

A Comparative Study on the Benefits of Convenience Foods to Working & Non-Working Women

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Abstract: *India is witnessing a drastic change in the segment of convenience food especially in the last decade and a half. More and more companies are venturing into the convenience food sector as well as international companies who also want to invest in this sector looking at the growth potential. The working women apart from their jobs, career, meetings and targets are also a part of a family where she needs to take care of their meals too where as non-working women are also busy with their household chores and both look up to serve the best possible meal to their family. This study aims at finding out about the use of convenience food by working and non-working women and of their need to choose, the type of convenience food they generally prefer and what benefits they see by using such a convenient product. The primary data for this study has been collected through questionnaire from non-working women and women of various working segments and the same has been presented in graphical form for clear understanding while the secondary data has been collected through literature review of various research papers, articles and books.*

Key Words: *Convenience Food, Processed Food, Working Women, Non-working Women*

Introduction

The term “convenience food” conjures up images of overly processed foods that are high in fat, sugar, and sodium and low in fiber and other nutrients. Convenience food often connotes a lack of effort or concern, whether by choice or necessity. Traditionally, convenience foods have not been the most healthful choices and often have been much costlier than home-cooked food. The last decade and half has seen a remarkable growth in the manufacture of convenience food industry in India and the working and non-working women are not left far behind in selecting such products for their family.

Over the years processed food has become one of the fastest

growing industries in world and Indian market is not far behind. The market for processed foods is still in the early stages in a developing economy like India but surely has a big impact to play in our daily diets. Food with convenience in cooking and purchase are finding entry into the Indian households. Of course taste habits, processed foods; new introductory products are no exception to this. The convenience food industries with the state of the art technology have been very successful in penetrating the local household in way of successful marketing and advertising of their products. These convenience foods have started replacing fresh and healthy food from consumers’ diet with processed food. The non-working women always ponder about the right kind of preparations that she needs to make for her family be it any time or any meal of the day. In this process she has to keep the choices of her family members into account and try to strike a right equilibrium in her food preparation. She understands her family’s likes and dislikes; she has the perfect knack or the perfect blend of ingredients into her preparation. She will spend her time in the kitchen cutting, grinding, mixing and blending to prepare the best of her preparations for her family. This has been her domain for years and she has settled a routine for herself in this domain of hers. Nothing in the world can beat her taste! It wouldn’t be wrong to say that every Indian knows the best food prepared is said as “ma kehaathka” – (prepared by mother’s hands). Indian home food is all about the touch of mother’s hand which gives ‘THE TASTE’ to our food. Nothing in the world can beat her taste!

The non-working women often find convenience food to be a costly affair as compared to the food she prepares at home. She does find many products which are very similar to preparation that she would prepare at home. She is able to easily compare the costs that she incurs for her own preparation and for the similar product available in the market.

At the same time non-working women do not hesitate to try out a new product for her family just for a change in her daily routine or her family liking. Indian lifestyle has gone under a lot of changes in the last couple of decades. The term “mother is at home cooking food” seems to be diminishing and more of “mother is at her place of work” is heard. These mothers have now stepped out of their kitchens and homes to follow the path of their career. They too want to be independent, industrious and successful in the world outside their so called domain.

Many of these women still need to be at home for many of the reasons which included preparing for breakfast, lunch or dinner. This leaves them scurrying for their homes post duty hours so that dinner is prepared on time. So what will happen to one’s beloved dal, paneer or subzi which the family look forward in their dinner, if the mother cannot find enough time in her kitchen? Indian households today welcome food with convenience in cooking and purchase. Processed food and taste habits are no exception to this. The food industry has been very successful in replacing fresh and healthy food from consumers’ diet with processed food. Food diversity in India is an embedded characteristic of India’s diverse culture consisting of different regions and states within. Traditionally, Indians like to have home-cooked food – a concept supported religiously as well as individually. However, with times due to increasing awareness and influence of western culture, there is a visible shift in food consumption patterns among urban Indian families. It all started in the early 1990’s when families started exploring outside food in the restaurants and moved on to accepting a wide variety of delicacies from world-over. Fast food is one of the major examples which gained acceptance of Indian palate after the multinational fast food players adapted the basic Indian food requirements viz. vegetarian meals and selected non-vegetarian options excluding beef and pork totally from their menu. Convenience food is perceived expensive by people besides being out-of-way meals in Indian culture. In today’s scenario, convenience food industry is getting adapted to Indian type of requirements and is growing leaps and bounds in India. Convenience food is gaining acceptance primarily from Indian youth and younger generations and is becoming part of day to day life. Keeping in view the working and non-working women and changing

preferences towards convenience foods, this study has its focus to understand the benefits these women would obtain through utilization of convenience foods.

