

Term Paper Submitted on FOOD PREFERENCE AMONGST YOUTH

Submitted by

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Abstract

The objective of my research is to understand food preferences amongst the youth, the factors driving them towards changing their patterns and preferences, and why they prefer some options over others. For the youth, some factors like parental control over them, advertisements, hanging out with friends etc. are all responsible for their food preferences. Several features have great control over their food choices. To understand the factors responsible for their changing food patterns and preferences, and to know why some foods are more popular than others amongst the youth, is important. It is in this relatively early stage of human life that people consume in supremely higher quantities, so whatever their consumption pattern is during this stage, shall drastically influence their future. The aim of the study is mainly to understand their food preferences, and to know what the necessary steps are, to improve the food habits amongst the youth.

CHAPTER 1 THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD

● Introduction

Food is a quintessential element of each individual's life. It is impossible to survive without food. For the youth, this is the period where they register their maximum growth. Food is the fuel that ignites the possibility of life. But food is much more than that, as it is not only fuel, but will sometimes act as a representation of identity and culture. Sharing food is sharing culture. People classify food into different terms and types, like South Indian, North Indian, Chinese, etc. Having meals, commonly with friends, is like a bond building exercise. Therefore food is an important part of life, not just a growth building component, but also as a symbol of culture. There is an increasing trend amongst the youth to incline towards western food chains that offer burgers, pizzas, etc. But also there is a substantial portion of people who still prefer their authentic food culture.

For teenagers, this is their primary stage of growth, and they need to be healthy. Otherwise what is consumed during this time, may affect their futures adversely. One of the biggest problems encountered by the youth, when it comes to their health, is the difficulty to consistently consume healthy food, due to problems like erratic periods of stress, expensive rates of places far from their native places, low quality of food provided in hostels and PGs etc. When in a different place for studying, it could be a bit difficult to adjust with the lifestyle. Thus, consumption of healthy food is another major issue to deal with.

Objective of the research

- To understand the youths preference of food types
- To explore important factors that affect our food preferences
- To know better about the youth populations' food preference

● Scope of study

The scope of study is confined to the food preferences of the youth. Data was collected by survey, not online, but by offline, person to person interactions. Though the subjects mostly belonged to the youth category (19 to 25 years), an old man and a child were also interviewed, to understand how age affects our food preference.

➤ Research methodology

My research study titled, "Food preferences amongst youth", is prepared from both primary and secondary sources of data by surveys, articles, journals, and books.

➤ **Limitations of study**

- The study was conducted during a short period of time.
- Respondents many not have provide responses honestly, as they are humans and are subject to dishonesty
- Personal bias can be found.

CHAPTER 2 FOOD PREFERENENCE AMONG YOUTH

Food preference and factors affecting it

As we are well aware, the individual needs food for their day to day energy. The choice of food depends on many factors. It includes time, age, money, individual constraints, etc. Here are some of the factors responsible for food preferences and how they affect the choice of food amongst people. Patterns and choices before consumption play a crucial part in the decisions made, surrounding food.

1. Food preference with age

Preference of food amongst people, vary across age groups. The direct and positive relation with age plays as a definitive function for consumption of food. If we take age groups, like children, youth, middle age, and old age, their preferences for food changes over time. I interviewed a child, a youth friend of mine, and an old man, and their food preferences are far from the same. When we consider the condition of a child, it is very different, as his parents fix the food preference for him. There are lot of constraints for him if, say, he wants to have chocolate. It is not possible for him to eat more chocolate, if his parents refuse to buy it for him, as he does not possess the means to do so. Even if he does not like to have milk, he is forced to drink it, as it is nutritious for his health. His parents are controlling his food preferences. For the youth, however, it was different. He is far freer in choice, and richer in options. He can have what he wants really, and is free to have how much ever 'chocolate' he can. He is absolutely free to have whatever, and there is no major obstacle between him and his choice .For the old man, this is the period of conscious decision making. He has to set limits of his own for his living, as he is free to have the food he desires. But he has to control his food consumption, as his food preferences are affected by other factors, such as diseases. The food preferences amongst people are different throughout different ages, as observed from the above examples.

