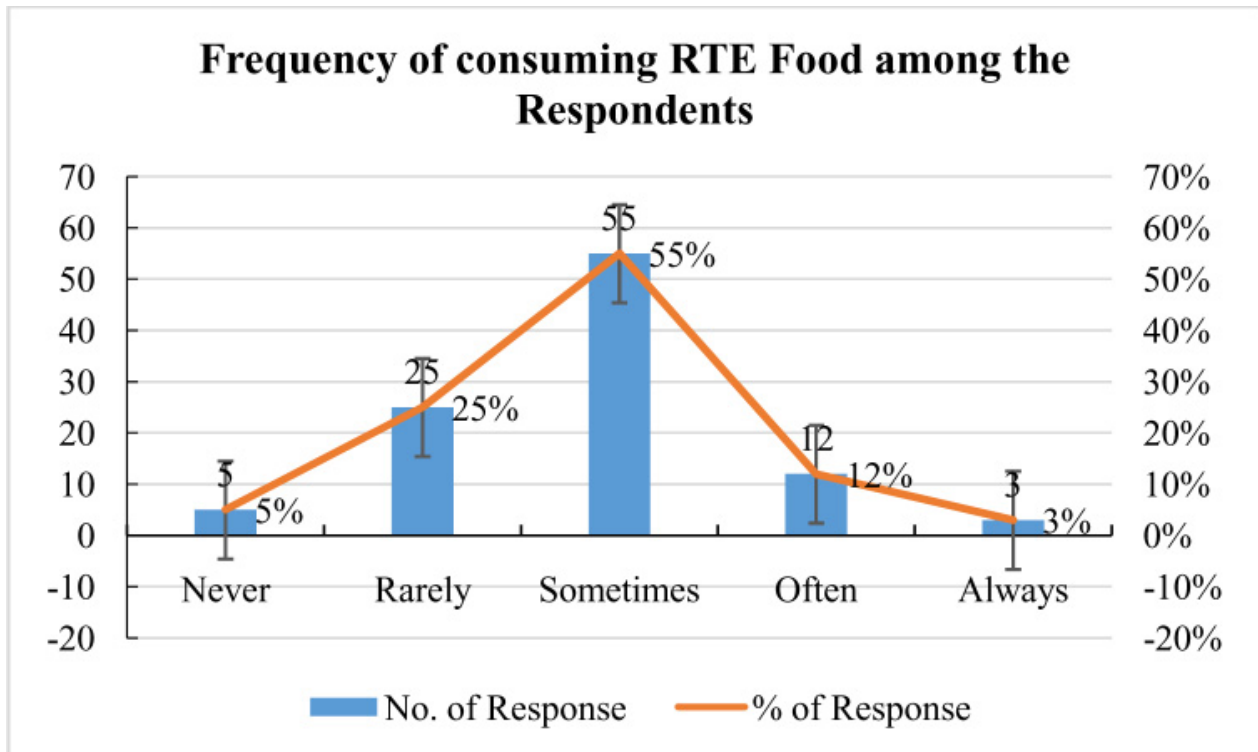


Fig. 1. Frequency of consuming RTE Food among the Respondents

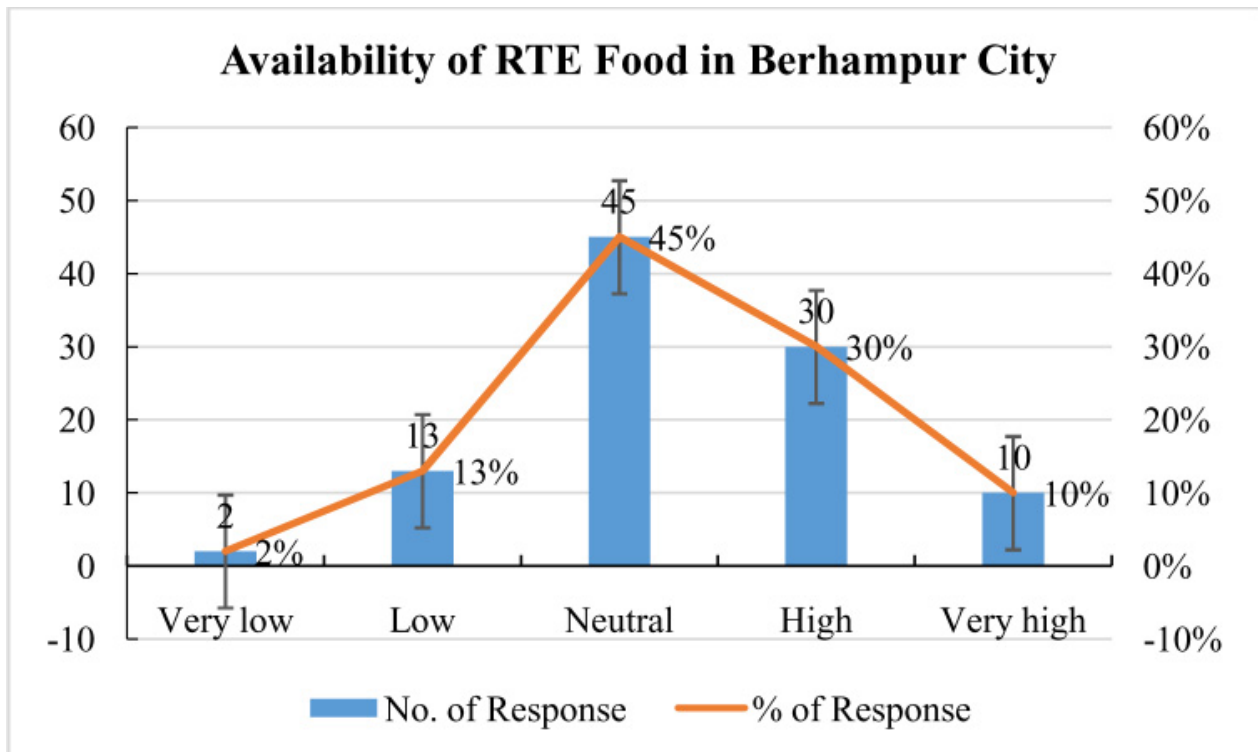


Fig. 2. Availability of RTE Food in Berhampur City

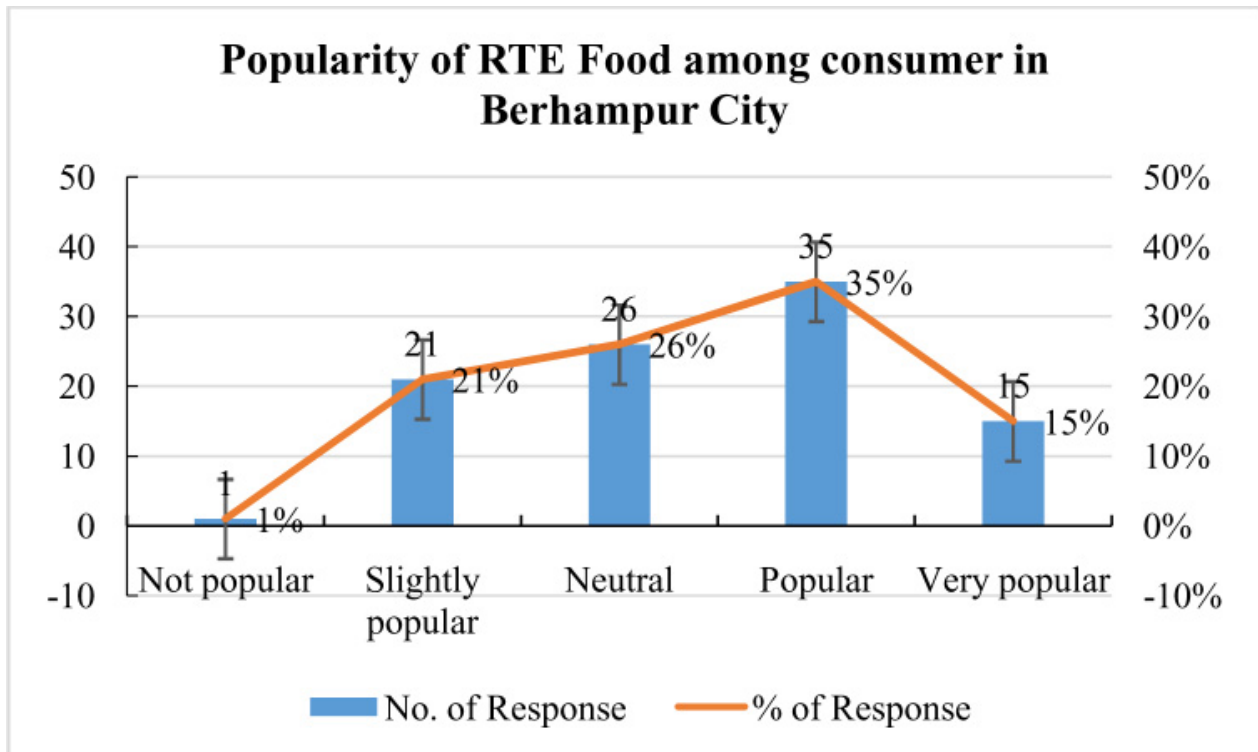


