

# Consumers' Behavior towards Ready -To - Eat Breakfast Cereals: A Review and Future Research Agenda

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## ABSTRACT

RTE breakfast cereals belong to the category of foods that have a prolonged shelf life. They are designed in such a way to consume straight from the packet which does not require any further preparation. Ready To Eat [RTE] Breakfast cereal is considered a highly competitive market because of its presence in the national and international markets. The current research is a systematic review of literature that focuses on the scientific findings in consumer behavior towards the food segment of RTE Breakfast Cereals [RTEBC]. Twenty-six relevant consumer behavior studies published between 2000 and 2020 were selected for this review. The Alphabet theory was applied as a theoretical framework to analyze the findings from the review.

Emerging markets of RTE markets like India is unique with its unorganized markets in several categories, low penetration rates, and a huge mass of consumers at the lower end. The presence of big retail players has also contributed to the increased demand for RTE food products in the country. It's evident from the review that consumer behavior varies with situations, time and regions. Demographic factors along with other considerable aspects are always a concern for the manufacturers and marketers as it contributes for changes in consumption patterns of consumers. The review is not restricted to geographical area but analyzed all observed elements across countries that are leading to the buying behavior of RTEBC. From the review it's implicit that there is a wide scope for future research to clearly comprehend the position of each factor. The review will help the growing economies to understand the potential of RTEBC market and to focus on the more influential aspects for a better market penetration.

## Keywords

Alphabet Theory, Ready – To –Eat Breakfast Cereals, Factors, Consumer behavior

## 1. RTE Breakfast Cereal Market – An overview

One of the dramatic changes noted in the food consumer behavior over the past few years is explicit in its consumption patterns (Verma et al., 2007; Anand, 2011; Alae-Carew et al., 2019; Stojanovic et al., 2013). This change is observed at every level of society and especially with the growing prosperity of the middle class. The changing demographics is with respect to the overall consumer base, irrespective of the categorical distribution of countries as developed or developing. The changes in the food consumption patterns and trends have a significant and direct influence on food production designs in the long and short run.

It exerts unique challenges to households and governments to provide sustainable diet to citizens irrespective of their geographic regions and the variations in the income at the household. Ready To Eat [RTE] Breakfast cereal is considered a highly competitive market because of its presence in the national and international markets.

Ready To Eat [RTE] has gained popularity in the Asian countries due to various reasons such as busy lifestyles, changing food habits, and increased tourism. The competition is very significant due to the diverse product offerings in the market. It's classified under the convenience food sector because of the three important convenient factors it renders such as timesaving, reachability, and reduced

cooking time. A report published by TechSci Research on India RTE Food Market Forecast and opportunities (2019) projected a growth in the RTE food market at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of more than 16 percent during 2018 - 23. With the changing lifestyles of consumers with rising employment opportunities, the demand for RTE food products is projected to grow during this period. Retail chains play a lead role in increasing awareness about RTE products among consumers. Many studies affirmed that RTE foods are very popular and consumed greatly by youth which is proved to be a competitive source of nutrients.

Emerging markets are unique with its unorganized markets in several categories, low penetration rates, and a huge mass of consumers at the lower end. The presence of big retail players has also contributed to the increased demand for RTE food products in these countries. Retailers also attempt to elicit product responses among its consumers. In Indian context, the intention to buy is a very strong factor in favor of the product but it also forces companies to apply different approaches to keep up the existing consumer base. The consumers believe in the 'touch-feel-buy' process. Consumers not only ascertain information about the products; but also about the retailer from whom they buy their products.

According to the report of (Culliney, 2020) a senior consumer analyst at Mintel research, the Indian breakfast cereal market is interestingly a great example of the move from non-packaged to packaged food. It reports that this shift is creating immense opportunities for packaged goods. Another interesting fact is that it's not only switching non-packed items in general but also the traditional breakfasts. The breakfast cereal market is brand-led which comprises of RTE cold cereals as 40 percent of the market,

Children cold cereals of 20 percent, and hot cereals 40 percent as per the global breakfast cereal market segmentation.

Marketers should anticipate different approaches to sustain consumer's interest in their products offered in the market. Consumers spend substantial time at retail outlets to decide about their thought- about product categories. Consumers tend to look for a variety of low-involvement product categories which are represented as a 'repertoire of loyalty'. These can be referred to as perceived risks which must be considered while designing the Marketing Mix for the products. The involvement of the risk element would motivate consumers to go for thorough information search from various sources of mass media or Point of Purchase [POP]. RTE cereals are noted as low involvement product category (Kumar, 2011) which may follow the same route of information search.

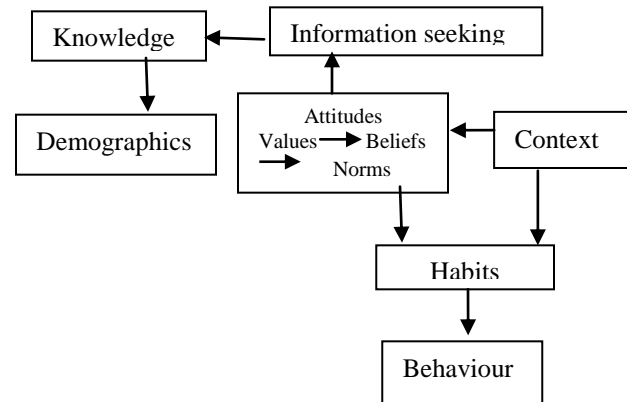
The current research concentrates on the literature review of the food segment RTE breakfast cereals. It studies on the purchase behavior of RTEBC consumers in particular and consumption patterns in general. Researchers applied Alphabet theory (Zapeda and Deal, 2019) to arrive at a more convincing and holistic picture of consumer behavior. The research followed this theoretical pattern to identify the main factors narrated as influential factors that would lead to an RTE purchase.

