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Attitudes and behaviours of university students and workers towards ready-to-heat and eat products

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Abstract
The Goal of the Research was to find out how college students and working adults in Jaipur see and use ready-to-eat foods. Ninety-three people were chosen at random to fill out the survey's questions. The majority of respondents ate ready-to-eat (RTE) meals twice to four times a week, with the bulk of those meals being eaten at lunchtime (44%). The majority of respondents (46%) said that they bought ready-to-eat meals because it was more convenient. It should be noted that although 11.8 percent of respondents considered fast food outlets to be extremely safe, 34.4 percent considered eating on the street to be highly unsafe. While asked about their biggest concern while grocery shopping, 43% of respondents said they were afraid about viruses like Hepatitis B and E. coli that are carried by humans. Consumers were most worried about the cleanliness of the shop (66.7%) when they purchased ready-to-eat meals. The results of this survey demonstrated that college students and staff were concerned about the safety of ready-to-eat (RTE) foods. Food marketers and public health organisations might both learn from this research, which could help them improve their methods of public education and information distribution.

Keywords: RTE, education, meals, viruses, Hepatitis B, public health

1. Introduction
Due to their portability, speed, and availability, ready-to-eat meals like fast food, takeaway, and packaged convenience foods have skyrocketed in popularity in recent decades. Ready-to-eat meals are investigated here to see how college and workplace students feel about them, interact with them, and work them into their diets [1-2].

Time restrictions, busy schedules, and a lack of cooking facilities are common among college students and working adults, all of which might shape their perspectives on and dependence on ready-to-eat foods. People who are short on time yet want to eat well often turn to these alternatives because of how easy they are to find and prepare. However, there may be dietary, health, and wellbeing consequences to relying heavily on ready-to-eat meals. In order to identify improvement opportunities and design interventions to encourage healthy eating habits among these groups, knowledge of the attitudes and behaviours around these food choices is essential [3-4].

There has been a dramatic shift in recent decades towards the widespread use of RTE meals in developing nations. RTE meals don't need any cooking before consumption. These are the foods that are either immediately eaten or stored for later use and may be prepared either traditionally or industrially, packaged or unpackaged. RTE meals are often consumed since they don't need any preparation before being eaten. There is a high demand for these kinds of convenience foods because of the busy lives of many people nowadays. The growing number of city dwellers also drives up demand for city-centric goods and services, especially those that simplify and shorten people's daily routines. In addition, the number of restaurants that cater to the needs of busy people by providing quick and easy meals is on the rise [5-6].

Ready-meal demand is affected by a number of factors, including the ageing population, shifting family structures, women's increased labour force participation, longer working hours, rising incomes, a preference for healthier food options, increased independence and a lack of collective cooking skills. Family size, wealth, and job schedule all have significant roles. There are, however, public health risks and hazards associated with the rising use of RTE meals. RTE foods, such as beef, chicken, fried rice, and noodles, have been related to several food poisoning episodes in Jaipur. Approximately 43% of all reported cases of

foodborne illness in Rajasthan were caused by outbreaks in schools. Most food contamination incidents may be traced back to improper storage, an unclean kitchen, unclean employees, or sloppy procedures [7-8].

Consumers' lack of awareness of food safety issues and willingness to back initiatives to improve the situation in Rajasthanare possible contributing factors. Earlier research has claimed that consumers' views, attitudes, and knowledge about food safety might impact behaviours and practises, so helping to solve issues of foodborne diseases. Food safety regulations, government inspections, and increased regulatory control are just a few examples. Effective food safety policy and risk communication requires an in-depth understanding of consumer knowledge and attitudes towards food safety concerns [9-10].

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine how and whether RTE meals are used by college students and staff. Students and working adults were selected since they make up the bulk of RTE food consumers. In addition, comparable research focused on the same populations. This research has the potential to provide light on the habits and perspectives of Jaipur's general consumers, particularly the city's student body and working population [11-12].

2. Materials and Methods

Studies served as the foundation for the creation of the survey's instrument. The survey included three sections: one on respondent demographics, one on how often they ate RTE food, and one on their overall impression of the category. UCSI University's Jaipur South Wing Campus ran a pilot test with 15 students and staff members. The questionnaire underwent changes in light of the findings.