Fig. 3. Popularity of RTE Food among consumer in Berhampur City

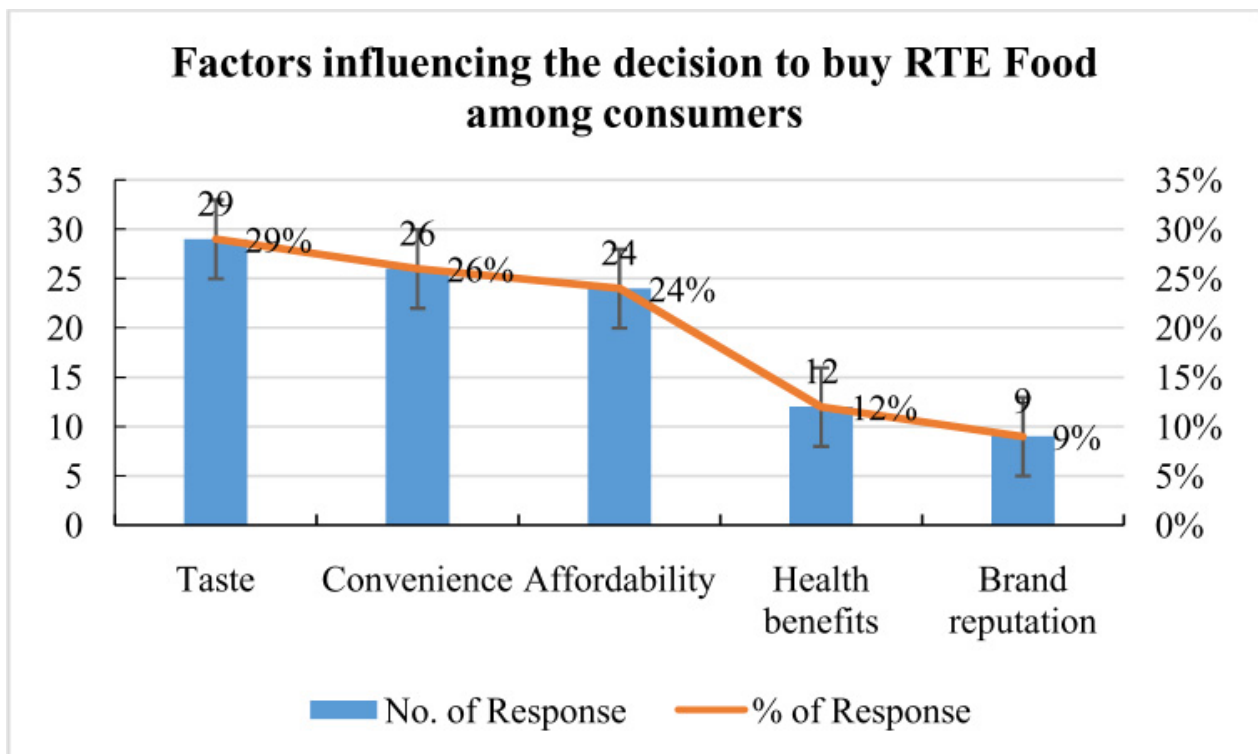


Fig. 4. Popularity of RTE Food among consumer in Berhampur City Consumer Preferences and Trends

In contrast, Health benefits (12%) and Brand reputation (9%) played a significantly smaller role in the decision-making process. This disparity suggests that for the majority of consumers, pragmatic considerations like immediate gratification and ease of access outweigh long-term health concerns or brand loyalty.

