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A STUDY ON THE PERCEPTION OF YOUTH TOWARDS FAST FOOD

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Abstract:

The latest socio-cultural shift we are witnessing is the increasing demand towards healthy eating. This is largely due to increased media exposure and awareness of the hazards of junk food. Youth nowadays is looking for healthy substitutes which exhibits a change in eating habits. This study tries to find out the change in perception of youth towards healthy eating, as it is always assumed that youth prefer junk food.

Our research focuses on identifying the correlation between demographic profiles and perception towards healthy eating habits. It further studies the relationship between perception of healthy eating habits and consumption of soft drinks, instant noodles and fast food. A sample of 200 respondents between the age group 18-35 years were taken for the study. Three top of the mind brands - Maggi, McDonald's, and Pepsi were taken for the study. Statistical tools were used to analyze the collected data. Bivariate statistical tools were used to analyze data and the findings suggested that there is a direct correlation between perception of healthy eating habits and consumption of Maggi, McDonald's and Pepsi.

Keywords: Healthy Eating; Consumption; Junk Food.

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1. Introduction

Fast food has become an integral part of the Indian diet especially of youth. Moreover, fast food stands for instant gratification and it has found its way into the lives of youth, because of this. Feature. Today's youth is experiencing a socio – cultural behavioral change where they want everything immediately and does not want to wait. But at the same time, they are health conscious and want to stay fit and healthy. This study tries to find out how the youth of today balances both these. Nielsen's 2015 Global Health & Wellness Survey that polled over 30,000 individuals online suggests that consumer mindset about healthy foods has shifted and they are ready to pay more for products that claim to boost health and weight loss. This has led to the creation of healthy fast foods. Global sales of healthy food products are estimated to reach \$1 trillion by 2017, according to Euromonitor.

Indian Scenario

India, a country known for its delicious parathas, ghee-laden curries, and sugary snacks is making healthy living a priority. Nearly half (48%) of Indian consumers surveyed by market intelligence firm Mintel are aiming for a healthier lifestyle in the coming years. Healthy living topped the list

of consumers' goals and aspirations for the next three years, ranking above better time management (30%), improving relationships with family and friends (25%), and travelling (24%) Local supermarkets are increasingly stocked with superfoods from around the world and nutritious traditional grains such as *ragi* (finger millet) and *jowar* (sorghum) have made a comeback in both households and trendy restaurants.

Moreover, snack food giants from Nestle to PepsiCo are tweaking their recipes to cut the salt, sugar, and fat in their noodles, chips, and sodas, besides introducing new products for the health-conscious consumer. Mintel says that in Asia it's India that witnessed the greatest number of "natural" food products being launched between 2012 and 2016. "Natural" items accounted for 28% of all food products launched in the country last year, up from 22% in 2012. It is known worldwide that healthy and natural foods tend to be more expensive, and many think twice before making a purchase.

2. Literature Review

Many studies have been done in the area of the perception of youth towards fast food across the world. Ozdemir et al in the study "Consumer Preferences for Fast Food Brands: Evidence from an Emerging Country" says that young consumers were heavily influenced by the convenience and consistency elements of fast food restaurants. The brand's reputation was also reported to be a prominent factor in their restaurant selection though these young consumers reported to be fond of the burger and French fries at well-known global brands such as MDonald's & Burger King, They liked to get quick, high quality fast food meals at affordable prices with a consistent taste and service level.

Goochani et al in the paper titled "Factors influencing Iranian consumers' attitudes toward fast-food consumption" reveals that "health consciousness" and "trust" are the main effective factors on the attitudes of the respondents. The results also revealed that the elder and married respondents have more positive attitudes toward fast-food consumption.

Elwood D. Watson says that, "younger consumers are far more concerned about everything from food ingredients, genetically modified food to organic foods than previous generations. Indeed, an obsession with healthy and clean eating seems to be the order of the day." S Johnson and Phillip Morgue say that, "A higher frequency of eating out and having fast food was also reported. This may be because majority of the youngsters lived in hostels. They had their meals in the mess/canteen, where the food variety was limited. Fresh fruits and vegetables are seldom available in the university canteen. Skipping of meals, especially breakfast, was also observed in nearly one-third ($n = 19$) of the students. It was a matter of concern since skipping meals is bad for the health of students who need sufficient energy and nutritive diet, as they live an active life."

