

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18937540

Website home: <https://jmcs.amcap.net/website>

Submission guidelines: <https://jmcs.amcap.net/website/page/submission-guidelines>

Date of Receiving: 04-08-2025

Date of Publication: 10-01-2026

Exploring Consumer Food Preferences: A Shift from Homemade Food to Ready-Made Food Among Adults in Lahore.

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Abstract

Dietary preferences of young adults are changing very rapidly due to developing lifestyles, job pressures, and living conditions. With growing workloads and limited time, many individuals are shifting away from traditional prepared meals and prefer ready-made or restaurant cuisine (Butt & Iqbal, 2024). The present study explored the food preferences of young adults in Lahore and their transformations from homemade food to ready-made food. Moreover, thoughts and perceptions were also explored about homemade food. Using an exploratory research design and a purposive sampling technique, a total of N=12 working males and Females from the city of Lahore were selected for in-depth interviews. An interview guide was generated based on questions about the transformation of consumer food preferences and the factors affecting the transformation of consumer food preferences. Descriptive statistics were used to characterize the participants, and thematic analysis was conducted to evaluate the findings. The outcomes of the study demonstrated that consumers' food preferences are determined by a mix of physical and economic forces that directly affect their daily meal choices. Rising food costs, differences in income levels, the nature of one's career, and the ease of access to prepared meals in metropolitan environments are the main causes of the shift in working people's dietary choices.

Keywords: *Food Preferences, Transformation, Ready-Made Food, Economic Factors, Physical Factors, Time Constraints, Social Environment.*

Introduction and Review of Literature

Individuals' eating habits, dietary decisions, and general lifestyle patterns are greatly influenced by their food preferences (Baw, 2024). These dispositions represent individual preferences as a result of cultural values, familial customs and moral values, social contexts, and personal experiences. In contemporary civilizations, food choices have dramatically shifted from traditional food to modern, readymade food effecting the preferences about the food (Feldman & Wunderlich, 2023). Adults are always changing their living situations, job obligations, and financial difficulties. Inspired by other people and social media (Peshcherova, 2023).

However, evolving urbanization, especially in developing countries like Pakistan, has significantly transformed the eating patterns of students due to their daily routines and working conditions (Ishaq, Khalid, & Ahmad, 2018). People who are working, living in urban cities, especially the hostel residents, experience increasing workload demands, long commuting hours, and limited time for household tasks that affect their food preferences. These considerable lifestyle changes have encouraged these food preferences from traditional homemade, ready-made, and processed foods (Feldman & Wunderlich, 2023).

Economic factors are also significantly affecting the eating decisions of individuals. What individuals choose to eat is directly impacted by growing food prices, changing income levels, and the affordability of various food items. Many working men and women pick ready-made meals because they seem to be inexpensive, time-saving, and easily accessible (Ishaq et al., 2018). The presence of fast-food restaurants, food delivery services, and neighborhood eateries in urban areas encourages consumers to change their eating habits. Because of these environmental changes, convenience meals are growing into a regular part of many people's everyday lives (Hossain et al., 2015).

Transformation is the process of change. In simple words, transformation is defined as a complete change in the appearance or characteristics of an individual. Food transformation means that any time you open your fridge or food cupboards, you enter the global food system (Ishaq, Khalid, & Ahmad, 2018). This system is a multiple web of all the people, organizations, and governments made available by this global food system all around the world (Peshcherova, 2023). In the modern world, and businesses that are involved in the production, distribution, sale, and consumption of food. Regardless of who we are or where we are on the earth, the food we can eat is available in supermarkets, restaurants, and food streets, which play an important role in supplying

different processed foods (Ishaq, Khalid, & Ahmad, 2018).

Food preferences are the consumer's behavior regarding food. Food preference is an integral part of a personal lifestyle. Food preference is a primary determinant of our dietary intake and behaviors. The transformation of consumers' food preferences can be determined by physical, social, and economic factors. The food sector is one of the most important parts of our global economy (Agha, Rind & Abro, 2022). A consumer is a person who purchases goods for their own personal use. Consumer behavior refers to the action and decision process of those who purchase goods for their personal use according to their needs (Feldman & Wunderlich, 2023). People's attitudes and behaviors related to food include measures like preferences, the desire to eat certain kinds of foods, and purchasing intentions (Baw, 2024). Connection with human civilization also has an influence on their eating habits and food preferences. In the past, people did not have exposure to restaurants. They only preferred to eat at home. But in the modern world, this belief has totally changed compared to the past. People now have more interest in buying ready-made food than in home-cooked food (Feldman & Wunderlich, 2023).