Definition

Convenience food: Convenience food, or tertiary processed food, is commercially prepared food designed for ease of consumption. (Source: www.google.com)

Processed food: Processed foods have been altered from their natural state for safety reasons and for convenience. (Source: www.answers.yahoo.com)

Packaged food: Basically packaged food is food that can be shipped somewhere. And the reason that they are packaged is because so they can be safe and keep out germs. (Source: www.wikianswers.com)

Review of Literature

Alan Warde (1999) "Convenience food: space and timing", emphasizes that many people are constrained to eat what they call convenience foods or tertiary processed food as a provisional response to inflexible problems of arranging day to day life. A distinction is drawn between modern and hypermodern forms of convenience, the first directed towards labour-saving or time compression, the second to time-shifting. It is maintained that convenience food is as much a hypermodern response to de-routinisation as it is a modern search for the reducing the overwork. Convenience food is required because people are too often in the wrong place; the impulse to time-shifting arises from the compulsion to plan ever more complex time-space paths in everyday life. The problem of timing supersedes the problem of shortage of time.

Anita Goyal and N P Singh (2007) in their research paper “Consumer perception about fast food in India: an exploratory study” indicate that the young Indian consumer has passion and inquisitiveness for visiting fast food outlets for fun and change but home food is their first choice. They feel homemade food is much better in quality in the sense of nutritional value, ,hygieness in the sense of preparation than food served at fast food outlets. These attributes are given highest value at any given choice.

Bernard Cova, Stefano Pace, (2006) "Brand community of convenience products: new forms of customer empowerment – the case “my Nutella The Community””, states that The

virtual community that gathers around a convenience product brand shows a new form of sociality and customer empowerment: it is not based on interaction between peers, but more on personal self-exhibition in front of other consumers through the marks and rituals linked to the brand. The company should play the role of non-intrusive enabler of these personal expressions, reducing its control over the brand's meanings. Dixon, Hinde, and Banwell, (2006) "Obesity, convenience and "phood"" have emphasized that in Australia the growing consumption of convenience foods is contributing to upward trends in obesity. It is argued that the functional food sector is well placed in a context where consumers are being encouraged to willingly adopt convenient food solutions, while also being concerned about the nutritional qualities of foods. Gray, Armstrong, and Farley, (2003) "Opportunities and constraints in the functional food market" review that the main food choice trends driving consumer demand for functional foods and the constraints limiting market development. Considers previous research activity in the functional food arena and subsequently identifies paramount research priorities that may facilitate the development of products that will help satisfy consumer demands for convenience, health and sensory pleasure. Jabir A, Sanjeev K and Janakiraman M (2010) in their study "Buying behaviour of consumers for food products in an emerging economy" emphasize the preferences of the consumers clearly indicate their priority for cleanliness/freshness of food products followed by price, quality, variety, packaging, and non-seasonal availability. The consumers' preference of marketplace largely depends on the convenience in purchasing at the marketplace along with the availability of additional services, attraction for children, basic amenities and affordability. Janaína Costa, Rafael Claro, Ana Paula, Renata Levy (2013) "Food Purchasing Sites: Repercussions For Healthy Eating" have stresses that changes in the food system are associated with the increase in consumption of foods with low nutritional value in recent decades. Data on food purchasing for household consumption, collected from the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE - Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) Household Budget Survey (HBS) in 2002-3, were

