

INTRODUCTION

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“No single food will make or break good health. But the kinds of food you choose day in and day out have a major impact.”

- Walter Willet

Today women have been given a respectable image and are making a meaningful contribution to the progress of the nation. In the early days, women were seen only as wives who were intended to cook, clean, and take care of their kids and family activities. Soon it was felt that women should have a better meaningful role in the households. Gradually, over a period, the roles of women have changed in areas, such as employment, whereby women are increasingly becoming employed affecting the division of housework. She has broken the chains of bondage and inferiority complex and will never return to her former status of a painted doll, a kitchen drudge, a child bearing machine or a mere hanger on.

Women today are equipped with reasonable level of education and training with competent skills and are trying to become economically independent by taking up jobs outside and also discharging duties as a homemaker as well, Young (2003). Women who hold jobs outside the home face many demands on their time. In order to carry out the work at home and outside, time and energy are the two important resources to be managed effectively as they are limited in both quantity and quality. Since the amount of energy possessed by each person is different while performing the household work, one should be very careful to plan in such a way that more work is achieved within the limited amount of available time and energy. Work simplification is the most important and useful tool for a homemaker and especially for gainfully employed homemaker who has to make use of the simplest easiest and quickest method of performing tasks, says Seetharaman (2005).

Managing both work and family makes it necessary for working women to use certain changes in their decision making process, especially with decisions on food acceptability, preparation and consumption for their own families (Kok, 2003).

Meal preparation is one of the most time consuming activities among the various household tasks performed daily. Cooking and cleanup continues to consume a major portion of household work time. Homemakers use more time for food preparation activities than other kinds of work and try to keep food costs within the family budget, which takes additional time and thought. It is possible to prepare nutritious and appetizing meal quickly with little of the manipulation skills.

According to Martech (2005), among convenience foods today there are many partially prepared, ready to serve convenience foods available in the market to help homemakers to streamline meal preparation. Chugg (2013) relates the term convenience foods to cover all foods where some preparation has been done ahead of the actual mealtime preparation. Homemakers who have heavy demands on their time and energy during the day and those who are employed, the only way to prepare satisfactory meals for their families is by using convenience foods.

Convenience foods help to control time and energy costs and help to feed the family in a number of ways. This makes it possible to eliminate the daily routine tasks, shorten cooking time, reduce dishwashing and shopping trips and besides widen menu possibilities. Food, which contains a considerable amount of cooking preparation as convenience foods, help to make daily cooking easier and more convenient for consumers. These prepared food stuffs are sold as hot and ready-to-eat dishes, items ready to consume at room temperature, shelf-stable products, or as refrigerated or frozen products requiring minimal preparation such as heating and consuming immediately.

Hughes (1999) express that the time spent for food preparation in the home has declined from 2.5 hours in 1974 to 15 minutes in 1994 and by 2010 the time to decline to eight minutes. This implies substantial growth in the market for prepared and semi prepared foods and increasing expenditure on food. In this respect, convenience is also associated with eating "on the run"; products that do not make a mess; and products that can be eaten in one hand. Nancy (2013) says that 40 percent of men and 65 percent of women

aged 25 and above engaged in daily cooking activity. On an average, men spent 0.7 hours on food preparation and while women spent 1.2 hours, quick-fix snacks consumed as less than two minutes. The difference in preparation time between cooking a meal from scratch with fresh or raw ingredients and using convenience, frozen meals or commercial food like hamburger and soups was only about 7 to 10 minutes.

Kowtaluk (2000) opines that Convenience foods are ready to eat or ready to cook processed food that require minimum preparation before eating which involves the act of just cut open the packet, heat it preferably in a microwave and is made ready to consume. The product branded as convenience food are sold in portions controlled, single serve packaging ,designed for portability for “on the go” or later eating. Convenience foods are generally traditional foods prepared and packed by manufacturers which needs little or no further cooking before being consumed. They can be used at any time, quickly and easily with or without heating. They can be stored and conveniently opened as the need arises.