2. Food preferences in relation with money and time

For maintaining life under the current world order, we need money. Money plays an important role in people's lives. For purchasing quality food product, money is required. In India, according to the global multidimensional Poverty index, 228.9 million people are poor. It is one of the largest countries with poor people in it. In rural India, where 75 percent of Indians live, there is 11.4 percentage of poverty, compared to urban areas, which has poverty of around 7 percent. This shows the gap of what we consider the rich and poor difference. The top 10 percentage of people hold 77 percentage of wealth, and the bottom section has just 1 percentage increase in wealth. This proves the inequality. Money plays an important role for people to purchase, or have good food. It is very important, and is a necessary factor for anybody to have good food. In the case of the youth population, according to my observation, students who have moved to another state for pursuing their education have been allocated a fixed amount of money for their food purchases. Nutritious healthy, safe food is very costly in Bangalore. All that the average student can afford with their pocket money is one week of it. After that period, the student has to depend on cheap food, which is bad for their health. Still, they have to take it against their wishes, as there are no viable alternatives. Though aware of the need for healthy food, money plays a critical role, and the student has to settle for cheap, unreliable food. Thus money acts as a constraint against our food choices. Another constraint is time. Not very many people have the time to make food, or to go to hotels which serve healthy options, but are not nearby. Difficulty also lies in the process of eating there, for the act of

consuming food is a time consuming process, and every one will not be able to have that much time. Time is incredibly important for everybody, and people cannot do everything in a fixed order. Financial circumstances play a huge role on food choices, as though one is aware of what they need, sometimes they lack the means to buy it. Time plays a huge role, as though one might have the means to buy good food, sometimes, they just cannot find the time to do it. Thus, external factors also play an important role in one's choice of food.

3. Food preference in relation with individual factors

Individual factors play a part in the choice of our food. It depends on certain factors:

- **Taste preference**

Taste preference is a huge factor, as most individuals prefer taste over health. The phase before youth is childhood, and during this phase, preferences are usually controlled by parents. Parents decide what is best for their child. What not to eat it is under their control, and the child has to obey that. Here, preferences are allocated not by our choice. As the wheel of life proceeds gradually, we become quite familiar with what to eat, and what not to eat. It is difficult, as during the period of youthfulness, one craves for freedom from parental controls. One wants to have their own life, and make their own choices. However, if people sacrifice taste for health, it will be a problem as it will affect their future health. As many of the youths are swayed towards junk food, and prefer them over traditional food, there is a calamitous possibility of a major threat to society health.

- **Social and political factors**

Another important point here is socio political factors. The background of the subject gives valuable insight into the evolution of their food habits. There is a certain level of pre determination about what we like to do or not, based on one's roots. If he comes from a poor background, since he might not have had the means to look after himself well, he might be malnourished, without have a good understanding of healthy food choices. He will continue with that life style, unless he is steered in the right track. Here, poverty becomes another obstacle in the choice of food among the youth

4. Combining conclusion

For making their choice of food, one goes through several factors. Multiple factors play an important part in decision making process for food choices. As seen above, sometimes economic conditions like price of food, problems of taste, all have an effect on the food preferences. Price of food determines what one can eat, as some cannot afford to have sumptuous meals with the money they have on them. So they will not be having a healthy lifestyle. Some can afford it, but they go for taste over health, and make unhealthy food choices. Another factor is age. Age also determines the choices regarding diet, if one takes into consideration how choices change from time to time with the bodily changes one encounters with the advancement of age. Age forces people to regulate their consumption pattern.

CHAPTER 3 FOOD PREFERENCES IN INDIA

When we consider the case of food preference, people in historical India are very different from modern Indian. It is a very different culture. The consumption patterns have deviated a lot since, and the influx of heterogeneous food cultures is easily observable. In South India, traditional dishes like dosa, idly, vada, sambar, etc., are the main components of the cuisine. There is not much change in the aforesaid. But due to impact of globalization, multinational food chains like McDonalds, KFC, Burger King, etc., have entered the race with our traditional brands of food. This is an indication of a widening culture gap amongst the people.