Vinayak Shah & Agnima Dutta says that, "Through analyzing past attempts at making healthier lifestyle choices, we saw how the removal of unhealthy behaviors often left a social and emotional void that people did not anticipate, and which exacerbated feelings of boredom and loneliness, making sustaining change very difficult to maintain. For example, after the initial novelty of a new healthy eating regime wears off, people were left with a limited repertoire of healthy foods, which often lead to boredom.

Kristen Benedict says that, “While levels of motivation and ability to make healthier lifestyle changes vary, most participants claimed that they would like to feel and/or look 'healthier'; being overweight and smoking were not aspirational behaviors for anyone. Broader cultural trends, such as the increasing demonization of smoking had played a role in priming and helping to motivate change. Nonetheless, it was clear that because people's immediate spheres of influence predisposed them to unhealthy behaviors, there was a need to normalize a healthier lifestyle in a relevant way for the audience.”

Linda Klabacha says that, “Taste is 'king': six out of ten shoppers choose food and beverages just because they taste good. In fact, almost half of the shoppers believe that healthy foods taste better. Only about one in four shoppers are willing to sacrifice taste or convenience for health benefits.” Margot Sanger Katz says that, “Over the last 20 years, sales of full-calorie soda in the United States have plummeted by more than 25 percent. Soda consumption, which rocketed from the 1960s through 1990s, is now experiencing a serious and sustained decline.”

Alison Grizwald says that, “That we aren’t drinking Coke and Pepsi at the rates we used to be isn’t surprising. People are more worried about sugar content and obesity. This time last year, an industry analyst told the New York Times that carbonated beverages were “in precipitous decline.”

3. Need/Importance

The idea of researching in this area was generated by taking into consideration the current socio-economic trends and the previous studies conducted in the area. There hasn’t been much research done in the area of health-conscious youth and fast food consumption. But this time its quite evident that the trends are going to stay for long and the lifestyle is going to change for the better. The study was done with respect to 2 top brands – McDonald’s and Maggi. The chosen brands are the top-of-the-mind recall brands and their rising/falling consumption patterns speak a lot more than just numbers. The consumption patterns are sharply changing, and the purchase intention of such products reflect a lot of things, among which, one can be the levels of health consciousness and the change in lifestyle. The research focuses on identifying whether the consumption patterns are related to the purchase intention of the above-mentioned brands. This research would throw some light on the changing perception of people in India with respect to their changing purchase intentions.

4. Objectives

- 1) To find out the influence of socio-cultural factors on the perception towards Healthy Eating Habits.
- 2) To find out if there is any correlation between Healthy Eating Habits and consumption pattern and Purchase Intention of McDonald’s & Maggi brands.

5. Research Methodology

The study was conducted in 3 phases:

Phase I- Eating habits were observed to be changing constantly with time. We interviewed people and asked what being healthy means to them. They came up with habits like eating healthy, eating

fresh, gyming and exercising, calorie count consuming less of fast food and instant noodles. After identifying such changing perceptions, we also identified factors like taste, temptation and influence of the surroundings which play an important role in deciding whether to eat healthy or not.

Phase II- Healthy eating habits, as defined by our interviewees, hinted us on change in consumption pattern of certain categories of food stuffs. Two such categories which we decided to do our research on are fast food and instant noodles. The top of the mind recalls brands (as interviewed) were chosen- Maggi and McDonald’s.

Phase III- Questionnaire was prepared and a sample space of 200 was taken. Different statistical and analytical tools like SPSS, Excel were used to draw the inferences and conclusions. Hypothesis were formed, and results and findings are presented as follows:

Usage of research tools like SPSS and filling up of questionnaires has provided us with a lot of genuine data on perception, demographics and the purchase intention of consumers. Using the statistical tools and knowledge, the research would turn out to be high on relevancy and accuracy. Both bivariate and multi variate statistical techniques are used to analyses the data.