## 2. Theoretical Model: Alphabet Theory

Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen and Madden, 1986) is the most commonly used and widely applied model when it comes to Attitude and Behaviour. Leone et al., 1999 studied the comparison of three models such as TPB (Theory of Planned behavior), TRA (Theory of reasoned Action) and TSR (Theory of self – regulation) rated the attitude-behavior

relationships whereas TPB was rated on the role of self-efficacy appraisals in intention and behavior. TPB also affirms the influence of external factors which would influence a person's behavior but gives much importance to the behavioral control by the perceived abilities. Perceived Behavioral Control is strongly connected to the concept of self – efficacy. Ackerman (2020) explained the concept of self-efficacy as self-control and the ability to modulate one's behavior to reach specific goals. It's more connected to one's perceived abilities. But the behavior would be affected by these perceptions in the majority of the cases.

The literature review conducted in this research made use of the Alphabet Theory as the theoretical framework to highlight the factors. Many Scientific attempts have made use of this theory to explain organic food consumption behavior and livestock products (Flemann & Hamm, 2014; Stampa et al., 2020). Studies supported the extrinsic factors in Alphabet Theory which is developed to predict the buying behavior on the buying of organic and local foods such as; health practices, environmental concerns, race, the presence of farmer's market, family composition, and income (Zepeda & Nie, 2012). Other than Values, Belief, and Norms [VBN] the variables such as knowledge [K], information seeking [IS] and habit [H] are also proved important as it helps in understanding the reasons why consumers are choosing organic or local foods. It resulted in a new framework called "Alphabet Theory" for a valid explanation of the organic and local food behavior (Zepeda & Deal, 2009).



**Figure 1: Conceptual framework – Alphabet Theory**

*Adapted from Zepeda and Deal (2009)*

### 3. Methodology and overview of the studies

#### 3.1 Definition of terms represented in the study

Breakfast cereals are represented as a healthy choice for breakfast. They are made from grain; rich in carbohydrates, low in fat, and a very good source of fiber. It's considered as a nutrient-dense food; supplying a modest amount of energy in calories to make a significant contribution of essential nutrients: carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals. Scientific studies show the importance of consuming all these nutrients to maintain a healthy balanced diet. Essential nutrients missed at the breakfast are not recouped back by the other meals of the day or by the wrong choice of breakfast in the morning (European Breakfast Cereal Association, 2013). A study conducted by Abukhader (2016) breakfast cereal is a widely popular morning breakfast meal and is represented as a source of nutrients and fibers for all categories of people.

RTE breakfast cereals belong to the category of foods that have a better and prolonged shelf life. They are designed in such a way to consume straight from the packet which does not require any further

preparation. This product group contains a vast array of products that can be seen as a separate section in supermarket/hypermarket shelves (Howarth, 1994). The variation has seen its rise due to different aspects such as convenience, time-saving, and affinity towards trying out new patterns of lifestyle and eating habits apart from the traditional style (Priyadarshini, 2015). Customers are aware of these types of RTE food products and the information sources of the product. Young consumers are more attracted to the consumption of RTE foods. It's worth noting that the majority of consumers had a planned decision in the purchase of instant food products. The increasing trends in the RTE category in terms of penetration and consumption are based on the positive influence of multiple demand factors. Modern trade has also significantly influenced the growth of the RTE food sector. Nowadays most families spend very little time in food preparation, cleaning, and eating. They love to spend more time on leisure activities rather than on food chores. RTE foods are considered as handy and time-saving (Alexander, 2009).

### *3.2 Search procedure*

The research utilized both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data has been collected from published thesis works, academic and non-academic websites, research articles from the databases of refereed journals, etc. The EBSCO, Emerald and Elsevier Publishers such as British Food Journal, Journal of Consumer Marketing, Journal of Consumer research, European Journal of Marketing, Journal of Retailing, Advances in Consumer research, Food Quality and Preference Journal, etc. Other relevant articles such as published / unpublished works, national and international conference proceedings, etc. were also reviewed. The papers are

extracted from the past 20 years, approximately from 2000 - 2020, though some relevant papers and frameworks have been referred despite the year. The search exercise in every database is limited to the Boolean query of Ready To Eat Breakfast cereals and buying behavior. It's very interesting to note that most of the studies originated from westernized cultures. Surprisingly, the number of studies regarding RTE breakfast cereals is sparse from Asian cultures. This increased the curiosity of the review and to explore more on the characteristics that would have driven the consumers to use the same.

### *3.3 Reviewed studies: An overview*

The method adopted in this research is a systematic research that tends to search, appraise and synthesize the evidence adhering to the guidelines on the conduct of the review. It follows a narrative method and accompany a tabular form. It analyzes what is known and unknown and recommendations for the future (Grant & Booth, 2009). The studies reviewed in this research were published between the years 2007 to 2019. One of the studies taken is from the year 1992 (Mitchell & Boustani, 1992) because of its relevance in this research. Most of the studies focused on the product category of Breakfast cereals and some of them discussed the Functional and Genetically Modified Food products in common. Out of 26 studies reviewed, nine were discussing on the Indian scenario. The other seventeen focused on some of the European countries and the United States of America. The sample size varied from 102 to 1265 participants. Ten studies purely focused on the databases for their data collection. Primary methods included quantitative surveys and interviews.

