



Most Consumed Instant Foods During the Pandemic: A Descriptive Study

Cristian Jay M. Trinidad, Phatricia A. Madlangbayan

College of Education, Bulacan State University

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people have prioritized buying their most basic needs, thus, households focused their daily spending on food. According to Medical City Clinic, with different levels of community quarantine still in place all over the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic, people are spending more time than ever at home. Having access to a variety of food choices online has caused a lot of people to fall into unhealthy dietary habits. One of the main responses of the government to the pandemic were several announcements of “lockdowns”, during which, millions of workers were not able to come to work and thousands of businesses have ceased operation. Most Filipinos were left financially struggling, and this struggle had forced most Filipino households to replace healthy and fresh food choices with the more accessible and cheaper instant foods.

Instant foods include a variety of food types that have been cooked, canned, frozen, packaged, or changed in nutritional composition with fortifying, preserving, or preparing in different ways. Among the categories of instant foods are instant beverages such as instant coffee, teas, powdered juices, and others. Fast food items, on the other hand, include fries, burgers, fried chicken, and others.

The trend in instant food and canned goods got higher despite the pandemic. According to GlobalData (2020), instant food became the staple food of most Asia-Pacific countries when Coronavirus came because of its taste, affordability and convenience. The other common reason why people tend to buy more instant food and canned goods is that it can be stocked for a long period of time, product variety and its low cost. According to Dancel (2020), rubbing alcohol and disinfectants were quickly emptying the shelves and same thing with the rice, toiletries, canned goods and instant foods. “As more people are staying home and avoiding outdoor activities amid the outbreak, the sales of instant noodles have peaked in recent days. The current utility-owned instant noodles are affected primarily by the COVID-19 pandemic and their demand has skyrocketed in recent days as consumers are actively stockpiling the emergency supplies in the APAC” says Khushboo Jain as cited in the article of GlobalData (2020).

After hearing the continuous rate of virus spread, most Filipinos have been buying in panic amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Health protocols were not well implemented inside most Philippine marketplaces, and close contact was inevitable. To make matters worse, less fortunate Filipinos were at times left with low quality goods because more privileged ones have bought most of the better quality supplies. “Hoarding during times of crisis is unethical. It is a practice that privileges those who can afford callously depriving those whose resources only allow them to survive on daily minimum wages the nourishment and protection for their own families,” (Leonen, as cited in Madarang, 2020). On another note, because of this panic buying, people are more prone to the virus. According to Carlisle (2020), Dr. Lauren Sauer said that, “The Coronavirus can be transmitted to surfaces.”, and in a crowded market, people are more likely to get infected.

In this study, the researchers aimed to identify the most consumed instant foods during the Coronavirus Disease-19 Pandemic, and, in that regard, identify the best ways to lessen the consumption of instant foods.

Statement of the Problem

The general problem of the study was, “What are the most consumed instant foods during the Pandemic?”

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How may the respondents be described in terms of:
 - 1.1 age,
 - 1.2 sex, and
 - 1.3 economic status?
2. How may the consumption of the following instant foods be described?

- 2.1 Processed Foods
- 2.2 Instant Beverage
- 2.3 Chips/Nuts
- 2.4 Fast food Items
- 3. What intervention programs may be done to help limit the consumption of instant foods during the pandemic?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This section provides a review of different literature deemed to be substantial in the research. The articles cited in this chapter contained relevant information about the topic, "Most consumed instant foods during the Coronavirus Disease-19 pandemic.

Instant Foods

Many years had passed but these instant food and canned goods were still in demand on people's buying list. According to just-food.com (2004), due to busy life, people had no time to prepare much healthier and nutritious food for themselves. They prefer eating foods which were not consumable when preparing. Until now during this pandemic, the demand in instant food and canned goods rose. "The Ready-to-Eat food segment dominated the market in 2019, accounting for 42.9% share in terms of value owing to the feasibility and consumption at the desired period without worrying about the deterioration of the product." (UnivDatos Marketing Insights, 2020) But does eating instant food and canned goods frequently have no harm to health? When talking about canned goods, people may think that they are less nutritious and less healthy compared to those fresh foods. Some people believed that the packaging itself can cause harm to one's health. According to Wargerink (2018), foods that were canned do not contain less nutrients. Actually, canning allows food to preserve their nutrients in a much more efficient manner. Contradicting this, Buckingham (2020) said that people should limit the intake of canned goods. Canned goods contain excess sodium and other preservatives to prolong the shelf life of the product which can also lead to some serious illness. "Too much sodium can cause negative effects on blood pressure and other heart-related conditions, and may also lead to water retention that may cause swelling," says Kestenbaum as cited in Buckingham (2020).