These findings align with research by Imtiyaz and Soni (2022), who identified convenience and specific product attributes as the primary determinants of RTE food purchases in emerging economies.

The dominance of convenience as a purchase driver reflects the time-constrained lifestyles of urban populations, particularly working professionals and students. However, the relatively low emphasis on health benefits raises concerns about nutritional awareness and long-term dietary implications.

The highest preference for healthy/organic RTE options (36%) indicates emerging health consciousness among consumers, reflecting broader trends toward clean-label and organic food products Siddiqui *et al.*, (2022). Packaged snacks (34%) and instant noodles (21%) remain popular due to their widespread availability and affordability. The relatively low preference for frozen meals (6%) may be attributed to concerns about freshness and limited cold storage infrastructure in households.

Consumer Perceptions and Awareness on RTE foods

Nutritional Value Rating: Consumer perceptions of RTE food nutritional value were mixed: 29% remained neutral, 27% rated it as “good,” while 24% considered it “poor” and 13% “very poor.” Only 7% rated nutritional

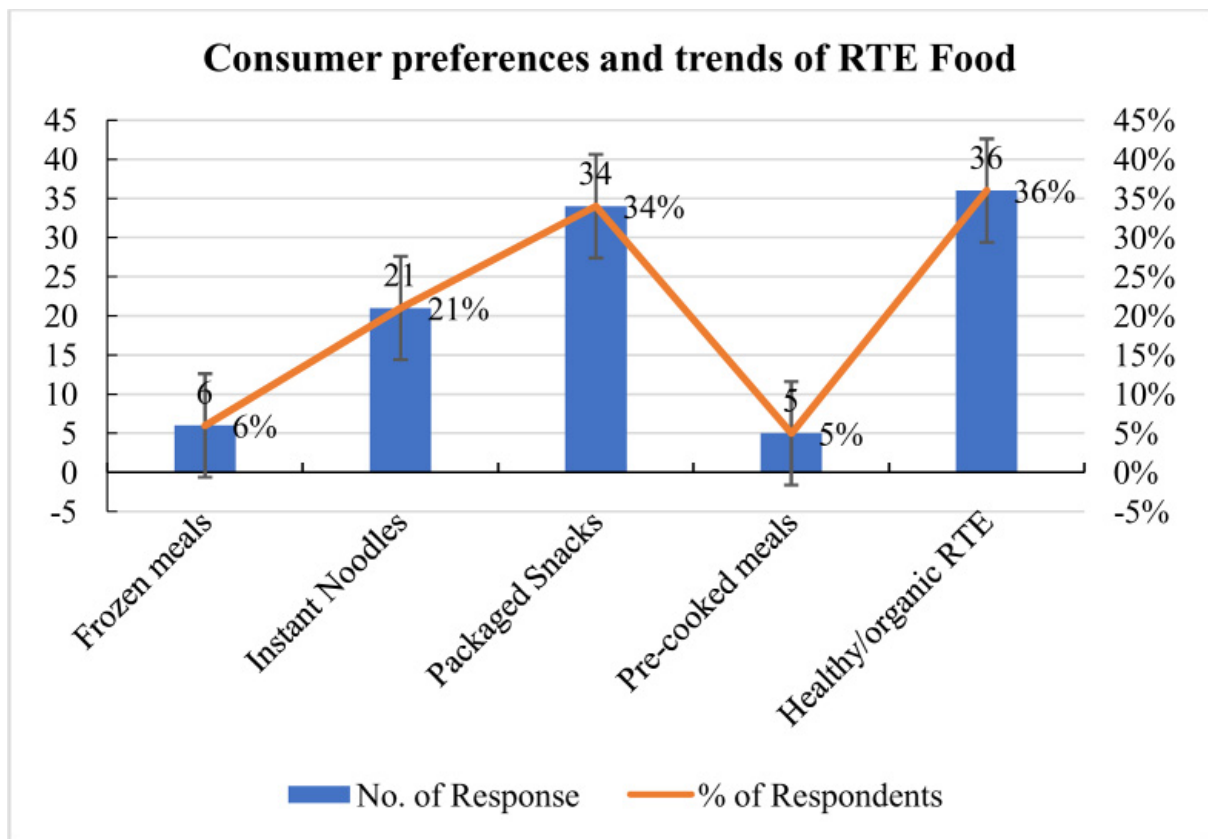


Fig. 5. Consumer preferences and trends of RTE Food

Table 2. Consumer Perceptions and Awareness on RTE foods (n=100)

Section	SL No.	Responses	No.of respondents Respondents	% of the
Nutritional value of Ready to Eat Food	1	Very poor	13	13%
	2	Poor	24	24%
	3	Neutral	29	29%
	4	Good	27	27%
	5	Very good	7	7%
Balanced nutrition provides by RTE Food	1	Strongly disagree	9	9%
	2	Disagree	37	37%
	3	Neutral	29	29%
	4	Agree	20	20%
	5	Strongly agree	5	5%
Checking of ingredients and preservatives in RTE Food by the consumer	1	Never	7	7%
	2	Rarely	20	20%
	3	Sometimes	35	35%
	4	Often	14	14%
	5	Always	24	24%
Taste and quality of RTE Food	1	Very poor	2	2%
	2	Poor	8	8%
	3	Neutral	27	27%
	4	Good	52	52%
	5	Excellent	11	11%
Perceiving the price of RTE food by consumer	1	Very expensive	4	4%
	2	Expensive	24	24%
	3	Reasonable	31	31%
	4	Affordable	35	35%
	5	Very affordable	6	6%

value as “very good.” This skepticism aligns with findings by Remnant and Adams (2015), who reported high levels of saturated fat and salt in supermarket ready meals.

Balanced Nutrition Perception: A significant proportion (46%) disagreed that RTE foods provide balanced nutrition, while only 25% agreed. This skepticism reflects