## 4. Results

### 1.1 Demographics

Demographics is the study of the entire population who are embedded in a social context and continuously exposing themselves to varied examples, expectations, and opportunities. These factors are directly influencing people in their buying behavior. Alphabet theory greatly explains the demographic variables which are directly linked to the food purchase. Most of the studies reviewed explicitly studied the demographic variables (Simon and Manohar, 2017; Priyadarshini, 2015; Bogue & Yu, 2015; Stojanovic et al; 2014; Anand, 2011; Ares & Gambaro, 2007; Golub and Binkley, 2005; Poulsen, 1999; Castetbon, Harris and Schwartz, 2011; 2012; Shi & Price; 1998) and its effect on the buying behavior. RTEBC consumption is noted higher in a household with one or more children. The New Production Introduction (NPI) model is utilized to classify new product formulation that would develop the overall nutritional quality of various cereals. Consumers have interest in such products which made use of new production designs which takes care of the ingredients such as salt, sugar, and fat (Castetbon, Harris and Schwartz, 2011). Many studies noted the significance of children targeted cereals. It mainly affirmed the nutritional quality and health aspects of functional foods that have gained momentum in the market (Annunziata and Vecchio, 2010; Golub and Binkley, 2005; Shi and Price, 1998). Studies indicate the influence of socio-demographic characteristics and their significance in the implicit values of both nutritional and non-nutritional cereal characteristics. Socio-demographics such as age and gender are the key determinants that influenced consumer acceptance for functional food products which will include RTE breakfast cereals (Ares and Gambaro, 2007; Pepe

et.al, 2011; Mitchell and Boustani, 1992; Rees, 1992). These studies provide valuable information to food companies for identifying new market segments and positioning strategies. It also refers to breakfast cereals as a low-risk product that possesses high potential for internationally acceptable results. On the whole; literature findings concerning demographics are throwing light on some of the common variables such as age, gender, occupation, marital status, household income, and several family members.

### 1.2 Information seeking and knowledge

The next important and recurring variable that is invariably seen in every second article is information seeking and knowledge. In-depth knowledge and information related to products can change the attitudes and then the behavior of the potential consumers. In many purchases, consumer involvement is visible in the way they would have expected the benefits part. Many research studies (Simon, S, 2017; Simon, and Manohar, 2017; Bogue and Yu, 2015; Kaur and Singh, 2014; Baskar and Sundaram, 2014; Mitchell & Boustani, 1992) examined the consumption pattern concerning the external influence, health and brand consciousness, ethical concerns and quality as the major factors that influence people to eat processed cereal food. External influence included easy availability, influenced advertisements, packaging design, friend's recommendation, good promotional offers, retailers' influence, and wide availability of a wide range of flavors. The technological implication, awareness levels, and decision-making process of these consumers are important. Deciding factors are based on ingredients, brand awareness, packaging, etc. Furthermore, many studies affirmed the health and nutritional benefits (Stojanovic et al., 2013; William, 2014; Goglia et al., 2010) of breakfast cereals. They are cited as relatively inexpensive,



nutrient-dense, and convenient food which is recommended as a healthy and balanced diet. It also affirms that the regular consumption of such foods can ensure nutrient intake and assist in reducing the risks of being obese and developing other diseases. An Individual's education, the standard of the household, and the level of frequency of functional food consumption also matter a lot. RTEBC products vary in nutritional content within and between different product categories. It's noted that no systematic relation between the type of brand and nutritional quality and the majority of the consumers expect the nutritional labels and claims on packages. Perceived healthiness of food, taste, pleasure, and convenience of consumption was also seen as significantly important as the driving forces of consumer purchase decisions. On the other hand, some studies affirmed that though nutritional information seems to be important it's not significantly influencing healthier choices (Dominick et al., 2018). Consumer's decision making on Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs) will be highly dependent on information about the available products (Schiffman et al., 2013).

The consumer's loyalty is highly possible but it is more probable that they would be loyal to more than a single brand. There is a chance of trying more brands and then stick to the one in which he felt more confident. Low-involvement product categories are more exposed to these kinds of different trials and it is normally noted as variety seeking associations and a 'repertoire of loyalty'. Limited problem solving is involved in such buying behavior. A consumer who is the first user will tend to depend on the advertisements or the brand itself at the point of purchase situation [normally in a retail environment] and go through the information provided. So it is noted that the advertisements have an

important role to play in the communication of product-related information. Kellogg is one of the famous brands which introduced such an advertisement method by inducing a high level of excitement in line with the diet and fitness aspects, with the launch of its "K" variant. Ethnic/cultural aspects and price are some of the elements in which the products struggle to be on the shelf. Food products demand a blend of quality and taste to develop as a strong brand. It is very vital to recognize the changing trends of consumer purchase patterns which proved increasingly vital and influential towards the purchase of food (Wheelock, 2007). They are in demand for food with quality and not ready to accept whatever food is available. So the staple foods such as cereals are dominating the food markets today. They are considered to be nutritious and adding to the variety and interest of the diet. The act of selling products by giving more emphasis on 'Pseudo quality', would be a success, is considered as a short term perspective. Consumers are more conscious, knowledgeable, and therefore more critical towards food.

### *1.3 Attitudes*

Research conducted by Vlachos and Gergantiz (2016) states that factors such as consumer attitudes towards products, given the high quality and also the convenience factor is increasingly becoming popular. It highlights the potentiality of organic RTE in the food market by understanding the perceptions towards these products. A health claim is often taken as a means to highlight scientifically proven health benefits of food consumption (Simon, S, 2017; Stojanovic et al., 2014; Barcellos and Lionello, 2011; Annunziata and Vecchio, 2010; Bae, Chae and Ryu, 2010; Costa Font, 2009; Golub and Binkley, 2005; Poulsen, 1999; Dominick et al., 2018; Goglia et al; 2010; Lee et al; 2007). The health aspects of a product have a substantial impact on consumer welfare,

producer profits, and the total welfare of the organization. But it varies with consumer demand and cost of production. The consumer responses vary based on the nature of the carrier product, type of health claim, functional ingredients separately or collectively. Normally health claims are perceived positively when linked to a product image. General health claims are more highly perceived than disease risk reduction claims. Familiarity in the ingredients used with its health effect claim is leading to a more positive impact. Research shows that health claims would be accepted by an average consumer if he understands the message conveyed.