After determining the sample size, 125 questionnaires were given at random to two groups at UCSI University. Since sending out surveys online is cheap and quick, that's how they were disseminated. After 3 months, 93 questionnaires were collected and used for data analysis out of 125 attempts, yielding a response rate of 74.4%.

IBM SPSS Statistics 21 was used to perform statistical analyses, including frequency and percentage mean calculations. The research was conducted with the agreement of the UCSI University Ethics Committee. All subjects provided their informed permission. Participants' identities and participation in the research were kept anonymous.

3. Results

The goal of this research was to examine how faculty and students at UCSI University, Jaipur see and practise consuming. This research has the potential to provide light on how college and working-age people see RTE food and how they use it in their daily lives.

Table displays the respondent characteristics that made up the sample. The current research has more female participants than male participants. There were somewhat more female responders than male respondents. The majority of respondents were students, while the next largest group were workers. The respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 34, 25 to 29, 30 to 34 and 35 and above. The highest level of education attained by any responder is a bachelor's degree, followed by master’s, then a diploma and finally a high school diploma.

Table 1: Respondents' Sociodemographics and Preferences

Profile	Respondents	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	45 (48.4)
	Female	48 (51.6)
Status	Student	61 (65.6)
	Employee	32 (34.4)
Age	18 to 24 years old	28 (30.1)
	25 to 29 years old	33 (35.5)
	30 to 34 years old	21 (22.6)
	Above 35 years old	11 (11.8)
Academic Qualification	High school	1 (1.1)
	Diploma	8 (8.6)
	Bachelor Degree	51 (54.8)
	Postgraduate	33 (35.5)

Table displays consumers' typical patterns of ready-to-eat food consumption. Five-and-a-half percent of respondents ate ready-to-eat foods twice or thrice weekly, 35% ate RTE foods once a week, 11% ate RTE foods five to seven times a week, and only two percent ate RTE foods more than seven times a week. Younger customers are more likely to regularly eat RTE food due to its perceived benefits in terms of convenience and time savings. Food that is simple to get, store, prepare, and cook is highly valued by today's youth. The majority of participants in the current research were between the ages of 18 and 29, therefore this may explain why this demographic often buys ready-to-eat foods.

Table 2: Habits of Ready-to-Eat-Food Intake

Item	Level	Percentage (%)
How many times a week do you typically consume ready-to-eat meals?	Once a week	35
	Two to four times a week	52
	Five to seven times a week	11
	More than seven times a week	2
When do you typically eat prepackaged meals?	Breakfast	22
	Lunch	44
	Tea Break	5
	Dinner	14
	More than once	15
	Cheaper price	11
Why do you choose to buy ready-to-eat meals?	Convenience	46
	Taste	15
	More variety	4
	Save time for preparation	22
	Others	2

Additionally, the vast majority of responders had RTE meals for lunch. This may indicate that most respondents used ready-to-eat foods as a substitute for restaurant meals or for snacking on the go. Found that RTE foods were bought for complete meals. Consumers in Rajasthan who are better well economically, have smaller families, and live in metropolitan areas are more likely to dine out than those who are less well off, have bigger families, live in the country, and do not work outside the home. However, it is important to mention for future research in order to get an insight into consumers' consuming behaviour of entire meals or meal components of RTE food. The survey in this study did not emphasise whether customers bought full meals or meal components. In the current research, 22% of participants ate RTE breakfast, 15% ate RTE for more than one meal, 14% ate RTE supper, and 5% ate RTE during tea breaks.

Convenience was the primary factor in the respondents' decision to buy RTE foods. Similar results have been found by other researchers about the primary motivation for consumers to buy RTE. Products and services that cater to consumers' needs and simplify their lives are more important as people work longer hours, endure longer commutes, and strive to make the most of their limited free time. Convenience foods have become more popular as a result of rising consumer demand brought on by modern lifestyle trends. Flavour, texture, appearance, promotion, and diminished home cooking are all factors that may influence a consumer's decision to purchase ready-to-eat (RTE) food. Increases in disposable income, international commerce, tourism, ease of preparation, and low prices are all contributing to the growth of the ready-to-eat food market.

Table shows how respondents rated RTE meals. When questioned about the safety of fast food restaurants' food sources, the majority followed by those who were doubtful. Many dine-in restaurant patrons believed it was rather safe, followed by uncertainty. Most respondents felt uncertain about eating at local eateries, followed by feeling pretty secure. The majority of shoppers were concerned about consuming imported and prepared food from supermarkets and grocery shops, followed by those who felt generally safe. In contrast, when asked about eating off the street, the majority rated it as somewhat unsafe and 34.4% as extremely risky. Most respondents considered fast food outlets to be very safe whereas the largest proportion of respondents considered street food to be highly unsafe.