growing consumer awareness about the nutritional limitations of processed foods, consistent with public health concerns about high sodium, sugar, and preservative content in RTE products Blake *et al.*(2021).

Ingredient Checking Behavior: Encouragingly, 35% of respondents “sometimes” check ingredients and

preservatives, while 24% “always” check. Only 7% never check ingredients, indicating rising health consciousness and label-reading behavior. This suggests opportunities for manufacturers to improve transparency and communicate nutritional information more effectively.

Taste and Quality: The majority of respondents (52%) rated RTE food taste and quality as “good,” while 27% remained neutral and 11% rated it as “excellent.” Only 10% expressed dissatisfaction (poor or very poor ratings), suggesting general acceptance of RTE food quality in terms of sensory attributes.

Price Perception: Regarding pricing, 35% of respondents perceived RTE foods as “affordable,” 31% as “reasonable,” and 24% as “expensive.” Only 4% considered them “very expensive.” This generally positive price perception indicates that RTE products are competitively priced for the target consumer segments in Berhampur.

CONCLUSION

The study provides comprehensive insights into the consumer preferences and market dynamics of Ready-to-Eat (RTE) foods in Berhampur City. While convenience, taste, and affordability remain the primary drivers of consumption, a growing skepticism regarding nutritional quality presents a significant challenge for the industry. The rising preference for healthy and organic RTE options signals a shift in consumer expectations toward products that successfully balance convenience with nutrition. To address these evolving needs, a multi-stakeholder approach is essential. Manufacturers are encouraged to improve nutritional profiles by reducing sodium, sugar, and preservatives while adopting clean-label practices and vitamin fortification. Retailers should expand

the availability of healthy options and create dedicated sections for organic products, while policymakers must establish firm nutritional standards and mandate transparent labeling. Ultimately, consumers are urged to develop better label-reading skills and incorporate RTE foods judiciously into a balanced diet, advocating for a marketplace that prioritizes both ease and well-being.

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