Historically, India has been the land of spices, and is very famous for it, and so the dishes were made up of spices. Invaders like the Mughals, brought their own items to India and mixed it up with traditional Indian food, so there was a fusion of food varieties among the people. When the British arrived, they established the idea of café, and other new consumption options to India. Spices attracted large group of Europeans to India, like Portuguese, Dutch, French, and the British to India. In exchange, they also brought things like papaya, potato, tomato, to India, and introduced the idea of café hotels in India.

Modern India has seen a lot a change. India has adopted the idea of globalization, to sustain their relevance in the world. New trade markets have opened, and the sheer size of the India population has lured many of the multi-national food chains to India, engaging in competition with restaurants that serve traditional food. KFC, Pizza Hut, McDonalds, Burger King etc., have all come to the market, and there is a shifting trend towards junk food companies. People are more interested in consuming junk food, as they consider it to be better due to its brand value, which gives it the appearance of being more premium.

But the impact of globalization on Indian food culture, or preference has not been all negative. Some positives are also present. Due to globalization, Indian food has become famous in many parts of world. Indian dishes like dosa, idly etc., all have a great market in India as well as abroad.

But still, if we consider that we are not always eating junk foods only and only because of conscious will, it would do a disservice to the amazing quality of our diverse food culture. A prime example of us sticking to indigenous dishes such as our traditional foods, and maintaining their relevance, is the example of the 'Vadapav' story. Many thought that the introduction of burger in India will wipe out the 'Vadapav', but instead, 'Vadapav' and burger go hand in hand. The taste preference for everybody is different.

Food choices as an identity

India is the land of diversity, with different people speaking different languages, subscribing to different religions, practicing different cultures, etc. Food plays an important part in the construction of one's identity. What we eat, or what we have to eat, plays an important part in our identity. One needs to take into consideration that, in India, according to religion, Hindus will not eat beef, and Muslims will not eat pork. Food differentiates people on the basis of religion and caste. Cooked rice was a food item considered to be pure, only to be consumed by high caste people. Higher castes and lower castes were differentiated based on what they ate, and what they didn't. In Kerala, communities like 'ezhavas' and 'chovas' eat beef. They were considered to be low in caste order. Here, food can be seen as differentiating people on the basis of caste. India is a country where different ethnic groups are present, and people speak different languages. They all have their own style of cooking, and food choices like Punjabi, Gujarati, Marathi, Kerala, Kannada, and several others, exist. Everybody has different food choices. This is how their identity is engraved by food. It would be fair to postulate that there is a rather strong connection between identity and food.

CHAPTER 4 YOUTH FOOD PREFERENCES

Food in Sanskrit means 'bhojan', and in Hindi, it is referred to as 'khaana'. Food is a source of enjoyment for most people. It is something which people find pleasure in having. It is something that makes us feel happy, and is an essential part of our life, without which our sustainability is in question. 'Bhojan' in Sanskrit means 'an act of enjoying'. The word itself suggests the joy of food. So food is a necessary part in our day-to-day life. The choice for food for everybody is different. It is different as certain factors like the ones mentioned above, plays an important part in their choices, and it has a great impact on the individual's decisions. Constraints, parental controls, money problems, age related issues, geographical issues, all are a problematic thing, influencing the choices of an individual.

How we consume the food, or what our preferences are; if one is going just by taste, or one is going for healthy options. That is the main question asked here. The food we take affects our life. What we consume impacts our future. Sometimes, we forget to keep that in mind, and just consume what we consider will be the best for us as the time, only keeping temporary pleasure in mind. The youth would usually be trying to get away from the control of their parents, and might make even more reckless choices. It is important to know the health risk and problems that accompany such choices. Awareness about food is necessary, and one should remember not to always go by the taste of it. If one consumes unhealthy food, and overeats consistently, it shall create huge problems. Considering the fact that health related issues due to food are several like obesity, diabetes, heart attack, etc., they have to be taken seriously. In India, most people are poor, and they have not been able to have a decent meal in their life. Because of that, most children are under nourished or malnourished. In India the programs are not reaching the grass root level. Such a strain on their childhood would potentially affect their future. Young people's lives are valuable, and they are the stepping stones of development for our country. In 2021, in the Global Hunger Index, India has slipped to the 101st position. 33 lakh children are malnourished. As the facts suggest, India is lagging in this field. There is an express need to improve the ranking of 101 out of 116 countries.