used to describe the contribution of food purchasing sites (FPS) to the diet of Brazilian families. All the 241 distinct FPS mentioned in the HBS were grouped into ten categories, according to the nature of the products available. Food acquisitions were organized into seven groups. Supermarkets and hypermarkets accounted for 49% of the acquisitions and were the main source of six out of the seven food groups. Street markets and greengroceries stood out in the acquisitions of fruits and vegetables, accounting for 39% of this market. The large contribution of supermarkets and hypermarkets to the diet shows the need for healthy eating promotion policies aiming at these locations. Joglekar A and Kundle S (2013) "Consumer awareness about convenience food among working and non-working women" have opined that Convenience food is the result of modern technological advances in the field of food processing, preservation techniques and the invention of various newer food additives. Convenience foods minimise the working time but it doesn't save us from consuming high preservatives, extra sodium and hydrogenated fats Kara, Kaynak and Kucukemiroglu (1997) state in their study "Marketing strategies for fast-food restaurants: a customer view" that; in recent years, a major food consumption trend in the USA and Canada is that more people are eating more meals outside their homes. It is predicted that this trend will accelerate in the future. As a result, fast-food markets will offer greater growth opportunities for marketers. RituAnand (2011), "A study of determinants impacting consumers food choice with reference to the fast food consumption in India", signifies the key determinants impacting consumers food choice are passion for eating out, socialize, ambience and taste for school and college goers and convenience for dual-income families in urban India. Findings indicate that fast food companies can no longer rely on convenience as USP in India, unless the implications of same on consumer's health is given equal importance in the years to come. Sunder S and Kiran S (2016) in their research paper "A Study On The Benefits of Convenience Foods To Non-Working Women" feel that the working women find it difficult to get hand on time to prepare food from scratch with their hectic life schedule. They tend to look out for ways where they can reduce their cooking time

using different means. They are also aware of the various products that they can use for their convenience. Sunder S and Kiran S (2015) in their research paper “A Study On The Benefits of Convenience Foods To Working Women” have emphasized that the working women are slowly adapting to concept of the use of convenience foods as they have realized various factors that are enabling them to save time by reducing preparation time, bringing in variety in preparations and also are able to use it during emergency situations. Tiwari P and Verma H (2008) in their research paper “Consumer Perception About Fast Food in India: An Empirical Study of Dehradun City” point out that fast food is one of the world's fastest growing food types. It now accounts for roughly half of all restaurant revenues in the developed countries, where it continues to expand. However, some of the most rapid growth is occurring in the developing world; where it is radically changing the way people eat. People buy fast food because it is cheap, easy to prepare, and heavily promoted. According to the article featured on www.fnbnews.com, 11th October 2011 there has been a major shift in food habits in the metropolitan cities, about 86% of households prefer to have instant food due to steep rise in dual income level and standard of living, convenience, and influence of western countries, according to a survey undertaken by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham).

Objectives of the study

1. To compare the factors influencing the use of convenience foods by working and non-working women.
2. To compare the categories of convenience foods preferred by working and non-working women.
3. To compare the preference of various categories of convenience foods by working and non-working women.
4. To compare the explored benefits of convenience foods for working and non-working women.

Research Methodology

Data collection: The primary data required for the research was collected using the following techniques:

Personal interviews: The researcher conducted personal interview with non-working and women working in various fields.

Questionnaire: A questionnaire bearing straight forward and

relevant questions was drafted and handed over to the sample to obtain their responses.

Sample technique: The population being “working women” & “non-working”, this study was conducted on more than 100 working & non-working women each between the age group of 25 to above 60 years. All the samples were selected randomly from the various areas of Pune city. Apart from the above mentioned tools the relevant secondary data for the research was collected from journals, books and internet.

Observations and Discussions:

Factors Influencing the Choice of Convenience Food

Non-working women tends to look for options to cook food during her day to day routine. She would play multiple roles in her family which keeps her thinking cap on throughout the day. With a fixed working time as a working woman, She adjusts her routine on day to day basis to ensure adequate time is available to do all the processes involved in the cooking which at various stages i.e. right from shopping groceries, pre-processing, processing, cooking, cleaning / clearing and serving of food. She seldom would look for ways in which she can reduce her cooking time for the various meals in a day. For the uncertainty of few ingredients in market or around the place nearby, and like or dislikes of ingredients by family members ,will might lead her to very easily pick up somewhere distant from her place of living. A working woman is career oriented and tends to look for options to cook food where she has to play multiple roles in her day. Her work timings will not allow her with adequate time to do all the processes involved in cooking at various stages i.e. right from buying grocery, pre-processing, processing, cooking, cleaning / clearing and serving of food. She often looks for ways to reduce her cooking time be it any meal in a day. The situation of unavailability of Certain ingredients at or around the living place or likes or dislikes of family members. Working women would prefer to pick up such ingredient that might be available somewhere distant from her place of living which is not the case with non-working women. Working and non-working woman both constantly ensure that a variety of ingredients are used in the preparation of their daily meals. This variety also ensures different tastes, textures and also nutritional benefits that go into the thought\planning process while preparing

