

People's Awareness about the Relationship between Food Habits / Ingredients & NCDs / CVDs

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1 - NCD - Non-Communicable Disease

2 - CVD - Cardiovascular Diseases

3 - SMM - Social Media Matters

4 - YOLO - Youth Online Learning Organisation

5 - CAPI - Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews

6 - FOPL - Front-of-Pack Labelling

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INTRODUCTION

Saturated fats, processed sugar, high levels of salts and a high degree of saturated fat and other preservatives are major contributors to the metabolic situations that lead to NCDs. More Indians are losing their lives to cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) than ever. According to the Global Burden of Diseases Report 2017, cardiovascular disease kills 1.7 million Indians every year. The premature mortality (years of life lost because of in India increased to 37 million in 2010 from 23.2 million in 1990 (by 59 per cent).

And yet, our consumption level of sugar salt and unsaturated fat is increasing in our daily food baskets. Not only have many of these products become less healthy over time, but the sheer number of choices in stores have also made it difficult and confusing for us to select healthy food. Adding to the confusion, unhealthy products may feature misleading health and nutrition claims on their packages.

This study attempted to trace the consumer awareness regarding the relationship between the food ingredients like unhealthy fat, processed sugar and salt and the incidence of ailments like Diabetes, high blood pressure and heart related diseases.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In order to focus the mandate of the research, we narrowed down the following objectives at the very beginning. This list of research objectives delineates the purpose and the possibilities of our study

1 To have an idea about the entrenchment of packed food in Indian markets.

2 To find the level of awareness among people about the warning labels on packaged food (about the excessive limits of salt, sugar and fats). This query would help us to discern the possibility of the relationship between the purchase decisions being made based on the awareness level?

3 To figure out the scope of government intervention.

Process of Data Collection

For online data collection, we collaborated with two organisations, viz. Social Media Matters (SMM) and Youth Online Learning Organisation (YOLO). These organisations have a network of volunteers spread over the country. In the beginning, we create online links for the survey, which is circulated through the network of volunteers. Ideally, the links are circulated to more than ten thousand target respondents.

Sample Design

We intend to conduct an online random sampling for data collection. Using the Cochran's method for sample size determination:

$$n_o = \frac{[(z_{0.005}^2) * p * (1 - p)]}{d^2}$$

Plugging in the z-value at a 95% level of confidence, $p=0.5$ and $d=0.5$, we get a sample size of about 384.

Research Methodology

We applied a quantitative research methodology for this study. Keeping in mind the Covid related restrictions, we had designed a multi-pronged strategy for data collection.

Online questionnaire:

An online questionnaire would be circulated through emails to targeted response groups. Online enumerators would ensure the quality of the collected data.

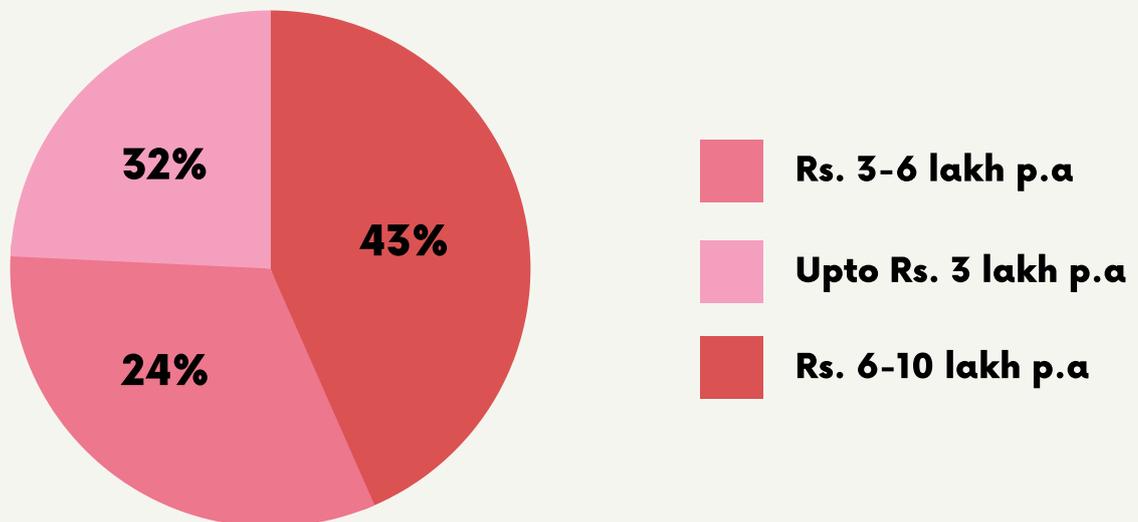
Findings

Data collection

As derived from the methodology, we were supposed to collect 384 observations. 397 households were surveyed through the online method, CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview). The data collection took place during the first half of July. A total of 634 online responses were collected. Upon cleaning the data, we found 397 responses good enough to be put into analysis.