Consumer lifestyles are changing day by day due to globalization and modernity. Our society is becoming more westernized day by day because we adopt Western culture. Due to a shortage of time, our eating patterns have totally changed (Hossain et al., 2015). Time is the most important factor that is deeply influencing our changing food preferences. Nowadays, most people like to eat fast food, ready-made food, and convenience foods rather than cook at home. These foods have become more popular among people. Today, consumer perceptions have totally changed due to different factors and situations (Agha, Rind & Abro, 2022).

The assumption that the food habits of working groups of people are significantly impacted by economic changes is supported by a growing body of socioeconomic and nutritional research. Rising food prices directly encourage consumers to prefer less expensive, high-energy items over typical meals that need more time and financial resources to prepare, claim Drewnowski and Specter (2004). Fast food, processed foods, and prepared meals are common, simple, and affordable dining options for working people due to economic concerns such as fluctuating income levels, job instability, and growing living expenses. According to Warde (2016), urban workers are increasingly relying on convenience meals despite the fact that they are less expensive and labor-intensive than cooking.

Additionally, literature suggests that occupations involving long working hours or shift-

based schedules limit the ability to prepare homemade meals, making market-based, low-cost foods more attractive (Jabs & Devine, 2006). Due to increased economic stressors, individuals started to arrange their food in a way that is affordable, accessible, and less time-consuming rather than traditional eating practices (Ishaq, Khalid, & Ahmad, 2018). Studies have shown a noticeable change in food preferences due to economic conditions and barriers (Ishaq, Khalid, & Ahmad, 2018).

The basic questions of human consumption, such as when, where, and how individuals eat, have been the subject of several studies. The idea of food preferences has been the subject of several studies from a variety of academic fields, including psychological science, humanism, finance, and nutritional sciences. Each field takes a different theoretical stance on the subject, emphasizing the intricacy and significance of comprehending eating-related behaviors. According to Rozin (2006), the fact that a variety of disciplines help address behavioral concerns in food decision-making demonstrates the complexity of the research on food preferences.

Despite the fact that people have a fundamental physiological requirement for food, choosing what to eat is not an easy process. Everybody has unique dietary preferences that are shaped by their interests and experiences. For example, although some people enjoy spicy foods like black pepper, others do not. In a similar vein, some people are picky or cautious eaters, while others love a wide range of meals. Food "liking" refers to how people assess the quality of an item or its sensory value, whereas dietary decision refers to a purchaser's preference for one sort of food over another.

Individual learning experiences and cultural norms can have an impact on adults' eating habits. These experiences, which can range from familial customs to cultural exposure, are very individualized and have an impact on how people form their preferences. Dietary decisions are also influenced by physiological reactions. Humans' preference for some tastes and distaste for others can be explained by sensations and physiological changes during digestion (Feldman & Wunderlich, 2023). For example, our preferences for sweetness or resistance to bitterness are greatly influenced by our sensory and biological makeup. The degree to which people appreciate distinct flavors depends on their environment and cultural context, even if core chemosensory systems are similar throughout groups.

SOCIAL CONTEXT AND SOCIAL SETTING

Different social classes have different food choices, leading to malnutrition and overnutrition. For example, people in higher social class groups generally have better

diet plans (for example, more intakes of natural products, lean meats, soft fish, whole foods, and raw vegetables) compared to manual workers (Martins, 2025). Social influences influence dietary decisions, and tests on dietary arrangements have shown that practices, beliefs, and qualities are the main factors that influence propensity, food planning methods, and health status (Abdollahnejad, Karimzad, & Akbarbegloo, 2025). Social tendencies, anyway, have been shown to change, for example, when people move to another country and accept the dietary tendencies of nearby cultures. For example, South Asian women who moved to Scotland showed a fatter intake, which is related to an enlarged weight profile and the incidence of coronary heart disease and diabetes (Feldman & Wunderlich, 2023). The social environment includes individuals who influence a person's eating behavior and the environment in which a person decides to burn through their diet (Laura,2020).