food. The non-working women do not have elaborate plans or preplanning made for coming days together; they might just pick up fresh ingredients during the day for her preparations whereas the working women mostly in advance or preplan their preparations hence making it a little easy to pick up the ingredients for the same. Working and non-working woman both are always prepared for situations that they might come across when she has to prepare food for surprise guests or additional people for meals; hence they keep some convenience stuff handy at home for such situations. Non working women have constant exchange of recipes and ideas of new preparation with other womens which also helps her to keep up to the ever demanding kids\members of the house. Both segments also go on to experiment on certain new preparations that is available in the market to appease her family or one could also consider that might be completely lost with what recipe must she follow for preparing something new. Working women may also be tired from their duty and may not want to cook for that particular meal and hence they would surely want to skip the initial pre-preparation stages of cooking and prefer to use a convenient food instead. They may look out for foods that may not involve any of the stages of cooking and may involve a short reheat process and nothing else. This gives them more time to relax and spend more time on other responsibilities of theirs. They might also find it boring or lazy to start any cooking process from scratch hence they would moreover even avoid the vey initial stage of cooking as going to the market for any kind of purchased to be done. Non-working women have started foraying into the world of convenience foods. They are looking into saving the first few steps of kitchen work rather than the later stage of cooking process. They are not worried of the kitchen mess that occurs while they prepare their meals nor do they feel the necessity of convenience food to prepare a variety in their meal. It was observed that non-working women who have children in their houses tend to lean more towards purchase of convenience foods for the instant availability.

Preference of Convenience Food

Convenience food is available in the market for a variety of products in a variety of forms and packaging. In the last decade one has seen a multiple growth in the convenience

food sector. Convenience food manufacturers are also investing in a lot of advertising for their products and targeting various audiences. The preference of convenience food is determined with most commonly available and purchased convenience products. The following list would indicate the various categories of convenience food that a non-working woman generally would purchase from the store:-

- Frozen – Non vegetarian products (chicken, fish, etc)
- Frozen – Vegetarian products (paneer, vegetables, etc)
- Frozen –Snack products (pizza, samosa, French fries, smily, etc)
- Ready to serve products – (dal makhni, paneermakni, palakpaneer, etc)
- Fresh cut vegetables – (carrot, cauliflower, etc.)
- Pre-processed products – (soups, gravy mixes, rawaidli mix, etc)
- Ready to eat snacks – (chips, farsan, sev, biscuits, etc)
- Canned products – (coconut milk, fruits, milkmaid, etc)
- Bottled products – (jams, sauces, syrups, mayonnaise, spreads, etc)
- Refrigerated products – (tofu, paneer, etc)

The above mentioned list was utilized into the questionnaire to obtain the preferences of working woman on their choice of categories during their purchases.

Benefits of Convenience Food

Time Saving: Convenience food helps reduce the time required for pre-preparation and to some extent even cooking time required. Hence, significant time can be saved where preparation from scratch for any meal can be avoided.

Variety: Due to the various techniques used in the convenience food manufacturing process one is able to get a lot of variety in the market. In fact the amount of variety available in the stores today does put a working woman in a fix on the choice that she needs to make. Another point to be noticed is that this variety remains constant in the market and does go off shelf citing seasonal reasons like the fresh fruits and vegetables do.

Healthy: One can read the contents and detailing on the packaging of the convenience product and decide to whether heath aspects are preferred or not.

Convenience: these products are convenient to carry, stack and store them since their packaging are well planned considering various factors like consistency, texture, size and fragility.

Shelf Life: Most convenience foods have a longer shelf life due to additives and the same is also mentioned on the package hence the user is well informed of its usage period.

Storage: Storage of convenience foods is easy as they can be stacked up anywhere and can also help better utilization of the space available. Regeneration is also faster and better.

Labour Saving: Convenience food helps saving labour in the terms of going to market for purchase, pre-cleaning, pre-preparation and post preparation cleaning.