Consumers' perception of breakfast cereals (Tate and Lyle, 2010; Lee and Lee 2007) viewed the benefits derived as one of the major criteria of purchase. The research reveals that the nutrition profile of their products makes a difference to the consumers while purchasing. Researches provided insights to manufacturers to focus on improving consumer acceptance by appropriate segmentation and targeting. Promotion should be taken care of the healthfulness aspects without actually compromising the taste and cost. Another aspect is the positive feelings towards ready-meal consumption for relaxation, spending less time and energy on cooking. The feeling of consumers that Ready To Eat meals is convenient and suitable for people living alone (Costa, Schoolmeester, Dekker and Jongen, 2003; 2002). Another set of studies (Mitchell and Boustani, 1992; Brennen et al., 2013) focused on consumer likes and dislikes towards breakfast cereal. The reasons stated include the taste and increased convenience with breakfast cereals have over other breakfast alternatives. Other than the positive effects studies concentrated on highlighting the associated risks to the purchase of breakfast cereals which include physical, financial, social, psychological,

and time risks influencing the purchase. Many of the existing brands of RTE are considered relatively high in sugar and salt, so regarded as energy-dense food but nutritionally poor. The paper suggests that there is immense potential to exploit the nutritional potential of RTE by product development by incorporating dietary fiber.

Some studies investigated (Barcellos et al., 2011; Bogue and Yu, 2009) the opportunities for functional foods in a developing country. It explored consumer's attitudes towards functional food products and most of the respondents presented positive attitudes towards functional foods and purchasing power to buy them. The understanding of the consumers in developing countries is fundamental to enhance food chains' competitiveness and their market orientation. It has to be integrated with consumer behavior theories to market orientation strategies for innovative food products. It also helps the communicators to tailor information that resonates with and motivates consumers to achieve optimum health through diet and lifestyle. The attributes which consumers like the most are the health benefits, taste, packaging, and ingredients. Cereals products with labels such as 'good for the heart', 'helps digestion' are viewed as positive in terms of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Types of cereals used were also treated as influencing factors in a purchase decision. The use of natural ingredients was viewed as one of the reasons for choosing specific functional foods. The educational level also significantly contributed to the choice of functional foods. It is noted that there is an increase in consumer awareness of functional foods with age. Consumer's beliefs about branded goods (Castleberry and Ehrenberg, 1990) naturally vary with the specific attributes of the different brands or their promotional appeals. It can be of two things: one is the brand has more users

than the other /or the brand is very exceptional on the particular attribute of being regarded as 'good value'. So it relates closely to consumer's current and past buying of the brand/product. Consumers are more interested to select products regarding the brands more than any other attribute.

#### *1.4 Context*

External influences play a greater role in forming consumer behavior towards RTEBC. There are situations where the attitudes can be influenced by external influences or pressure (Alae-Carew et al., 2019; Law et al., 2019; Christophe Bénéa et al., 2019; Simon, S, 2017; Bae, Chae and Ryu , 2010). When it comes to food, people tend to be more cautious and make sure that they are not ending in something wrong for their dear and near ones. The factors will vary depending upon the internal and external influences. The main factors examined (Kautra et al., 2015) included the role of branding, age, promotion, a shift from the agriculture-based economy to an industrial based economy, and sub-culture. Food consumption and selection are the most complex phenomenon influenced by various factors. It is termed as marketing-related, psychology-related and sensory-related. Consumers use different strategies to choose the right food product (Sabri et al., 2014).

Many other factors like product specificities and characteristics also influence the individual. The consumer is influenced by these factors in his decision-making process such as shopping habits, purchasing behavior, brands, and selection of retail stores for shopping visits (Rani, 2014). RTE category continues to attract consumers like business travelers, students, working professionals who seek 100 percent convenience due to restricted time to cook, and also to households in which members lack knowledge of cooking the food

themselves. Convenience with affordability and quality will be the main growth drivers of the industry that can meet the growing domestic demands as well as to create more demand. Industrial players tend to attract the target segments to focus more on affordability and acceptability (Alexander, 2009). It's revealed that consumers respond positively and strongly to the promotion, negatively and strongly to price, calories, fiber, and sugar content. The demand for RTEC is generally priced elastic and very sensitive to brands in the same segment (Chidmi et al., 2005).

There was also an increase in consumer awareness of functional foods and health benefits with age. Middle-aged women were more likely to consume functional foods than other age categories. They are considered to be innovative consumers in terms of purchasing new products (Poulson, 1999). Females generally had more knowledge about diet and health relationships than males and more positive attitudes towards functional cereal foods. Many retailers specifically work with a policy of standardization to adapt to the host market. It takes into consideration the psychic distance in terms of consumer characteristics. The reason for adopting the standard format is to maintain the economies of scale. In most cases, the standardization can cause negative financial results because of the changes in consumer preferences and behavior. So it is suggested and recommended that it is always better to adopt a mix strategy of standardization and adaptation. The study shows that crossing borders require an adaptation in three marketing mix elements such as - product, price, and promotion (Tseltsova and Bohnert, 2015). Nevo (2001) studied the market power in the RTE cereal industry and affirmed it is characterized by high concentration, high price-cost margins, large advertising-to-sales ratios, introduction to