Social support is affected abnormally by knowledge or obliviousness; for instance, a person's family might positively impact their diet choices by encouraging and motivating smart eating experimentation. The variety of food options will depend on the setting in which the food is consumed, such as a restaurant, workplace, school, or home (Butt & Iqbal, 2024). Our dietary preferences are influenced by a variety of individual characteristics, including attitudes, beliefs, motives, and perceptions. Consumers are urged to adopt healthier diets due to food-induced health risks. One aspect of quality that is used to assess food is health (Kurt, 2010).

FOOD INTRINSIC FACTORS

Cost was a significant factor influencing the customer's buying conduct. Ordinarily, customers change their choices, the cost and flavor of the food, and what they receive in quality. Ready-made food has been imaginatively utilized for promotion to assist with illustration for clients, building their devotion, and creating satisfaction. Cost analysis and value of food correlation were extremely responsive to the purchasing goal of the purchaser. The value of food and significance rely upon the buyer's payment (Suresh et al., 2024). Customers may want a variety of items of food to change the flavor as high positions on their inclination list from time to time, but these items are frequently disallowed due to their exorbitant cost (Ali, 2022). Shoppers have a proper brain expectation of considering excessively priced items to be of high quality, and then again, low-priced items are of inferior quality (Rozen,2016).

The connection between cost and purchaser buy expectation has consistently been clear. The more exorbitant cost has been considered as a hindrance to the buying dynamic, particularly for the lower-income buyer (Bellamy et al., 2023). Cost was a component of

the buying conduct control on account of its capacity to restrict the shopper's dependence on their pay. According to earlier research, consumers' inclinations to buy food are significantly influenced by price. One of the main reasons for the effect item deal was accessibility. Finding their goods, which is readily available at oddball stores like Eleven and others, is appreciated by many consumers. Since consumers prefer to buy food on a penny-pinching basis rather than in quantity, there shouldn't be a need to visit shopping complexes like this to buy it. In order to determine its influence on the shopper's buying objective, this aspect was thus also considered to be included in the current research investigation (Kevin, 2001).

The buying goal was created in various ways in the behavior of a shopper for the purchase of an item or service, for example, item acknowledgment, optional item assessment, and post-buying returns in terms of administration or quality. Once the choice has been made by the customer to purchase the item, they are driven by their expectations. The dynamic of buy expectations was influenced by changes in value, quality, and worth. (Valarie, 1988).

FOOD EXTRINSIC FACTORS

Food has been consistently the principal topic in our day-to-day existence, be it for endurance, social, financial, or mental health. Individuals partner nourishment with friendship and diet. In any case, for some non-industrial nations like Malaysia, individuals' leftovers have gradually moved towards a westernized design, which brought about another food situation (Bellamy et al., 2023). Besides, young people these days will purchase any accessible things on the rack, disregarding their well-being (Mostafa, Al Dhaheri, Feehan & Yousif, 2024).

This new dietary example needs to address obesity and hunger. Observably, most customers lean toward helpful food as opposed to quality food, particularly among young people who are affected by their diet's stoutness prompts numerous infections, from constant to extreme, and in some cases can cause death (Martins, 2025). A way of life encompassed with appealing food has become a danger to the vast majority, as they will generally eat high-fat food, starch, and straightforward sugar, particularly as they age, and they should see diet-related diseases like obesity as a big deal. End eatery that will show standard without considering different elements like health. (Franchi,2016)

Extraneous components are characterized as the encompassing elements that impact food determination, like climate and family. The inherent variables incorporate individual food determination, choice, taste, information, and the ability to attempt new

food with the acknowledgment of food (Habib & Hussain, 2024). Inclination has three distinct rights, and it has a similar significance to decision, and in conclusion, it alludes to a buying choice. Clearly, food inclinations are firmly identified with two unique components, which are natural and external factors. Appearance, smell, taste, and surface are essential for the faculties that are tried in tangible science (Med,2019)

Food information, such as health claims, packaging, nutrition labels, brands, and advertisements, is defined as one of the external factors in food selection. The literature review concluded that food-related information is a factor influencing our food choices. Food-related information affects consumer perceptions when buying any food. (Larson, 2009). The food environment is considered an external factor to food, which greatly affects food choice. The additional food environment is divided into two factors such as social environment (such as interpersonal factors and social norms of family, peers, and social networks, including moral concerns and social environment when choosing food) and the physical environment (such as product availability, convenience, and accessibility; in-store features such as automatic display, location, order, and time (Habib & Hussain, 2024). The literature review concluded that the social environment also affects consumers' food choices. (Somalia, 2016)

In the social sphere, the family and the family food environment have an important influence on our dietary intake, but this influence is more profound for adolescents and children than for adults. In contrast, for adults, personal food choices are influenced by interactions with other people outside the family unit (such as close friends, peers, and colleagues) (Cui, 2024). Not only do they share the background of food, but also social norms and attitudes between people, things that have a long-term impact on the type of food they eat, whether they eat together or not. Most people are influenced by friends and try to start eating prepared food (Christopher, 2018).