Demographic details

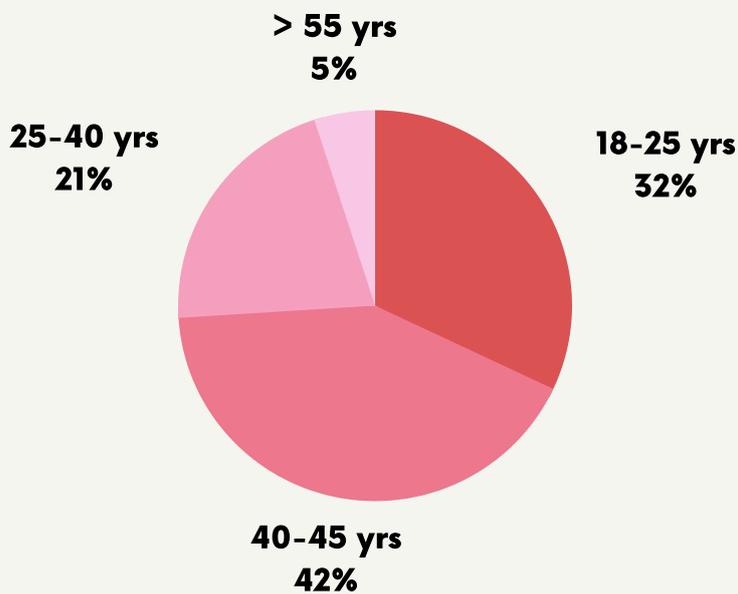
01 : Income Distribution



A cross section of people were interviewed for this survey. 32% of the respondents were from lower income strata of below 3 lakh p.a.

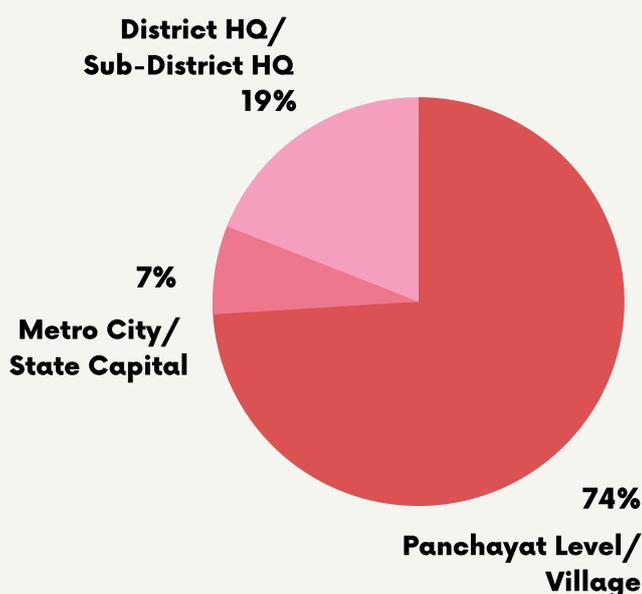
- 24% were from the income bracket of 3 to 6 lakh p.a.
- 43% were from the income slab of 6 to 10 lakh p.a.