When asked how concerned they were about finding bug or rodent droppings in the food they purchased, the majority were extremely concerned. 31.2% were also very concerned about any contaminants introduced during production. Human-to-human transmission of illnesses and microbes was another key concern for the majority of responders.

Table 3: The public's opinion on ready-to-eat meals

Questions	(%)of Responses				
	1	2	3	4	5
What do you think the overall safety level is for these meal options?*					
1. quick-service eateries	11.8	21.5	35.5	4.3	26.9
2. In-and-out service restaurants	6.5	12.9	45.2	0	35.5
3. Regional eateries	0	21.5	35.5	6.5	36.6
4. Food that is brought in from other countries	9.7	10.8	35.5	0	44.1
5. Food that is already cooked and sold at grocery stores	9.7	26.9	29.0	0	34.4
6. Common foodstuffs	0	37.6	4.3	34.4	23.7
How concerned are you about the following when you go grocery shopping? **					
1. Decomposing insects and rodent faeces	37.6	8.6	33.3	0	20.4
2. Manufacturing-time additives	31.2	9.7	30.1	2.2	26.9
3. Humans are the source of sickness.	43.0	12.9	28.0	2.2	14.0
4. Human-Transmitted Bacteria	43.0	4.3	33.3	4.3	15.1
5. Worker-generated contaminants	29.0	9.7	45.2	2.2	14.0
6. The potential dangers of chemical pollution	37.6	6.5	38.7	2.2	15.1
When purchasing pre-packaged meals, what worries do you have? ***					
1. You are a price-conscious buyer.	31.2	5.4	33.3	3.2	26.9
2. When you shop, you consider the product's ingredients carefully.	21.5	10.8	37.6	0	30.1
3. While purchasing a product, you consider the number of calories it has.	9.7	18.3	31.2	15.1	25.8
1. You care about the hygiene of the grocery shop.	66.7	0	30.1	0	3.2
5. You evaluate the quality of various food goods based on their packaging.	22.6	4.3	35.5	0	37.6
6. You think about how healthy the item is for you to consume	17.2	10.8	32.3	8.6	31.2
7. You take note of the brand name or manufacturer, number	16.1	10.8	29.0	2.2	41.9
8. You make sure the store is reliable	21.5	7.5	33.3	0	37.6

The majority of respondents were concerned about chemical pollution and pollutants brought in by workers. In essence, it's important to remember that the vast majority of buyers feared contracting an illness or being exposed to microorganisms from another person.

Consumers were most worried about the cleanliness of the shop when they purchased ready-to-eat meals. While 31% are concerned with cost, just 22.6 are also checking out the quality of the food's packaging. Respondents also consider the price and where they can buy the goods before making a final decision. Respondents also consider other factors, such as the product's calorie count, brand name or manufacturer and nutritional value. Consumers' worries about food safety have risen in recent years, according to research, as a result of increasing media coverage and a more generalized understanding of the connection between nutrition and health [13-14]. Effective risk management and information distribution need a thorough understanding of the dramatic changes in food purchasing and consumption patterns [15].

Convenience sampling may have reduced the study's external validity since it was used to acquire the data. In addition, all of the responders came from the same Jaipur university. Therefore, future research should think about creating a standardized method to more accurately reflect the population.

4. Conclusion

In this study, researchers in Jaipur looked at how and why college students and office workers use RTE meals. The findings emphasised the regularity with which respondents bought or consumed RTE meals. Respondents cited convenience as the primary reason they bought RTE foods. Regarding RTE food sources, most respondents saw fast food restaurants as safe while considering street meals to be very dangerous. The public as a whole was concerned about contracting a human-transmitted illness or being exposed to a bacterial infection. Consumers worried most about the store's cleanliness while purchasing ready-to-eat foods. This

current research demonstrates that college students and staff, like the broader public, are increasingly concerned about the safety of ready-to-eat (RTE) food. Consumers' real food safety handling practises, as well as their consumption habits and perceptions of food safety, may be influenced by a number of variables that should be studied. Food manufacturers and public health groups might both use this information to improve their public outreach and education efforts.

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