Eating instant foods such as instant noodles frequently is not advisable, Mount Elizabeth Hospital's dietitian Seow Vi Vien said that, "The nutritional quality of instant noodles is of concern because it contains a high amount of fat, saturated fat and sodium, as well as little fibre, protein, vitamins and minerals." as cited in Quek (2017). They are trying to say that instant food cannot be recommended as a replacement for meals. Possible effects of excessive intake of sodium to the body can lead to high blood pressure or worse, stroke. A person who eats instant food frequently can become malnourished because he doesn't acquire the required nutrients like minerals, vitamins and protein to support health. According to Quek (2017), Miss Seow recommended that if you are going to eat instant noodles, you must at least add some vegetable, meats, fish, egg or tofu to supply the nutrients on the body. According to Coila, to reduce the sodium and calories in instant noodles, she suggested using only half a package of ramen and better not use its seasoning. Moderation is the key, everything that is too much is also bad for your health. "Many people think eating instant noodles is toxic and harmful, but it's not true. Some people overuse and abuse it ... it's not meant to be eaten five times a day!" says Dr. Tee E Siong as cited in Murugappan (2015). Similar to Coila, in the article of Murugappan, Dr. Tee E Siong said, seasoning included in the instant food must not be added.

REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

This section provides review of prior studies containing similar ideas and studies about the most consumed instant foods during the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, this chapter attempts to provide insights in the different discussions, results or findings gathered.

Influence of Instant Food among Students

The aim of this research was to determine the negative effects of consuming instant foods. It is believed that students must be encouraged to avoid instant foods consumption as much as possible. This paper provided instant foods background and the effects if students consume instant food frequently. It was deemed that the study may be influential to other people, especially to future generations of Filipinos. It is important to know the negative effects of instant foods in order to avoid many diseases such as obesity, kidney disease, and diabetes.

Impact of Buying Behavior of Consumers towards Instant Food Products in Chennai District

Buying behaviour refers to the process by which individuals search for, select, purchase, use, and dispose of goods and services, in satisfaction of their needs and wants. The present study has been initiated with the objective to study the buying behaviour of consumers towards instant food products. The main objectives of the study are to study the perception with reference to awareness and satisfaction. This research also helps to assess the ability of shopping sites in order to attract and retain the customer, to analyze the shift in buying behaviour and to explore the reasons why potential customers do not prefer online shopping. The research methodology was exploratory and descriptive. In the study the sample was based on purposive, judgment and convenience sampling. Primary data and secondary data have been collected for this study.

Consumers' Preference And Consumption Towards Instant Food Products

The study aimed to identify the customer preference towards instant food products. The study identified that a majority of the consumers have purchased instant products regularly and they preferred for easy availability and lesser time for preparation. This study was conducted based on qualitative data collected through questionnaires from the users of instant food products. The study results identified that a majority of the respondents have purchased instant food products regularly. Lesser time taken for preparation is a main reason for purchasing instant food products. The consumers are more satisfied with availability of the instant food products. This study will be useful to the manufacturers of instant products for understanding the choices and preferences of consumers and to formulate suitable marketing strategies for improving sales.

The Effect of Instant Foods on Daily Life of First Year and Second Year English Majors at Hanoi University

The study was executed to identify the major effects of instant food products on daily life on freshmen and sophomores from English Department at Hanoi University. Furthermore, the research was intended to propose some practical solutions in order to assist students in surmounting culinary difficulties and mitigating adverse influence derived from ready-made foods. A questionnaire was designed and administered to 80 students in April, 2015. Based on the data analysis, it could be surmised that ready-made foods have both positive and negative impacts on two cohorts of students. Apart from gaining more leisure time, participants also benefit by taking instant products as labor saving and energy saving modification.

The impact of COVID-19 lockdown on food priorities. Results from a preliminary study using social media and an online survey with Spanish consumers

This preliminary study describes the impact of the COVID-19 health crisis on people's interests, opinions, and behaviour towards food. Here, the evolution of people's internet searches, the characteristics of the most watched YouTube videos, and Tweeted messages in relation to COVID-19 and food was studied. Additionally, an online questionnaire (Spanish population, n = 362) studied changes in food shopping habits during the lockdown, motivations behind the changes, and perceived reliability of the information received from the media. Results showed initial trending searches and most watched YouTube videos were about understanding what COVID-19 is and how the illness can progress and spread. When the official statement of a pandemic was released, trending searches in relation to food and shopping increased. Data retrieved from Twitter also showed an evolution from shopping concerns to the feeling of uncertainty for the oncoming crisis. The answers to the online questionnaire showed reduction of shopping frequency but no changes in shopping location. Products purchased with higher frequency were pasta and vegetables (health motivations), others were purchased to improve their mood (nuts, cheese, and chocolates). Reduced purchasing was attributed to products with a short shelf-life (fish, seafood) or because they were unhealthy and contributed to gained body weight (sugary bakery goods) or mood (desserts). Statements made by experts or scientists were considered.