Research Framework

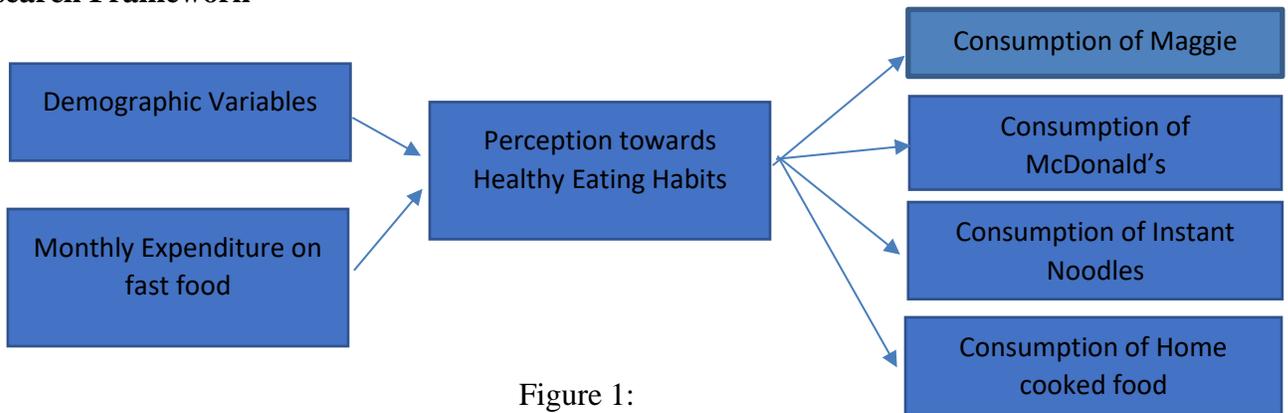


Figure 1:

6. Hypothesis and Findings

1a –H0–There is no significant difference between Gender and perception towards healthy eating habits

Table 1:

| Parameters | Sig (2- tailed) values |
|------------------|------------------------|
| Health Conscious | .207 |
| Calorie count | .831 |
| Exercise | .213 |
| Diet | .496 |
| Taste | .376 |
| Temptation | .952 |
| Influence | .390 |

Interpretation – In the above test all the sig (2-tailed) values are >0.05, therefore our null / H0 hypothesis is accepted. We can conclude that there is no significant difference between different genders and the perception towards healthy eating habits. Irrespective of gender, the consumption pattern remains same.

1b – H₀ – There is no significant difference between marital status and perception towards healthy eating habits.

Table 2:

| Parameters | Sig(2-tailed) values |
|------------------|----------------------|
| Health Conscious | .168 |
| Calorie count | .228 |
| Exercise | .869 |
| Diet | .636 |
| Taste | .926 |
| Temptation | .413 |
| Influence | .919 |

Interpretation - In the above test all the sig (2-tailed) values are >0.05, therefore our null / H₀ hypothesis is accepted. We can conclude that there is no significant difference between marital status and the perception towards healthy eating habits.

1c – H₀ – There is no significant difference between employment status and perception towards healthy eating habits.

Table 3:

| Parameters | Sig Values of Anova Table |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| Health Conscious | .842 |
| Calorie count | .075 |
| Exercise | .329 |
| Diet | .846 |
| Taste | .120 |
| Temptation | .139 |
| Influence | .339 |

Interpretation - - In the above test all the sig Anova table values are >0.05, therefore our null / H₀ hypothesis is accepted. We can conclude that there is no significant difference between employment status and the perception towards healthy eating habits.

1d. – H₀ – There is no significant difference between monthly income/pocket money and perception towards healthy eating habits

Table 4:

| Parameters | Sig Anova table values |
|------------------|------------------------|
| Health Conscious | .442 |
| Calorie count | .592 |
| Exercise | .776 |
| Diet | .539 |
| Taste | .024* |
| Temptation | .022* |
| Influence | .156 |

* There is significance i.e a value < 0.05

Interpretation – In the above test all the sig Anova table values, except , Taste and Temptation , are > 0.05 for which we accept the HO hypothesis which means there is no significant difference between monthly income/ pocket money and parameters such as health consciousness , calorie counting, exercising , dieting and influence of surroundings. In the case of taste and temptation since the values are < 0.05 , we reject the HO hypothesis which means that there is significant difference between monthly income/ pocket money and parameters like taste and temptation. Income plays an important role in consumption of fast food among youth.

1e – HO – There is no significant difference between monthly expenditure on fast food and perception towards healthy eating habits

Table 5:

| Parameters | Sig Anova values |
|------------------|------------------|
| Health Conscious | .332 |
| Calorie count | .452 |
| Exercise | .963 |
| Diet | .540 |
| Taste | .090 |
| Temptation | .001* |
| Influence | .110 |

* There is significance i.e a value < 0.05

Interpretation – In the above test all the sig Anova table values, except, Temptation , are > 0.05 for which we accept the HO hypothesis which means there is no significant difference between monthly expenditure on fast food and parameters such as health consciousness , calorie counting, exercising , dieting, taste and influence of surroundings. In the case of temptation since the value is < 0.05 , we reject the HO hypothesis which means that there is significant difference between monthly expenditure on fast food and parameters like temptation.