Problem Statement

Working adults' dietary choices have evolved dramatically in recent years, particularly in cities where time constraints, budgetary constraints, and lifestyle changes have become more common. Despite the vital role that handmade food plays in maintaining nutritional balance and cultural identity, many working people are shifting toward ready-made, processed, and standardized food alternatives (Mostafa, Al Dhaheri, Feehan & Yousif, 2024). This development raises concerns about shifting eating patterns, a decrease in the desire to prepare meals at home, and its eventual impact on health and wellbeing. Few studies explicitly look at how economic and physical factors affect the development of food choices between employees in Pakistan, particularly in the context

of rapidly urbanizing cities like Lahore, despite the fact that prior research has emphasized a variety of food preferences.

This gap makes it difficult to comprehend the current causes driving changing eating habits and the broader social and economic implications of these changes. Additionally, consumers' lifestyles are altering dramatically as disposable income rises and information grows more available owing to social media's rapid expansion. Consumption patterns are changing as a result of changing work cultures and lifestyles. Patterns of food intake have also been significantly impacted by Western culture. Time constraints are another element that influences food consumption. Families find it difficult to prepare meals.

Consumers increasingly choose prepared dishes over handcrafted ones due to a shift in their eating habits. Due to their busy schedules and overtime, many customers purchase prepared meals because they don't have sufficient spare time for cooking. Finding the factors driving the change in customers' dietary choices is my main objective in this study. The availability of eateries and prepared meals at home are examples of the physical factors. Food prices, income levels, and jobs are examples of economic factors. Peer groups, reference groups, religion, and socioeconomic status are examples of social aspects. These factors significantly influenced the dietary decisions made by consumers.

This investigation is crucial because the shifting eating patterns of working men and women reflect larger structural alterations in society, such as a greater dependence on convenience foods, stress at work, rising food costs, and shifting home dynamics.

Significance of the Study

This study is very significant since it provides a better understanding of the changing food preferences of urban workers, particularly in Lahore. As attitudes continue to change as a result of financial stresses, demanding work schedules, and easier availability of readily accessible meals, it is crucial to investigate the underlying causes of these changes. The research's findings contribute to the expanding body of understanding on consumer behavior by showing how social and physical factors, such as income, food costs, occupation, the availability of convenience meals, and time constraints, affect people's food choices.

Furthermore, although international research has demonstrated changes in what people eat, there is a dearth of empirical evidence in the Pakistani context, particularly with regard to working men and women. With a focus on this neighborhood, the study offers significant insights into how development and changes in lifestyle impact everyday

eating patterns. From the perspective of public health, the study is equally significant. Nutritionists, medical experts, and legislators can create effective initiatives to promote healthy eating habits by having a better understanding of the reasons for working people's growing reliance on prepared or processed food. These results are crucial for addressing the growing health risks associated with unhealthy eating habits.

This study will also be useful to understand how many elements have a significant impact on our lifestyle and eating habits, as well as how our society is becoming more rationalized every day. Lastly, this study will determine how consumer food tastes have changed and if societal changes have been beneficial or detrimental

OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this research is to study the transformation of consumers' food preferences, exploring the thoughts and perceptions about homemade food.

- To study the effects of physical, social, cultural, and economic factors on the transformation of consumers' food preferences.
- Identify motivators and barriers to cooking homemade food versus buying ready-made foods.
- To study the broad acceptance of ready-made food and homemade food.
- To study the different theorists' concepts about the rationalization of society.

The following research questions were answered through the present study.

1. How does the transformation of consumer food preferences take place?
2. What are the physical, social, and economic factors affecting the transformation of consumer food preferences?
3. What are the motivators and barriers to making your own food versus purchasing ready-made food or eating out?

Methodology

Research Design and Philosophical Approach

This study used a qualitative research methodology to examine how Lahore's working population's dietary preferences have changed. Because it enables a thorough understanding of people's beliefs, observations, and decisions they make concerning their food choices, a qualitative method was used. The study sought to understand the intricate social, economic, and individual factors influencing working men's and women's transition from home-cooked meals to commercially produced and convenience foods using semi-structured interviews. The research was guided by an interpretivist conceptual approach, which emphasizes the importance of understanding

human behavior from the perspectives of the participants.