Youths' food habits

Youth is an extremely dynamic stage in life. It is during this part of their lives, that they get their own independence, and a certain level of freedom is given to them. Now they have to think about their future and what will be good for them. It is not that they are completely independent, but there is some relaxation on the constraints previously placed over their freedom. This is the period of tension and identity crisis, and it is quite difficult to deal with it. This is the time to focus on good food and healthy habits.

Youths' preference for healthy food

Healthy food is an essential part of our growth building. When one inspects traditional eating habits of the Indian population, we see that healthy food was always present in their dietary intake. Before globalization, junk foods were practically absent, and there was little knowledge among people about it. People had to travel to other countries to have food items like burger and pizza, or they were limited to just certain places only. So they were not available at the normal everyday market. People preferred traditional healthy food, and had a healthy lifestyle. Primary sector was dominant during this period of that time, so people used to work hard on the fields. So they were leading a healthy life style. In Kerala, the main food at that time was 'kanji', which means rice porridge, which was the regular dish for everybody at the time. Most were vegetarians, though non vegetarians were also present. The life style was pretty fixed into that culture, because there was an obvious lack of choices for food. If we take choices into consideration, there were few options, so they were inclined towards healthy food mostly. For Kerala, it was 'kanji', and in Tami Nadu, it was 'pongal'. For North Indians, it was 'roti'. Due to only few options being present, people learnt to adjust with the few options.

At the start of the globalization period, India was one of the most populous countries in the world. There was a large market for multinational food chain companies like KFC, Pizza Hut, McDonalds, etc. So they started to sell out their food chain joints in India. Gradually, people became aware of their food products because of the advertisement coverage it had and its omnipresent brand name. A large section of youth population, particularly from the urban area, began to prefer their products over healthy food. This has since, become a huge health issue. The incidence of obesity, that is, abnormal accumulation of fat, presenting a risk to health, with a body mass index (BMI), respectively over 30 or 25, is observably higher. Obesity has been increasing steadily. Some are not getting healthy food because they lack the financial resources, lack of time, and other reasons discussed above, but the exceptional points here are taste and brand value. Healthy food does not taste that good usually, and due to the taste preference, several people prefer junk food over healthy food. This is the main source of worry amongst people, as if we continue to stick to unhealthy food practices, it will lead to diseases and problems to the health of the individual. The youth has to change their forms of thought, and be more cautious to try and consume healthy substances.

Hike in popularity of junk food

Junk food, which has been mentioned above, includes several varieties like burger, pizza, hot dogs, fried chicken, etc. Their advertisement popularity and brand value had sufficient shine to catch eye of the people. Their branding gave their products the appearance of higher value, and the consumption of their products gave people the feeling of higher status. This trend was rampant particularly in urban India, rather than rural India, evidenced by the fact that more people who are obese, are from urban area, rather than rural areas. Junk food consumption is amongst the main reasons for obesity.

If we consider why junk food has become so popular in India, or anywhere all, it is primarily because of their marketing strategy and media coverage. It has made a large influence, and has had a great impact on people's lives, so much so that even small children can look at the logo of McDonalds, and KFC, and can identify them without any error. Such is the coverage they have over the market. They have worldwide recognition, and the media strategy of junk food multinational companies has won over the international market.

The consumption of junk food, or preference of junk food over healthy food, is quite problematic. Junk food cause serious problems to our health, even besides obesity. It causes anxiety, memory problems and serious heart related issues.

Youths' preference to sweet food

Sweet is an addictive substance, and it is very hard to control its consumption for most people. Sugar is present in almost every food item, even rice and wheat. Moderate consumption of sugar is okay. Scientific studies show that a

certain amount of sugar is necessary for a person's wellbeing. An adult must consume around 30 grams of sugar every day.