new products, etc. Li et al. (2013) demonstrated the health-related product attributes and purchasing behavior in the RTE cereal market and showed that products do impact consumer purchasing decisions. It showed that the prices of substitute products available do influence as a strong factor that affects consumer's purchasing decisions. The reasons for the growth in the breakfast cereals market is determined by the marketing efforts of various players. The most visible example is Kellogg's. They are taking numerous steps to ensure that their brand is remembered and seen by way of celebrity endorsements and other ways of advertisements. Marketing efforts such as on-ground activations with local celebrity chefs, festival-themed cooking shows, trial packs, in-store promotions are also undertaken by many popular brands. It is understood that local players are finding it difficult to match the marketing activities with the big multinationals. Analysts believe that the overall market continues to grow with a shuffling of market share between the players. Breakfast cereals are internationally matured with multiple formats, flavors, and pack sizes. Companies are investing heavily in educating consumers regarding their products. All of them are tailoring its offerings to the local market which improved the market potential. Annunziata and Vecchio (2012) researched the factors affecting the use and understanding of nutrition information on food labels. It is considered a very important tool for transferring information on product characteristics to consumers but its potential is not always exploited. The aspects of Marketing Mix such as price, place, promotion, and product in line with different market requirements also (Vignali, 2001) traced as an important reason for influencing the purchase behavior of consumers.

#### *1.5 Habits*

International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation Review, USA (2006) encouraged people to eat breakfast regularly, by highlighting the health benefits such as healthful diet, weight management, cognitive and academic performance, cardiovascular, digestive and bone health. Many barriers to eating breakfast were also discussed. The misconceptions were related to nutrition, lack of time due to hectic morning schedules, long commutes to jobs, and non-traditional work hours. Various strategies were discussed to encourage a healthful breakfast to attract more consumers to it (Alae-Carew et al., 2019; Law et al., 2019; Simon, S, 2017)

#### *1.6 Intention and behavior*

The majority of consumers of RTE packed food items are young generation people who belong to nuclear families with a moderate income level. It was noticed that television as a medium improved consumer awareness. The main interest of consumers towards these kinds of products is revealed as instant consumption, time-saving, taste, and convenience to use them as snacks (Simon, S, 2017; Bogue and Yu, 2015; Barcellos and Lionello, 2011; Anand, 2011, Ares and Gambaro, 2007; Costa Font, 2009; Poulsen, 1999)

Health consciousness also is considered to be an important factor indicated by the non-buyers of these products. It also showed the common buying behavior of elders as a planned one. It is noted from the study that most of the consumers perceived value from the consumption of ready to eat products. The quality, taste, and special attributes of the products also were some of the positive points. Attractive packaging and sales promotion can help to improve the sales of these types of products. Brand loyalty is also an important crucial factor that is very difficult to induce consumers to brand switching.

According to scientific literature, RTE meal refers to a food category which can be consumed in the same taste in which its sold or distributed, does not include nuts in the shell or whole, raw fruits, vegetables that are intended for hulling, peeling, or washing by the consumer (Bae et al., 2010). The research examined four factors to analyze the food-related lifestyle and consumer behavior towards ready-to-eat foods. Four factors were extracted by Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). They are health-oriented, taste-oriented, convenience-oriented, and tradition-oriented factors. Ready-To-Eat segmentation based on food-related lifestyles must be applied to develop proper marketing strategies. Each segment would be different across marital status, education level, family type, eating-out expenditure, place of purchase, and reason for purchase. Marketers would be benefitted in segmenting and identification of factors of consumer behavior to focus on specialized strategies based on the differences.

## 5. Concluding discussion

### 5.1 Theoretical framework

Many factors emerged as a part of this literature review using the Alphabet framework. Though many studies have been conducted with this framework, a product evaluation with this is a quite new attempt. The researchers have attempted this because of the complex nature of the framework with many constructs. The complexity lies in the identification of factors under each construct heading which is quite a tedious and thought-provoking one. Figure 2: Summary of findings on factors that influence consumer behavior towards RTEBC below tries to illustrate the factors as per the factors influencing the buying behavior towards the Ready To Eat Breakfast Cereals [RTEBC]. It's surprising to note that the elements covered in the ABC and VBC theories in the Alphabet theory, were well covered in the

consumer behavior studies of RTEBC. The influencing factors are organized in such a way to get a bird's eye view of RTEBC consumer behavior. During the analysis of the study, it was noticed that the emerged factors are interlinked to provide an explicit overview of the consumer's intention and behavior. The most addressed aspects of RTEBC are demographics, as it is all about food and food consumption which involved the demographic aspects. In line with demographics the most explored areas include information seeking and knowledge which helped the consumers to gather the fundamental understanding of the product which followed the contextual support of other elements. The most obvious factors included the marketing mix, shopping habits, acceptability, affordability, and availability. The habits are less explored in limited research studies, where it was mentioned as a leading factor towards the purchase of the products. It is an area that can be explored to understand the causes or reasons other than the health and weight management factors to understand it in a deeper sense.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The summary of our research findings is embedded in the theoretical framework [Figure 2] of Alphabet theory. This framework will provide glimpses of the current research work to understand the factors influencing the buying behavior towards RTEBC. From the literature review, it's noted that the most prevalent elements which contribute the consumer buying behavior are Demographics, information seeking, knowledge, context, and not the least habits and intention and behavior.

Information seeking and gaining of knowledge related to the purchase is also an evident element that needs special attention. Human beings always tend to be comfortable enough to avoid risks by

indulging in various methods such as observation, experiments, etc. Understanding how people will make use of the information gathered can help the companies to be active in their processes to retain them. Consumer Involvement is a very important factor which is very much related to consumer behavior and marketing constructs. It is well established in many studies and has been used to classify products and messages according to the level of involvement they arouse. The involvement is normally used to segment consumers into low, moderate, and low involvement groups to target them with different promotional strategies. (Michaelidou et al., 2008). Health and brand consciousness are major implications for the stakeholders to consider different product mix. Quality management and ethical concerns are considered important by consumers in selecting their products.