Sample and Sampling Strategy

Twelve (N=12) working men and women who live in Lahore's City Housing were chosen for the study using a purposive sampling approach. Because it enables the researcher to deliberately select individuals who have direct experience of the shift in food preferences, this method is appropriate for qualitative research. The study was suitable and pertinent to target participants who live in a contemporary, fast-paced residential neighborhood with easy access to ready-made food outlets, since its goal was to investigate how working people's lives impact their food choices.

The use of a small sample size (n = 12) was suitable for qualitative research as the food choices of people from lower- or middle-class neighborhoods may not be reflected in the sample, which represents a certain socioeconomic group living in a developed residential area. Additionally, even when purposive sampling is theoretically sound, it increases the risk of researcher bias since participant selection depends on personal preference.

Data Collection and Analysis

As a research instrument, an interview guide was utilized for data collection. The information was gathered in June of 2021. It was really challenging for me to get information from the participants because of the COVID-19 lockdown. During this crucial time, the COVID-19 epidemic was affecting individuals all over the world. Social separation was being practiced. The population was given strict directives by the government to stay indoors, wear masks, maintain social distance, and refrain from touching or interacting with anybody. They even provided extremely careful guidelines on self-care. Data collection was highly challenging and required a significant amount of time and effort.

Each of the twelve working men and women participated in in-depth interviews for this study. In order to give them time to consider the interview guide's responses to those questions, they received it roughly a week before their scheduled interview. "How did your food preferences change?" was an open-ended inquiry that asked them to discuss their own food preferences. What influences your dietary choices? What are the drawbacks of cooking at home as opposed to buying prepared meals or dining out? What encourages cooking at home? What foods do you currently like? During interviews, the researcher used probing questions since they believed it was necessary to encourage individuals to provide answers.

When the topic was exhausted, each person was free to speak. The duration of every conversation was around thirty-five minutes. There were two stages to the analysis. First, audio recordings and interview transcripts were examined many times. Important quotes and phrases from the interviews were underlined by the researcher. Before a consistent but distinct category emerged, the author retreated three times between the transcripts. These categories were given names by the researchers, who also coded the transcripts. Second, until the topic is well established, the researchers consistently improve the classification. Determining the reference and adhering to the research framework's tenets are included in the deductive portion.

Results

The results demonstrate that a complex interplay of socioeconomic, cultural, and physical factors influences changes in consumer food choices, demonstrating that eating habits remain unchanged on their own. Participants consistently said that their work schedules, income levels, resource availability, and the broader social milieu in which they live influence their eating choices. Many significant patterns that show how these outside factors cause a shift from traditional homemade meals to simple, ready-made food substitutes were found using theme analysis. Seven themes were identified to explain the change in consumer food choices, including three subjects on perceptions of homemade cuisine.

THEME 1: FOOD PREFERENCE

Hunger is the main reason for eating. Hunger is defined as the requirement for any type of food or drink that is used by the body as an energy source. Obviously, we need food to survive on the earth, and when we eat, our tastes change. Similarly, our food preferences change. Food preferences are a multifaceted and conceptual process that is constantly changing due to different situations.

Our finding indicates that 92% of participants preferred to eat food to remove the feeling of hunger, and only 8 % of participants, due to its taste, gave preference to eating food.

Every human being needs energy to survive in society. Food is the best source of energy in all parts of the world. If we are alive on the earth, then we need food because we feel hungry. So, to remove the feeling of hunger, we eat food." (participants 1,2,4,5,6,7,8,9,11,12)

"Food provides me energy. I feel that food helps me run the tasks of my body. I frequently utilize the relationship that food is fuel for my body, much like gas is fuel for my car. So, I eat food. " (participant 10)

"I think food provides energy to our immune systems and enables us to survive in

society. On the other hand, its taste influences me a lot. So, I eat food. "(participant 3)

THEME 2: THE EFFECTS OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES AND AMENITIES ON FOOD PREFERENCES

"The accessibility of ready-made foods at home and the availability of eating places affect us a lot in preparing meals at home. So, we prefer to go to restaurants to eat rather than make homemade food." (participants: 5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12)

"Ready-made food is cheaper than homemade food. As a result, we always prefer to buy ready-made food rather than make food at home because it is less expensive and more effective than raw ingredients. (participants 1,4)