Food Safety: The new techniques used in the manufacturing and packaging of convenience like aseptic canning, rapid freezing, various methods of eradicating bacteria reduces its

presence and also reduces spoilage of food to a great extent if stored properly. **Recipe Knowledge:** Many a time the working woman does have requests from her own home or she herself wants to try preparing something of which recipe might not be known to her. Hence she looks out for such products for which she need not bother to know how to prepare it rather she would use the convenience of such available products.

Availability: Certain fresh products might not be available throughout the year due to their seasonal availability whereas convenience products are manufactured using stringent quality standards hence their availability besides being consistent also has consistent taste, texture and taste.

Findings: Analysis of data is done from results obtained from more than 100 working and non-working women from various areas of Pune city. The result obtained from this is represented graphically.

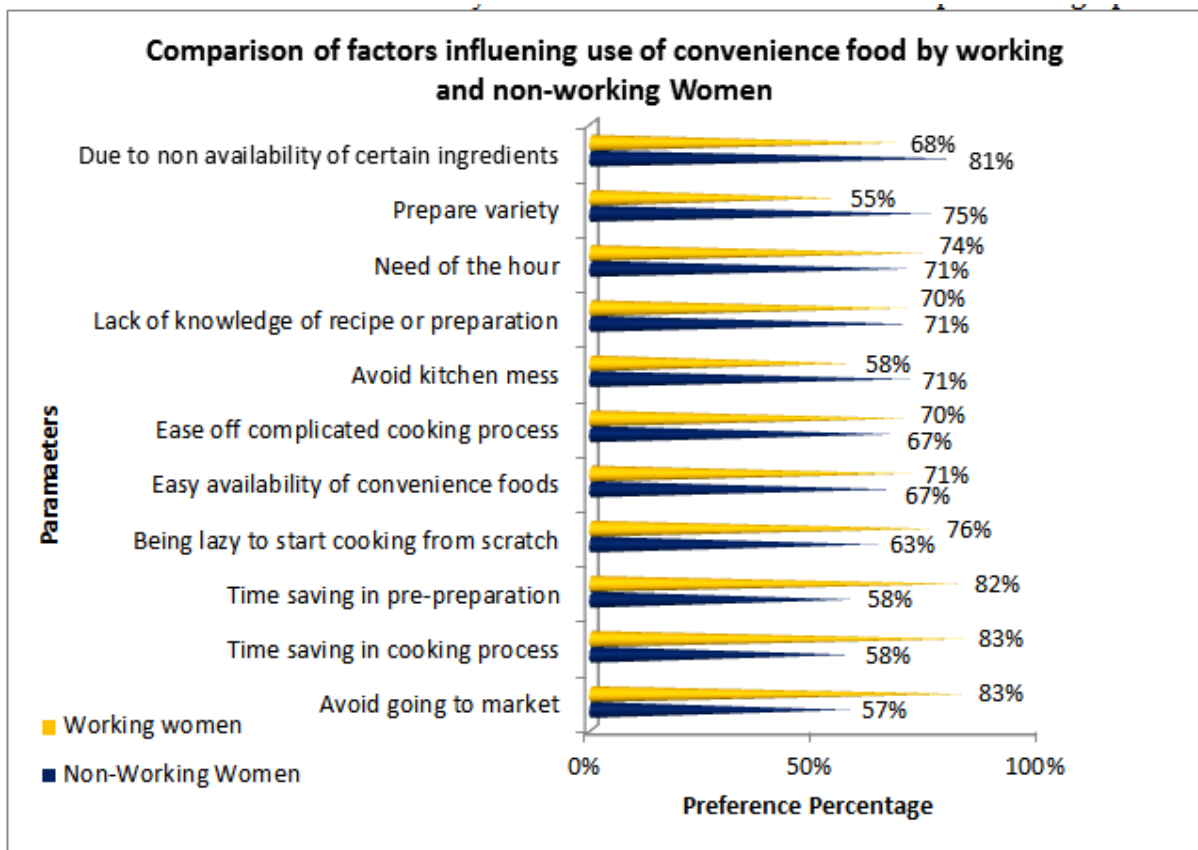


Figure – 1

Figure 1 shows the various factors that influence a working and non-working woman to purchase convenience food. It can be observed that; avoiding going to the market, time saving in cooking and pre-preparation processes are the major influencing factor for working women whereas non

availability of ingredients, variety in preparation and avoiding kitchen mess are the major influencing factor for non-working women. Factors like need of the hour, lack of recipe knowledge, ease off complicated process and ease of availability have pretty similar influences.