So for the youth, when you consider sugar, it is naturally very hard to control their desire for it. Even from childhood, children ask for chocolate and other sweets. Even during childhood, we crave for sugar. During the youth stage, controls placed upon one's individual freedoms are far less stringent. So when a kid addicted to sugar, grows into a youth addicted to sugar, he/she is far more likely to abuse the substance more, with their newfound freedom.

Though sugar is present in all types of food, all sugars are not created the same. Artificial sugars are far more dangerous to the body than natural sugars. Cakes, pastries, cool drinks, etc. contain immense amounts of artificial sugars. These substances will create problems for one's dietary intake. One must have a balanced dietary intake, as everything should be consumed in a balance. Not having sugar is not a sustainable solution to this problem. Appropriate amounts of it, is essential, but it has to be regulated, and taken in an orderly fashion.

Sugar products can create problem such as tooth decay, high blood pressure, inflammation, weight gain, obesity, diabetes, etc. All of this is caused by high amount of sugar consumption in daily intake of food. The diseases mainly show up following a few years of consistent consumption. Sugar is also called 'white poison', because of the dangers it has.

Combining conclusions

Here, we can see that youths' mind on choice of food has been evolving. There is an increasing trend towards consumption of junk food amongst the urban elites, just as there is an increasing trend of preference to taste than health. Still most young people who are living in their homes, not separated, are having healthy food due to parental control over them. The junk food multinational food chain companies has successfully captivated the food market in India and attracted a lot of young people. As a youngster, the addictiveness to sugar and junk food is a dangerous problem to control. Overeating can cause many diseases, and the unhealthy food that is cooked outside, could cause severe maladies in the long run.

As per the observations from above, as the understanding of potential diseases caused due to irresponsible consumption increases, we need to be more cautious, and develop superior knowledge about what we eat. It is essential to shown some care for one's health.

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS FROM THE INFORMATION

So, to collect data, I had used the method of survey, that is, a 'person to person' survey, to know the food preferences amongst the youth. A total of 15 respondents from the youth population was taken for the survey purpose, and a old man and a children aged 10 years was also interviewed to get answers. Other data was obtained mainly from journal articles.

Questions asked :

Question1. Which food do you think is most tasty one?

- Junk food
 - Healthy food
- Out of 15, total of 10 voted for junk food.

Question2. During weekends or any celebrations, which food do you prefer?

- Junk food
 - Healthy food
- Out of 15, total of 11 preferred junk food.

Question3. Do you have proper food every day?

- Yes
- No

Out of 15 respondents, a total of 8 says no, 7 says yes

Question4. Do you have fruits, vegetables, in your daily diet?

- Yes
 - Partially or sometimes
 - No
- Out of 15 respondents 5 said no 7 said sometimes 3 said yes.

Question5. Do you eat sugary substances every day?

- Yes
 - No
 - Not always
- Out of 15 respondents, 5 said yes, 7 said not always, and 3 said no.

Question6. Are you able to buy healthy food every day?

- Yes
 - No
- Out of 15 respondents 9 said no, and 6 said yes.

Question7. Do you read the nutritional value of food you buy?

- Yes
 - No
- Out of 15 respondents only 9 said they did.

As the finding here clearly suggests, the youth are not aware of their food choices. In order to be aware about their food, they must be aware about themselves. Youths' food choices above is clearly pointing towards junk food, as it tastes better, and as far as the health matter is considered, the youth population seems less bothered about how their eating habits might affect them.

Conclusion

As the data obtained from the research mainly shows, members of the youth population are not interested in leading a healthy life. It seems to be the least of their problems, as compared to the other immediate problems that might encounter on a regular basis. So they care less about their health and habits. What they prefer in their stage is taste. It is because the youth have given more importance to the taste factor than the health factor, that there is rising case of obesity and overweight issues. So all that could be done is to encourage the youth to choose their food wisely, and develop healthy eating habits.

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