2a – HO – There is no significant correlation between the perception towards healthy eating habits and the purchase intention of instant noodles.

Table 6:

| Parameters | Pearson Correlation Sig (2 tailed test) = r | Inference |
|------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Health Conscious | -0.281* | Weak negative correlation |
| Calorie count | -0.240* | Weak negative correlation |
| Exercise | -0.064 | Very weak negative correlation |
| Diet | -0.128 | Very weak negative correlation |
| Taste | 0.138 | Very weak positive correlation |
| Temptation | 0.332* | Weak positive correlation |
| Influence | 0.373* | Weak positive correlation |

* the level of significance is 0.01

Interpretation - We performed Pearson coefficient test on the above data and the Level of Significance is 0.05 and 0.01(marked with *). The inference has been drawn and we can say that there is some correlation (negative/positive) between the perception towards healthy eating habits and purchase of instant noodles.

2b – H0 – There is no significant correlation between the perception towards healthy eating habits and consumption of Maggi.

Table 7:

| Parameters | Pearson Correlation Sig (2 tailed test) = r | Inference |
|------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Health Conscious | -0.85 | Very strong negative correlation |
| Calorie count | -0.164 | Very weak negative correlation |
| Exercise | -0.069 | Very weak negative correlation |
| Diet | -0.162 | Very weak negative correlation |
| Taste | 0.031 | Very weak positive correlation |
| Temptation | 0.168 | Very weak positive correlation |
| Influence | -0.001 | Very weak negative correlation |

Interpretation - We performed Pearson coefficient test on the above data and the Level of Significance is 0.05. The inference has been drawn and we can say that there is some correlation (negative/positive) between the perception towards healthy eating habits and consumption of Maggi.

2c – H0 – There is no significant correlation between the perception towards healthy eating habits and preference of home cooked food than dining out.

Table 8:

| Parameters | Pearson Correlation Sig (2 tailed test) = r | Inference |
|------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Health Conscious | -0.240* | Weak negative correlation |
| Calorie count | -0.177 | Very weak negative correlation |
| Exercise | -0.023 | Very weak negative correlation |
| Diet | -0.291* | Weak negative correlation |
| Taste | 0.180 | Very weak positive correlation |
| Temptation | 0.317* | Weak positive correlation |
| Influence | 0.291* | Weak positive correlation |

* the level of significance is 0.01

Interpretation - We performed Pearson coefficient test on the above data and the Level of Significance is 0.05 and 0.01(marked with *). The inference has been drawn and we can say that there is some correlation (negative/positive) between the perception towards healthy eating habits and preference of home cooked food than dining out.

2d – H0- There is no significant correlation between the perception towards healthy eating habits and preference towards McDonald's whenever dining out.

Table 9:

| Parameters | Pearson Correlation Sig (2 tailed test) = r | Inference |
|------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Health Conscious | -0.13 | Very weak negative correlation |
| Calorie count | 0.033 | Very weak positive correlation |
| Exercise | 0.182* | Very weak positive correlation |
| Diet | 0.035 | Very weak positive correlation |
| Taste | 0.051 | Very weak positive correlation |
| Temptation | 0.098 | Very weak positive correlation |
| Influence | 0.351* | Weak positive correlation |

* The level of significance is 0.0

Interpretation - Pearson coefficient test on the above data and the Level of Significance is 0.05 and 0.01 (marked with *). The inference has been drawn and we can say that there is some correlation (negative/positive) between the perception towards healthy eating habits and preference of McDonald's whenever dining out.

7. Conclusions

The world is moving towards healthy eating habits. Eating habits are constantly changing. People are becoming more health conscious and are shifting towards a healthy lifestyle. Our research findings prove that people are getting more aware of healthy lifestyles and food stuffs which can add to their calories. The purchase intention and consumption of brands like, Maggi and McDonald's are observed to be decreasing. This might be an indication of people getting health conscious and shift of food culture from junk food to healthy food. They consume more so due to temptation and not need. This may lead to guilt later and there by resulting in more exercising and trying to stay fit. The findings shows that there is a clear rise in demand for home cooked food and it could be because of the increasing awareness of negative effects of junk food.

8. Future Scope

Since the world is moving towards healthy lifestyle, there is a very huge demand for healthy eating and fast foods. Though many studies have been done in this area and so there is a tremendous scope for research in the area of consumption of healthy fast food. Such studies can also help future entrepreneurs who can explore these sectors.

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