"I like to purchase ready-made food rather than homemade food, because it is available in different varieties of taste." (participant 2)

"I think brands affect me when I eat anything because I am so conscious about my health. I always prefer to eat branded food items like bread, spreads, honey, ketchup, etc (participant 3)

It was observed during research that affordability, availability, and accessibility were the major factors affecting the transformation of food preferences. Food preferences and diet quality were positively linked with food prices, income, occupation, availability, and accessibility. There were more differences between the participants' food preferences and diet quality. Low-income participants were eating everything available at low prices. They were not more conscious about the quality of their diet. They were just focusing on food prices and quantity, but the high-income participants were only focused on the healthy diet. Because they were more conscious about their health. They were only focused on healthy dietary quality. Food prices and quantity did not matter to them. It can be said that they were brand-conscious. The findings of this research indicate that 83% of participants' food preferences were changing due to the affordability, availability, and accessibility of food, and 8% of participants' food preferences were changing due to brand. Available resources and amenities were the main elements that strongly affected their meal preferences.

THEME 3: EFFECTS OF THE ECONOMIC AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT ON FOOD PREFERENCES

Economic factors such as income, occupation, and food prices, as well as physical factors such as food accessibility and the availability of eating establishments. These factors were strongly influencing the transformation of consumer food preferences. Many of the participants were reported,

"I buy ready-made food because its prices are more effective for me as compared to raw ingredients." (participant 2)

"We usually buy ready-made foods or convenience foods that have a good quality-price ratio." (participants 4,6,8,11,12)

"Ready-made food is cheaper than cooking at home. As a result, I buy

ready-made foods.” (participants 1)2

Food prices were affecting people's food purchasing decisions. Consumers' food preferences were changing due to low food prices. They were giving more priority to ready-made food because it was cheaper than homemade food. The ready-made food prices had no fundamental influence on the income and socio-economic status of the participants. Food prices were the main issue in selecting foods in this study, it was found. All participants were paying attention to food prices. The empirical finding indicates that about 58% of the participants' food preferences changed due to economic factors.

“Availability and accessibility affect our meal planning because we are working women. For our families, we have no time to prepare meals at home. So, to save our time, we mostly prefer Food Panda because it provides food in just a few minutes and its services are open 24 hours.” (participants 3,5)

“I buy ready-made foods or convenience foods instead of cooking at home since they're easily available in any supermarket or convenience store.” (participant 7)

“I like to buy ready-made food because it is available in a variety of tastes at minimum prices.” participant 9

“Instead of cooking at home, I go to restaurants when I feel hungry because they are available near my home location.” (participant 10)

Accessibility of ready-made foods to the home and the availability of eating places were the most important physical factors in the transformation of consumers' food preferences. These physical factors depend on transportation and location. Availability and accessibility were the biggest determinants in changing consumers' food preferences. About 41% of participants' food preferences were changing due to physical factors.

4.1.4 THEME 4: EFFECTS OF JOB CONSTRAINTS ON FOOD PREFERENCES

Job conflict strongly influenced the participants' food preferences. Participants were not able to prepare meals at home because they were too busy with jobs and other homework. Their busy lifestyle was not allowing them to participate in cooking activities. Occupation, working hours, and irregular night shift schedules; these factors had a greater impact on participants' food preferences. They were very serious due to that situation. They like to eat homemade food, but their busy work routine does not allow them to prepare meals at home. About 91% of participants' food preferences changed due to their jobs and working hours.

“Because our jobs and working hours do not allow us to cook meals at home, we prefer to consume ready-made foods or fast foods in the workplace and at home.” (participants 4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12)

Due to working hours, it's very difficult for me to cook food at home. So, I mostly prefer to eat chocolate, biscuits, and junk foods for breakfast, lunch, and dinner instead of cooking at home.” (participants 1, 2)

“I like homemade food, but due to my irregular schedule and night shift, I have not

found time to cook. So, I eat those foods that are easily available.” (3)

4.1.5 THEME 5: THE EFFECTS OF CULTURE AND SOCIAL CONTEXT ON FOOD PREFERENCES

Social context was a strong influence on their eating behavior and food preferences. They ate differently when they were eating with other people. Their food preferences were strongly influenced by social relations such as family, peer group, and reference group. They were going to different parties and learning from each other. Culture and social environment had an impact on their food preferences. About 41% of participants' food preferences changed due to social context.