Quality matters in all areas of business such as manufacturing, presentation, marketing, sales, etc. Ethical norms are to be applied to make sure of building values and irrevocable standards. The information gained through friends and relatives also plays a critical role in shaping the consumer's behavior. These recommendations if are coming from a reliable source who do they trust adds value to their decisions. This can be of prime importance when it comes to the product ingredients and nutrient profile. Consumers also look into the cultural or ethnic aspects of the product that they desire to buy. A sensitivity analysis has to be carried out to identify the elements that consumers consider as important in selecting a product. It can vary from region to region. The companies should be critical in analyzing these norms that would benefit the production, packaging, and design. It is also important to understand the degree of customer recognition of products by their

name. To create brand awareness is a very important step in Marketing. This brand awareness will help the consumers to understand the key differences of the products with their competitors. This will also help companies to launch new products and services at a faster pace. It also encourages repeat purchases which will add the competitive advantage of the products.

Contextual elements also showed a key role in the purchase decisions of RTEBC. The main relevant point noted in this review is the inclination of consumers towards an industrial based economy. The rapid development of technology has led to a massive change in consumer behavior. Innovation and adaptive capability of the companies are trending to win the marketing era. Understanding consumer behavior will continue to play a critical role, in the long run, planning to maximize its sales. The marketing mix is a combination of various elements to make the sale of a particular product. The entire process by which a consumer recognizes his needs and exploring the ways to satisfy those needs is crucial in consumer behavior. The effects of Marketing mix elements on the planning and decision making of a particular product makes a huge difference as the campaign as successful or unsuccessful. Understanding shopping habits are also very useful in understanding consumer behavior. The impulsive behavior and the planned purchase behavior make a real difference in their product preferences. Convenience, accessibility, availability, affordability are very common factors that influence the buying habits of consumers. Functional Foods are gaining relevance in the food market where the producer has to offer new products that should meet the consumer demands, by identifying their choice motives.

Attitudes are usually learned through direct and indirect experience. Attitudes are

important because they frequently predict consumer's behavior. To understand the attitudes is generally very difficult. The information and knowledge gained by consumers about alternative products will positively affect consumer attitudes towards RTEBC. If a person has more of a positive attitude towards RTE products, it's natural to predict that they may buy more of these nature of products when they intend to buy products. This area is worth research to understand how attitudes are formed in this towards RTE food products. Some of the elements noted include the health claim, nutritional profile, taste, increased convenience, functional ingredients, and packaging. Health, nutritional claim, and functional ingredients can be the major drivers to purchase RTEBC. Consumers are in the habit of purchasing products with health and nutrient content claims to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Habits are also important for understanding consumer behavior. The main factors identified across the review are healthful diet, weight management, and cognitive performance. Other reasons are not much discussed for the repetitive nature of the purchase. Intention and behavioral elements are also considerably discussed across the literature review. The elements include youth trends, instant consumption, time-saving, brand loyalty, tradition, and sensory evaluation.