Methodology of the Study

This chapter presents the methods and techniques of the study, population and sample of the study and data collection procedure.

Methods and Techniques of the Study

This present study utilizes a descriptive, quantitative approach to analyzing the gathered data. Quantitative approach analyzes numerical or quantified types of data. Descriptive approach, on the other hand, is a non-hypothetical approach in research that deals with describing the sample and making generalizations from such descriptions.

The technique used by the researchers in this study to collect data is survey through mediated interviews only. The researchers opted to gather quantitative data through the use of a validated survey instrument which also qualified as the mediated interview questionnaire. The survey was used for the residents of Malolos and San Ildefonso, who will be the only respondents of the study.

Population and Sample of the Study

The sample of the study comprised of two groups: 50 respondents from Malolos, Bulacan and another 50 respondents from San Ildefonso, Bulacan, for a total of 100 respondents

Theoretical/ Conceptual Framework

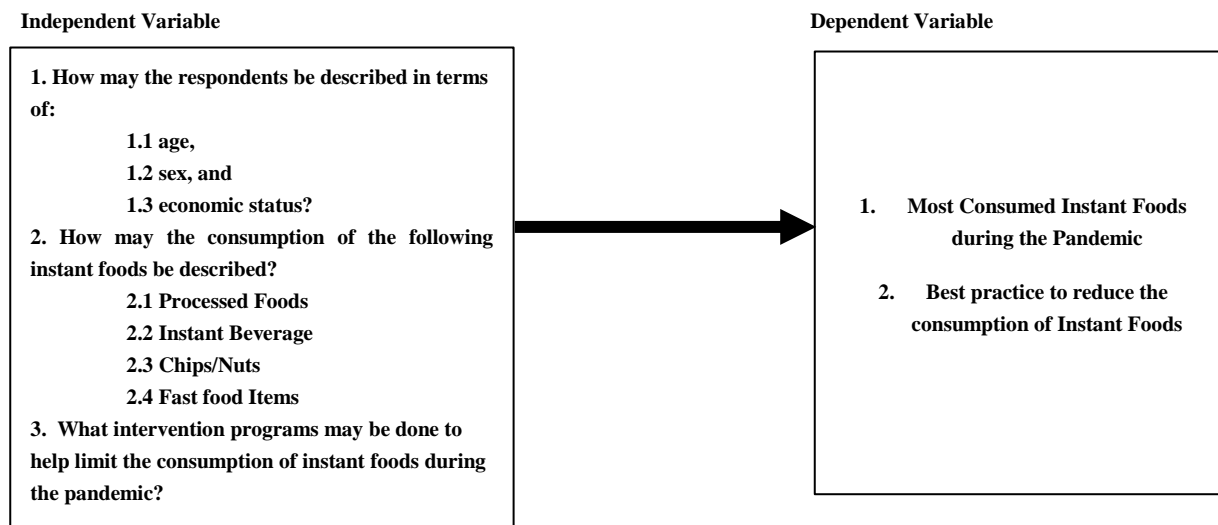


Figure 1 shows the Conceptual Framework of this study. It shows the descriptive process of the demographic profile of the respondents, kinds of instant food taken, and intervention programs to common instant food taken during pandemic time in aid of achieving the outputs of the study.

The first box contains the research questions which are the demographic profile of the respondents, kinds of instant food taken, and intervention programs which are directly connected to the most consumed instant foods during the pandemic as well as the best practice to reduce the consumption of instant foods, both outputs were based on the tallied and statistically presented data from the conducted online survey.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter presents the summary of findings, conclusion and recommendation.