“Natural and nurture, you know, occur from the parents or other human beings. If you have many friends, you meet with each other, and you go to your friends' homes. Then you learn about different food cultures from your friends. Therefore, we have learned about different food cultures from our friends. Now we go to restaurants to eat food or order food. This thing was not always included in our nature and nurture. This is something we learned from our friends.” (participants 9,10).

“In our busy lifestyle, it is very difficult for us to manage time between homework and work. As a result, we are unable to find time to prepare meals at home. We always eat ready-made food because it is easily available everywhere in different varieties and tastes. One of the most important things is that many of our friends like to eat. So, we prefer to eat ready-made food daily.” (participants 5, 6, 7)

Culture strongly influenced the participants' food preferences and eating habits. Their food venues, beliefs, attitudes, and habits were all changing as a result of culture and social environment. They were adopting Western culture in their eating, sleeping, wearing, and watching. They were going to restaurants to eat daily. The concept of kitchen culture was completely removed from those families. They were more influenced by social media and globalization. Modernity was too much there. About 58% of participants' food preferences were changing due to cultural factors.

We usually eat fast food for breakfast, lunch, and dinner because it is trendy and easily available everywhere. Its fast services, low food prices, quality, quantity, and discounts always influence us. KFC, Pizza Hut, Burger King, and McDonald's are the fast food restaurants that are open 24 hours. These restaurants provide services to customers in just a few minutes.” (participant 1,3)

“Convenience food is more expensive than fast food and ready-made food, but my family and I like to eat convenience foods like noodles, pasta, cakes, etc. Convenience food is easy to cook, and it is easily available in every supermarket and nearby store. ” (participant 2)

For a few participants, their families' food preferences were a barrier to cooking homemade food. They were thinking that when they were growing up, they had the full opportunity to select anything that they wanted to eat. If our children demand anything, which is especially related to food, it's our duty to fulfil their needs. Another barrier to cooking homemade food was their busy lifestyle and work commitments. They were not finding much more time to prepare meals at home for their family. They were facing different problems. Our finding indicates that for 14% of participants, family food preferences were a barrier to cooking homemade food.

Discussion

Findings of this study revealed that food preferences are a learning process that continues from childhood to the day of death. When they survive in society, people learn different eating habits from others. With the passage of time, people's eating habits change due to life turning points. Food preference is a conceptual, multifaceted, and dynamic process. From a social perspective, food preferences are affected by the social environment. Some kinds of food preferences are rationalized. Sometimes, we consciously select ice cream instead of salad. The main reasons behind selecting these foods are their reasonable prices and taste. The possibility of a prize or punishment emphatically changes food preferences. Food preferences are a complex process involving a lot of factors and considerations. Sensory perception is the same for all of us. But biological, psychological, economic, physical, and cultural factors affect us differently. Everyone has different food preferences according to their age, gender, race, and ethnicity.

Food preferences vary according to satisfaction and different factors. Taste and hunger have a significant role in changing food preferences. Because every human being has a different capacity to absorb energy into their bodies, the exposure to new tastes and lack of time encourages people to buy ready-made food rather than cook at home. Consumers are more concerned about the taste of food than the appearance and texture. Our finding indicates that 92% of consumers were eating food to remove the feeling of hunger, and only 8% of consumers, due to its taste, were giving preference to eating food.

Food preferences are the evaluative attitude that people express toward food. People's food preferences can be liked or disliked (Martin Stein, 2009). Consumers' food preferences may be changed by their life cycle stages (Martin, 2015). Food preferences can be connected to menu arrangement. Many people believe that taste is the underlying factor behind our food preferences (Sameer, 2009). All humans differently perceive certain foods' tastes. Most of our changing food preferences are the result of experiments and interaction (Birch, 1999). Taste and smell are the sensory elements that can be learnt (Mela, 2006).

Almost all the participants thought that the accessibility of resources and facilities influences their food preferences. Their food preferences and diet quality were positively linked with their food prices, occupation, income, availability, and accessibility. Everyone's food preferences and dietary quality are totally different. Such as low-income people eating everything easily available at low prices. They don't pay

attention to their food quality. They just search out discount items. They don't think about the advantages and disadvantages of the food product. But the situation is totally different for high-income people. They just focus on their food quality rather than their quantity and prices, because they are more conscious about their health. The availability of resources and facilities changes consumers' food preferences. Our findings indicate that 83% of participants' food preferences were changing due to affordability, availability, and accessibility of food, and 8% of participants' food preferences were changing due to brand.