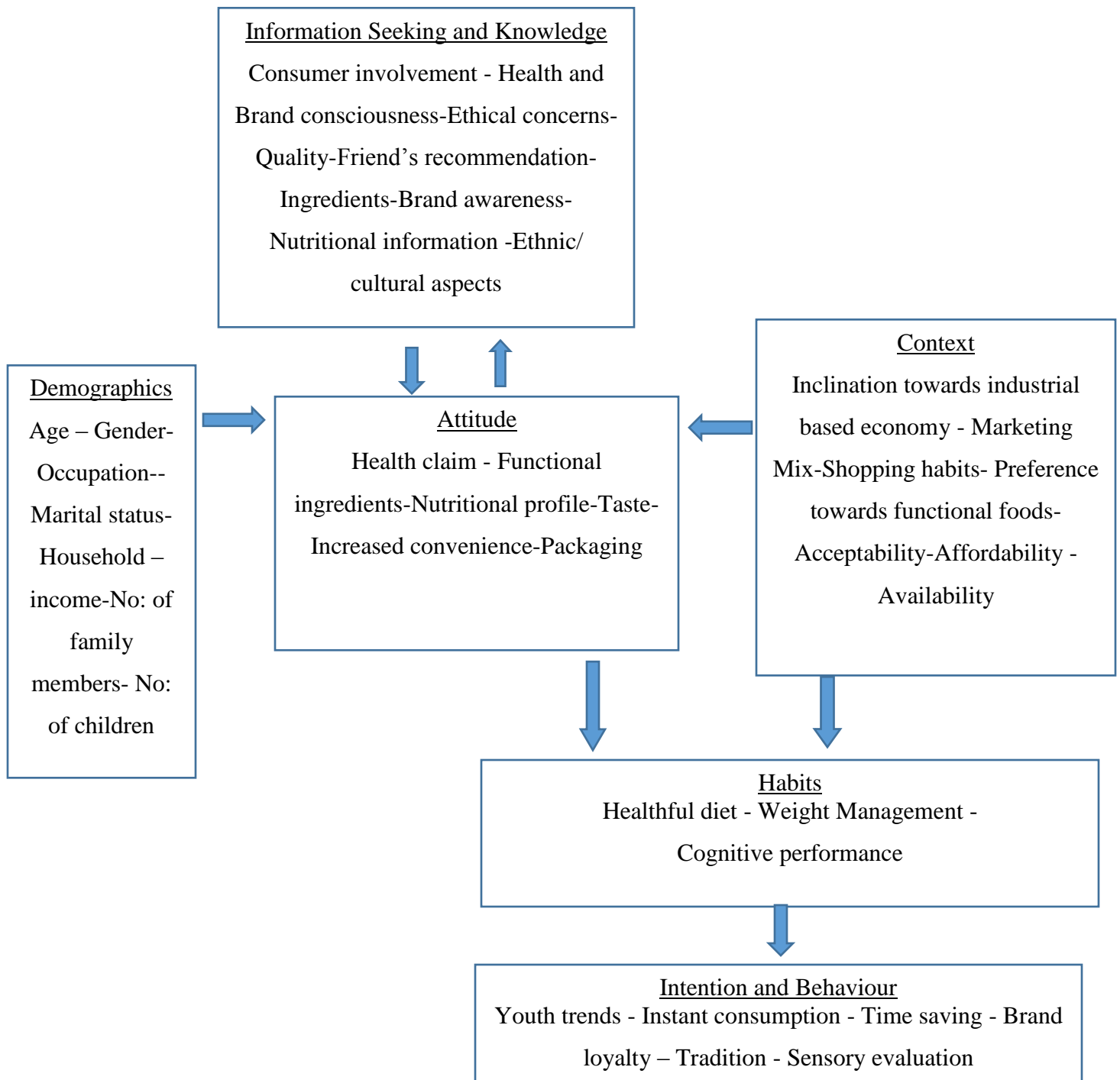


Figure 2: Summary of findings on factors that influence consumer behavior towards RTEBC



## 6. Limitations and future research agenda

This research has taken a step to review literature across the countries based on consumer behavior towards RTEBC. Though RTEBC is a growing segment in Asian countries it's most popular in Europe and America. The research tried to throw light on the various factors influencing consumer behavior towards the purchase of RTE Breakfast cereals. The application of Alphabet theory helped researchers to understand the critical areas which need more focus and attention in the area of RTE breakfast cereals' consumer behavior. The review did not focus on any country or region but observed the various studies to identify the abstract factors that may lead to the buying behavior. This study can be a base to streamline the most influential factor through a model-based testing. Each factor can be further investigated with reference to regional scenario including the socio-cultural aspects. It's noted in the current research that some sub-factors like health consciousness are taken as a contextual element and also as an information seeking criterion. So further empirical study is required to understand the most dominating aspect.

## 7. Implications for Asian Business Context

The market of RTE Breakfast cereals is expected to witness a growth of 5.9% in Asia-Pacific market during the period of 2017-2023 (research and markets.com, 2019). The influence of western culture on food habits of the middle class society significantly contributes to the growth of the RTEBC in this region. Demand of convenience goods are gaining relevance because of the rapid changing lifestyles. There are various types of breakfast cereals, ready- to-eat (RTE) breakfast cereals are more popular in Europe and North America.

However, Asian countries are also proving a new ground for the breakfast cereals. Hot cereals were more popular in Asian countries. But due to the changes in the lifestyles and increased requirements for convenience foods contributed to the demand of RTE cereals. The current research focused on RTEBC as it's the fastest growing market in the developing economies.

The hectic and busy lifestyle also has incredibly increased the popularity of packaged foods. They include RTE meals, bakery items, canned food, sauces, and condiments. The trend shows that there would be public pressure on the food-related sustainability approach of companies. Consumers of today are more active in their buying and consumption practices to reduce cognitive dissonance after their purchase. Improving product technologies are dependent on consumers, because of their changing interests. This is basically due to the increased information search on product and the intention to try out new versions introduced in the market. Consumers are also concerned much about providing immediate feedback on their consumption experiences which would add pressure on the producers' future decisions (Tudoran et al., 2012). So breakfast cereal manufacturers have evolved their innovation by integrating local flavours of each region to improve the functional benefits of their products. Widening the distribution networks even to the underserved target group has helped to boost growth in this sector.

The current research focused on the factors generally influence the purchase of RTE breakfast cereals across countries which also include Asian business context. The manufacturers and marketers who are targeting the low penetrated areas can understand the trends and tastes of their potential consumers.

**Table 1 – Overview of Articles selected**

Author (s), Year	Title	Study focus	Alphabet theory – Element reference	Method	Product	Sample size	Country
Alae-Carew, C., Bird, F.A., Choudhury, S., Harris, F., Aleksandrowicz, L., Milner, J., Joy, E.JM. Agrawal, S., Dangour, A.D. and Green, R., 2019	Future diets in India: A systematic review of food consumption projection studies	Referring to: the future diets - Food consumption- Food projections	Habits - Context	Literature survey	Vegetables, fruits, and dairy products – Rice and wheat cereals	Six literature databases up to Jan 2018. Followed PRISMA [Preferred Reporting items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses guidelines	India
Law, C., Green, R., Kadiyala, S., Shankar, B., Knai, C., Brown, K. A., Dangour, A. D., and Cornelsen, L., 2019	Purchase trends of processed foods and beverages in urban India	Purchase trends of eight district categories of processed food and beverages – between the period of 2013 - 2017	Habits - Context	Data collected through Kantar World Panel Division	purchases of consumer goods – which included RTE meal and Breakfast cereals	The dataset covers product level purchases between Jan 2013 and December 2017.	India
Christophe Bénéa et. al., 2019	Understanding food system drivers: A critical review of	Review of food system drivers	Context	Critical literature review – multidisciplina	Ultra-processed food and other	Database covering information from the period 2000 to 2017	General

	literature		ry databases	categories			
Simon, S, 2017	A study on the determinants of consumer buying behavior towards RTE Breakfast Cereals	Similarities and differences of cities based on the factors influencing their buying behavior	Information seeking & Knowledge, Attitudes, Context, Demographics, Habits and Intention and behavior	Quantitative survey	RTEBC	500 samples	India
Simon, S and Manohar, B.M, 2017	Consumer Involvement Towards Ready – To – Eat Breakfast Cereals in India: An Application of Revised Product Involvement Inventory [RPII]	Application of Revised Product Involvement Inventory	Information seeking & knowledge	Survey data	RTE Breakfast cereals	250 consumers	India
Koutra et al., 2015	The role of branding, Promotion and Sub-culture in the consumption of Breakfast cereals in Thailand	Role of branding, promotion and subculture in influencing the consumption of breakfast cereals	Context	Qualitative interpretive approach	Breakfast cereals	Kellogg's case study	Thailand
Priyadarshini, 2015	Purchasing Practice of the consumers towards Ready To Eat food products	Purchase behavior towards RTE / C foods	Demographics	Structured survey tool	RTE/C foods	110 respondents	India