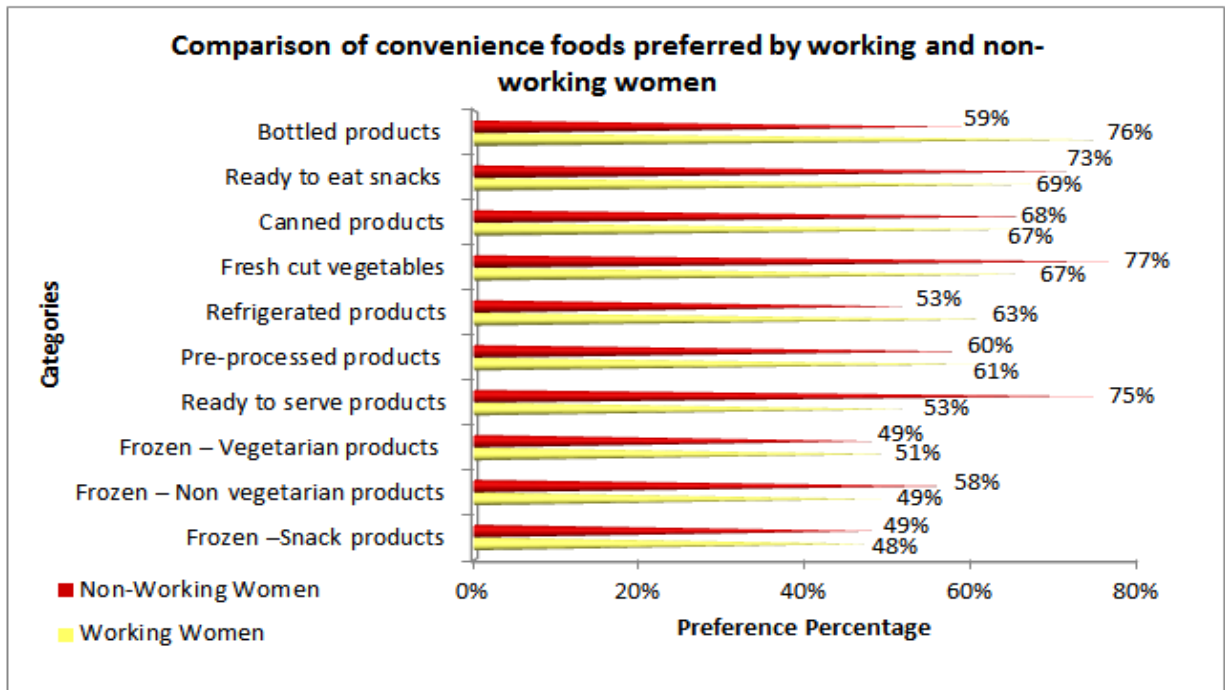


Figure -2

Figure 2 indicates that non-working women prefer to buy fresh cut vegetables followed by ready to serve foods and frozen non-vegetarian products whereas working women prefer

refrigerated and bottled products. Their choice for other products are pretty similar.