Many participants thought that social factors such as family, reference group, and peer group significantly influenced their transformation of food preferences. Their eating behavior is more firmly influenced by their social context. They eat differently when they eat with others. The social environment more influences their food preferences. They are more influenced by their eating behaviors and food preferences when they attend parties, weddings, and other events.

There is evidence that social interaction with others makes some modifications in their food preferences. 41% of consumers' food preferences were changing due to the social environment. The culture has a strong influence on their food preferences. Their venues, attitudes, values, and norms about food are rapidly changing. They are adopting Western culture in their sleeping, eating, wearing, and watching. They go to restaurants daily to eat. The concept of kitchen culture is disappearing in those societies. They are more influenced by social media and globalization. Modernity is everywhere, not only in their food perceptions but in everything. The ratio of eating ready-made foods, fast foods, and convenience foods was higher in those people.

The result indicates that 58% of consumers' food preferences were changing due to culture. Literature indicates that the social environment plays an important role in food preferences (Stoddard, 1998). Many people adopt their daily diet according to the availability of certain foods. As a result, they have developed new cuisines (Ward, 2024).

Food prices are the main factor behind consumer food selection. Consumers' food preferences are changing due to low food prices. Everyone is giving more priority to outdoor meals. Because these food prices are cheaper as compared to raw ingredients, outdoor food prices have no significant impact on their income or socioeconomic status. Food prices are the main issue in selecting foods in this study, which finds out. Many people are showing more attention to food prices. 58% of consumers' food preferences are changing due to economic factors.

The most important physical factors, such as the availability of ready-made food at home and eating establishments, physical factors are more deeply influencing their changing food preferences. These physical factors are dependent on transportation and location. Affordability and accessibility are the biggest factors found in the transformation of food preferences.

Due to busy lifestyles and other circumstances, consumers do not manage time between home and job. In those situations when they need food to fulfil their hunger but they have no time for cooking, they go to restaurants to eat or order food to satisfy their hunger. Food Panda is the best facility for everyone, which makes everyone's life so much more comfortable by providing its 24-hour services. Restaurants, the availability of nearby food stores, supermarkets, and accessibility of transportation shape these factors more influentially on their transformation of consumers' food preferences. Due to the accessibility and availability of ready-made foods, they are giving more preference to ready-made foods than homemade food. Of those, 41% of consumers' food preferences are changing due to physical factors.

Ready-made food is becoming more popular everywhere because of its low prices and good taste. Accessibility and the availability of ready-made food are the main reasons behind changing consumer food preferences. Because this method of providing food is more effective and quicker. The consumer's taste is transforming the world widely, including Pakistan. Traditional foods are being replaced by ready-made foods. For almost all consumers, ready-made food is the shortest way to remove the feeling of hunger. Homemade food is being replaced with ready-made food, which is apparently a symbol of modernity.

Time constraints increase the consumption of ready-made foods and decrease the consumption of homemade food. The researcher observed that the ease of access to ready-made food and nearby shopping malls are the main reasons behind the changing of consumer food preferences as observed in city housing in Lahore. Occupation and working hours played an important role in the transformation of food preferences, especially in families where women work, as observed by the researcher. Due to a lack of time, they were giving more preference to purchasing ready-made food than cooking food at home.

Conclusion

It was concluded that the major issues faced by many consumers till now are that the consumers do not know the quality of the food that is ordered from any food cart or

restaurant. They don't know how that food is cooked or which type of spices are used in making that food. In some conditions, it is not possible to eliminate the food due to quality issues, but many consumers are facing an unwanted situation in which they are consuming that food due to time issues related to night shift, work commitments, irregular schedules, and working hours. They are under stress due to that issue. They like homemade food, but their working hours and busy lifestyle do not allow them to cook homemade food. Many of them are more conscious about their health, but due to their irregular schedule, they avoid them. They are under more stress because obesity and other health problems are increasing among those consumers. Because they consume fast foods, ready-made foods, and convenience foods. Due to that situation, the obesity ratio is higher among those people. The finding indicates that job conflict is the main factor that more deeply influences their food preferences. 91% of consumers were changing their food preferences due to job constraints. Good health is a result of good behavior. However, good health needs good eating. Healthy eating requires more time for cooking food. Both effort and time are essential in healthy eating. Time is a factor positively linked with a healthy diet. (Begin, 2000).

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