It is better to consume the entire content of convenience food in one serve once the packet is opened. Though convenient and reasonably priced for a busy lifestyle, they are too dangerous also as they are typically high in calories, fat, saturated fat, sugar, salt and trans-fats. The fact is that they have no control over their production as in home-cooked food. The manufacturers use oil, masala and other ingredients of his choice and liking. The foods are tasty and generally wholesome and the range of foods available in the market fulfills the family's needs instantly. They are useful during emergencies especially when someone is sick and family members do not find time to work in the kitchen, and when guests land uninformed. It also makes possible to taste different foods, as one may not be good at cooking all kind of foods at home, David (2000).

The traditional Indian society believed in cooking family meals daily and serving it fresh and hot. However, when both husband and wife are employed, it is becoming a compelling need to switch over to convenience foods to save time and energy and for others this time can be used for slowly constructive

and innovative work. Consumers today in India are turning to convenience foods, however at rates lower than the rest of the developed world. They combine the speed in food preparation to maintain quality and nutritional value. People when busy with their work and do not find time to cook on a daily basis, skip meals or have a quick bite at fast food joints, or eateries on roadsides which tends to affect their health. Here comes convenience food items as safe and a blessing for these people, who need not skip their food and can depend on hygienic foods, says Beaumer (2007).

According to Data monitor (2006) the basic cooking knowledge and skills have eroded from generation to generation. Culinary skills are not being passed down from one generation to the next as young people today are not involved in the cooking process from an early age and do not have the opportunity to learn through participation. As a result, younger consumers view cooking skills as a status symbol. Consumers are technology literate and advanced appliances particularly microwaves to facilitate meal preparation. They use the Internet to seek guidance on food preparation and to source recipes, but are unfamiliar with basic cooking terminology and to prepare using common kitchen ingredients.

The consumers of today who do not have the time or skills to prepare complex meals still expect to consume nutritious options. There is an ongoing market for products and services that cater to consumer segment. The families coming home from work or school are hungry and want to eat immediately. Mealtimes are also further complicated by families making multiple meals due to different food demands by children and parents, and opt for fully and partly-prepared meal solutions of convenience foods say Buckley (2007).

Convenience foods mean more than single-serve, easy-to-prepare, and easy-to-take-away products. Consumers also expect additional attributes, such as foods that are healthy, ethical, and comforting besides being cost effective and hygienic opines Shelly, (2008). He feels that the changing food habits, higher income, increasing number of working couples, lack of time for cooking at home, and the increasing number of senior citizens without family

help, have increased the demand for convenience foods. It saves time, back-breaking effort and fuel. It is often confused with fast food, where consumers buy it and eat it on the spot or at their workplace as they are in a hurry and are on the move.

Convenience foods are driven heavily by the trend towards more convenient food preparation and consumption, which is a result of busy lifestyles and aging population. Convenience foods are tasty and high quality, while meeting consumer expectations in terms of ease of use, safety, variety, packaging, nutritional value and product appeal. Consumers are attracted by their relatively low cost and complexity, ease of use, variety, availability despite the season, and food safety measures and certification. When convenience foods were first introduced, consumers were willing to accept a lower quality and poorer taste for the inability to prepare meal in a short period of time. But today, consumer's requirements for convenience foods are more sophisticated than ease and speed of preparation. Today, convenience foods must also include ease in purchasing and clean – up, nutritious, flavored and perceived value.

Convenience foods besides saving time in the kitchen, reduce costs due to spoilage, and reduce costs using economies of scale. These foods are packed for long shelf life with little loss of flavor and nutrients over the time. They are developed specifically to preserve the oversupply of agricultural products available at the time of harvest in order to stabilize the food markets in developed countries, says Mark (2013).

According to Pepper (2001) Convenience is one of the big trends in today's food business. The demand for convenience food products is steadily increasing; therefore, understanding the convenience food consumption is an important issue. Despite of being vital properties of convenience food, saving time and effort, it has not been very successful for predicting convenience food consumption by the producers and manufactures.

Though the market is flooded with convenience food products that do not require much time and energy for preparation, its consumption is not up to the expectation of the producers. Hence, the study entitled "Acceptability

and Impact of Convenience Foods in the Selected Households in Coimbatore City” was taken up with the following objective:

1. To assess the knowledge on the availability of the convenience foods by the selected homemakers.
2. To compare the extent of use of the convenience foods and eating habits and
3. To analyse the advancement of the convenience foods in the market and households.

It is hoped that the study will unveil certain facts regarding the availability, consumption pattern and its quality in terms of taste and cost, besides the impact on the households.