Summary of Findings

The following are the salient findings of this study:

- 1.1 Most of the respondents were aged 15-25. Related literature also stated that this age group is the most exposed to instant foods.
- 1.2 In terms of the gender of the respondents, a majority of those who answered the survey questionnaire were female.
- 1.3 As shown on the survey results, a majority of the respondents belong to the middle-class. This means that most of the respondents were greatly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in terms of food purchasing.
- 2.1 Processed foods like meat products (hotdogs, hams, bacons etc.) were the most consumed instant foods. Processed foods are foods that are easy to prepare such as: meat products, canned goods, and microwavable meals that are usually seen in convenience stores. The researchers assumed that these processed meat products were very convenient to prepare as it lessened the cooking time which may have been the main reason for its high consumption levels as compared to canned goods and microwavable meals.
- 2.2 The most consumed instant beverage is coffee, and this may be explained by the fact that drinking coffee is traditionally embedded into Filipinos as drinking tea is to Chinese and Japanese people.
- 2.3 In terms of chips/nuts, most of the respondents appeared to love eating potato chips. Cornick, a Filipino corn snack, and beans were also considerably consumed by the respondents. These simple snacks call for zero preparation and are widely available in the country, hence, their high consumption levels.
- 2.4 Based on the data gathered, fast food chains like Jollibee remained open during the quarantine period, growing by an average of 50 percent versus same-store sales in the early part of 2020 (Abadilla, 2021). It is known that fast food chains continued to operate despite the pandemic and also took a growth with the help of deliveries. Fries and burgers are the most highly consumed fast food items, but the researchers debate that this may have been caused by the availability of these items on the streets.
3. Data also revealed that the most effective way to limit the intake of instant food during this Pandemic Times is to provide meal planning. "By knowing in advance the meals you will prepare, and having the ingredients to prepare them, you'll set yourself to make healthy meal choices and avoid poor food choices that can compromise your health" (Mealplify,2019)

3.1 It may also be gleaned that most respondents believed that “Local Government Units should provide seedlings of vegetables for their residence and discuss the proper ways of planting them”. From this statistic, it may be interpreted to mean that most Filipinos depend on government intervention for reducing instant foods intake.

Conclusion

Processed foods like meat products (hotdogs, hams, bacons etc.) were the most consumed instant foods by the respondents during the Covid-19 pandemic. The most consumed instant beverage is coffee, and most respondents loved eating potato chips as their extra food or for snacks. Lastly, fries and burgers were the most consumed fast food items.

In terms of frequency, the highest percentage score is “Once a week”, which means that most respondents consume instant foods on a weekly basis. Taste is the most important preference in buying decision according to 31% of the respondents. Data also revealed that the most effective way to limit the intake of instant food during this Pandemic Times is to “provide meal planning”. In addition, most respondents agreed that Local Government Units should provide seedlings of vegetables for their residence and discuss the proper way of planting them.

The researchers also found out that even though many of the respondents suggested meal planning to lessen the consumption of instant foods, still, most respondents consume instant food at least once, twice, or thrice a week, and it is very difficult for consumers to avoid buying these instant foods due to availability, convenience, and affordability reasons. However, it must be noted that these high levels of consumption of instant foods may be detrimental to health. Excessive intake of instant food can bring harm to the health of a person. According to Shim (2020), “A study has found that ready-meals are usually high in saturated fat and salt. Those who consume ready-meals regularly (over 70g/day of ready-made meals)

were also found to have a remarkably lower nutrient intake, falling significantly beneath the national nutrient-based recommendations.” If the person cannot avoid the intake of instant food, it is better to add something nutritious to that specific instant food, as also suggested by some experts. According to Quek (2017), you must at least add some vegetables, meats, fish, egg or tofu to supply the nutrients on the body.

People were unaware of the nutritional content of the food that they eat. As long as it suits their preference, people bought them. However, people should be more mindful of their health and what harmful effects to the human body can be caused by excessive consumption of these instant foods.

In summary, instant foods have been increasingly consumed during the pandemic. Most Filipinos, lower-class and middle-class) were given very few food options due to the lack of funds and unemployment, thus these people are forced to buy instant foods as a replacement for healthy foods. This study served as an eye-opener not only to the harmful effects of excessive instant foods consumption but also to the hardships caused by the pandemic.

Recommendations

This part is composed of recommendations suggested by the researchers to attain the broad intention and the general purpose of the study on the most consumed instant foods during the Pandemic.

The researchers recommend that:

12.1 Parents should guide and advise their child to lessen the consumption of instant foods. Children, at a young age, must be made aware that instant foods contain sodium, saturated fat, Trans fat, and cholesterol.

12.2 The community also should be aware that excessive consumption of instant foods is detrimental for one’s health and should hence be consumed moderately.

12.3 The study of instant foods consumption must be promoted, improved, and continued. Future researchers may find guidance in this study as to how similar studies may be done.

12.4 Food industry flourished because of the pandemic. A lot of people increased their buying decision rate in terms of stocking and preparing for lockdowns in 2020. Food deliveries also became popular due to restrictions of going out. People then tend to use their mobile applications to pick and choose what they like to eat. In the context of this study, food industry can also come up with new ideas on how to prepare the much healthier food choices without sacrificing convenience.

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