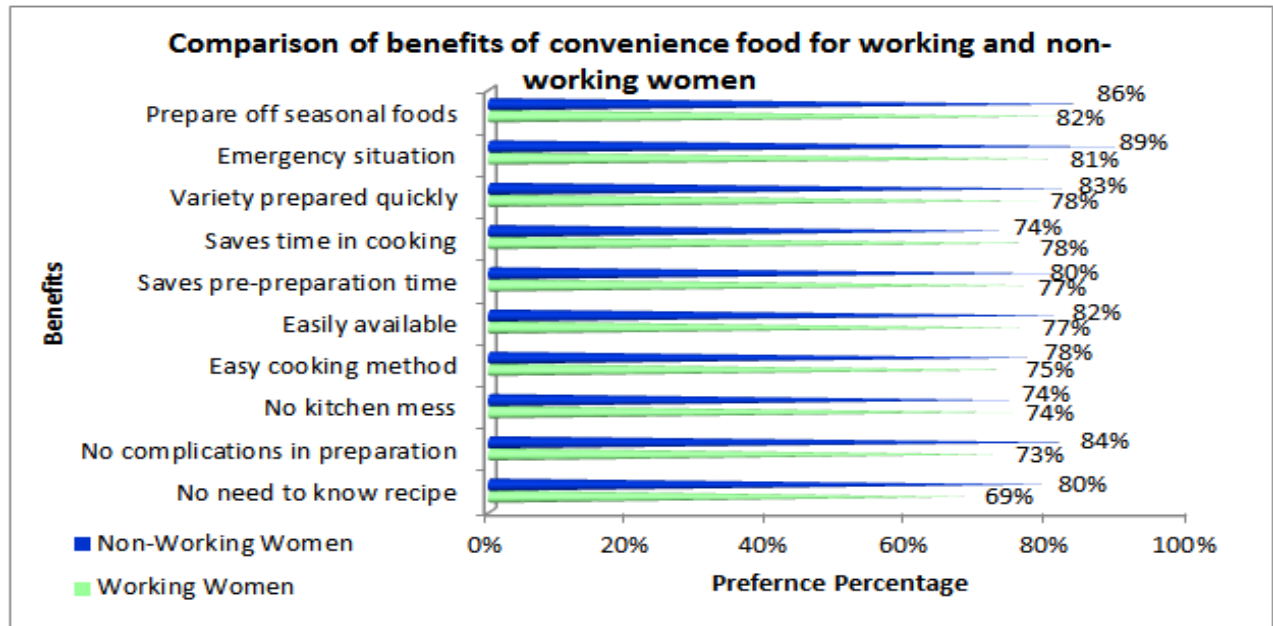


Figure – 3

Figure 3 shows what benefits the working women are able to obtain by using convenience foods. The working and non-working women find that; for emergency situation, preparing off seasonal food and to prepare variety quickly are the most beneficial. Non working women also feel that when they do not know the recipe they find convenience food beneficial.

Suggestions

1. It is suggested that whenever a working or non-working woman decides to purchase a convenience food she must try to read and understand the health benefits she might be obtaining by the use of that particular convenience product.
2. A working or non-working woman must also observe the

storage factor of that particular convenience food as each convenience food has a different storage criteria or pre-requisites.

3. The study is conducted in the current scenario and the opinions, perception and expectations of the respondents may differ with time and does not differentiate respondents on basis of their demographic factors which may have an influence of their perception thereby identifying scope for further research.

Conclusion

There has been a tremendous growth of the convenience food industry in India in the last decade. Many minor and major companies have opened door to consumers to try out their convenience product. A lot of investment is done by these manufacturing companies in advertising their products through different media to attract more consumers. They have been successful in entering into urban houses to a great extent. Convenience food is surely gaining popularity amongst all ages today. The working and non-working women surely are looking into this segment for their homes. They are very careful in choosing the right product for their family. They are aware of the difference between their preparations and similar convenience foods available in the market and also the cost factor for the same. They ensure that they are the masterminds of variety and get the correct ingredients in their preparations. The non-working women do not hesitate to make different preparations and try out new recipes rather than opening a pack of convenient food. Their preference in processed foods is stuck with pre cut vegetables, ready to serve products or snacks rather than the frozen products. Non-working women are not bothered with the kitchen mess that happens during cooking nor do they think much on saving cooking time or find an easy way out. It is also noted that the non-working women have a tendency to use convenience food during situations when a quick meal needs to be prepared, whereas the working women will surely tend to look upon such convenient products which will help her to save time of her cooking process in some way or the other. Today's working women do not hesitate to go out to try a new convenient product that may be available in the market. They are well versed with what are the new convenient products that

are available in the store nearby. Convenience food is available in a variety of forms which may include products like pre-cut vegetables, bottled and canned products, frozen meat and snacks, ready to cook or ready to serve foods and many more. These products are well designed considering the requirement of the consumer. They are also made safe for consumption and also hold a good shelf life. Their storage conditions are also mentioned to ensure proper utilization of product in case of it not being utilized completely. The women are adapting to use of convenience foods as they are realizing that they are able to save time by reducing preparation time and also are able to include some variety into their preparations.

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