Bogue & Yu, 2015	The influence of socio-demographic and lifestyle factors on Consumer's Healthy Cereal Food choices	Information from the end-users of cereal products	Demographics, intention, behavior	Cluster and analysis	Cereal foods	-	-
Simon, S and Manohar, B. M; 2015	Consumer risk perceptions in the Breakfast Cereal Market	Analysis of risks in decision making	Information seeking & knowledge	Survey data	RTE Breakfast cereals	250 consumers	India
Baskar & Sundaram, 2014	Indian consumer purchasing behavior towards Brand Processed Food	Purchase behavior to brand processed food	Attitudes	Quantitative survey	Branded Functional food	102 consumers – from major cities in South India – Chennai, Bangalore, Cochin and Hyderabad	India
Stojanovic et al, 2014	Markets of food with nutritive and health claim: Producers' and retailers 'perspectives	Determine the importance of products with nutritive and health claims	Demographics & Attitudes	In-depth interviews	Functional foods	29 producers and 26 retailers	Western Balkans
Barcellos and Lionello, 2011	The consumer market for functional foods in South Brazil	Consumer motivation, attitudes, and intention to buy Functional foods	Attitudes	Quantitative survey	Functional foods	450 consumers	South Brazil
Anand, 2011	A study of determinants impacting consumer's choice regarding fast food	Explore food choice variables	Demographics, Intention, behavior	Literature and survey	Fast food	WHO, Euromonitor International & Data monitor International databases	India

consumption in India									
Annunziata and Vecchio, 2010	Italian consumer attitudes towards products for wellbeing: the functional food market	Investigates on factors which influence the behavior towards functional foods	Attitude	Quantitative survey	Functional foods	340 consumers	Italy		
Bae, and 2010	Chae, Ryu, Consumer behaviors towards Ready – To – Eat foods based on food-related lifestyles in Korea	Consumer behavioral factors towards RTE foods	Attitudes - Context	Cluster Analysis	RTE foods	410 RTE consumers	Republic of Korea		
Ares and Gambaro, 2007	Influence of gender, age and motives underlying food choice on perceived healthiness and willingness to try functional foods	Evaluate the effect of age, gender, and motives on food choice	Demographics, Intention, and behavior	Structured survey tool	Functional foods	200 consumers	UK		
Costa-Font, 2009	Consumer acceptance, choice, and attitudes towards Genetically Modified [GM] food	Examine the choice, acceptance and attitudes towards GM food	Attitude & Intention	Ad hoc survey and personal interviews	GM food	314 consumers	Spain		
Golub, 2005	Consumer choice of Breakfast	Demand for healthy breakfast	Demographics & Attitudes	ACNielson Homescan	Breakfast cereals	7195 US households in 1999	US		



	cereals	cereals			database & USDA food nutrition data			
Poulsen, 1999	Danish consumer attitudes towards functional foods	Explore attitudes towards functional food	Attitudes, Intention, and demographics		Focus group interviews, conjoint analysis, and a survey	Functional foods	205 respondents	Denmark
Castetbon, Harris and Schwartz, 2011	Purchases of Ready – To – eat cereals vary across US household sociodemographic categories according to nutritional value and advertising targets	Describe RTE cereal purchases	Demographics		Cross-sectional study of purchases of 249 RTE cereals	RTE cereals	Neilson Homescan	USA
Dominick, S., Bir, C., Widmar, N., Acharya, L., Wang, H. and Wilcox, M., 2018.	Exploring preferences beyond the cereal box: Ready To Eat Breakfast cereal buying behaviors	Study of preferences – nutrients	Attitudes		Logit model	RTE breakfast cereals	1265 residents	USA
Goglia et al., 2010	Nutritional quality and labeling of ready-to-eat cereals: the contribution of the French observatory of	To assess the nutritional quality of food products	Context - Attitudes		Surveys	RTE Breakfast cereals	Oqali database	France

food quality										
Shi and Price, 1998	Impacts of Sociodemographic variables on the implicit values of Breakfast Cereal Characteristics	Implicit values of nutrient and non-nutrient characteristics of breakfast cereals	Demographics Context	-	Survey data	Breakfast cereals	USDA's Food database	Nationwide Consumption	USA	
Lee et al., 2007	Consumer insights on healthy Breakfast cereal – A focus group research	Attitudes, opinions, and concerns of consumer segments of RTE cereal	Attitudes		Focus group	RTE cereals	Conjoint analysis		-	
Verma et al., 2007	Diversification of Food Production and Consumption Patterns in India	Agricultural diversification – food demand	Context		Secondary data	Cereal – based and Non-cereal-based diet	National Survey [NSSO]	Sample Organization	India	
Mitchell and Boustani, 1992	Consumer risk perceptions in the Breakfast Cereal Market	Consumers decision making	Information seeking and knowledge		Focus groups & survey	Breakfast cereals	180 shoppers		UK	

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