02 : Age Distribution of the Respondents



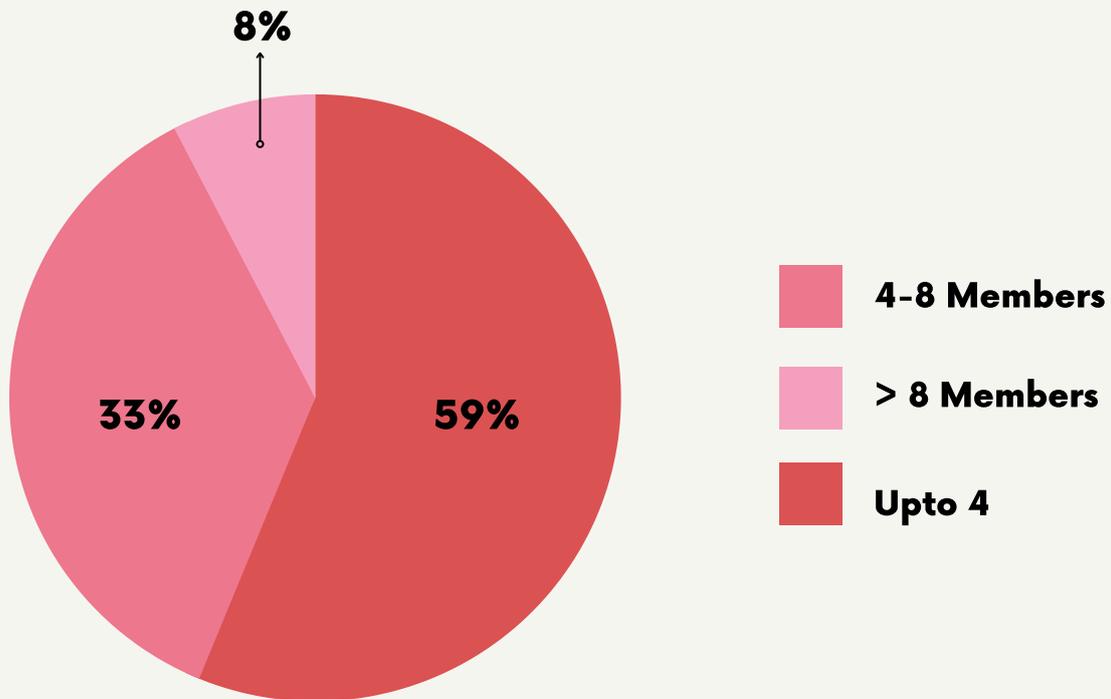
- 32% of the respondent parents are from the age group of 18-25.
- 21% aged between 25 to 40.
- 42% parents were from the age group of 40-55 years.
- A thin slice of 5% were from the more than 55 years age group.

03 : Residential Status



- 74% of the respondents are from tier one metro cities.
- 19% of the respondents were from tier 2 cities and/ or district headquarters.
- Only 7% of the respondents are from the rural background.

04 : Family Size

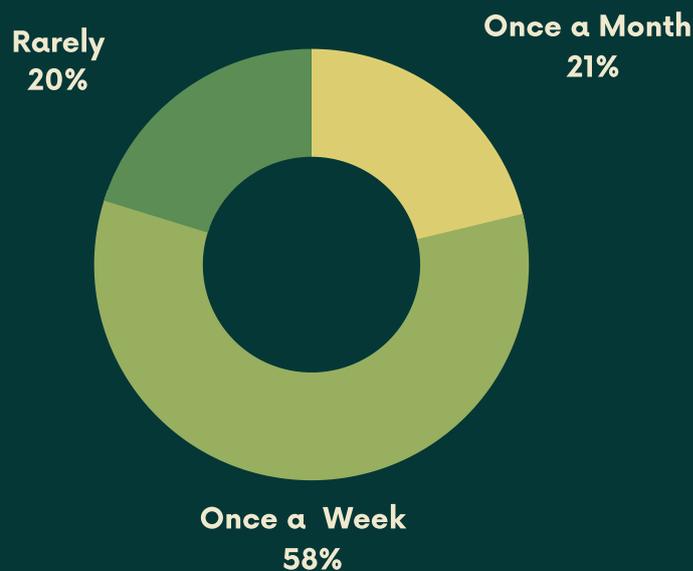


- 59% of the respondents were from a family size of 4 .
- 33% of the respondents had a family size ranged between 4 to 8.
- Only 8% of the respondents were from a family that had more than 8 members.
- This means that most of the respondents were from nuclear families.

MAIN FINDINGS

In this section we would discuss the response pattern regarding the food habits of the family members, consciousness about the food habit and possible acceptance of probable government intervention to ensure Front of Pack Labelling Policy or FOPL. To begin with, we understood it necessary to have an idea of the penetration of the packed food in Indian Markets. The parents were asked to report the frequency of packed food consumption.

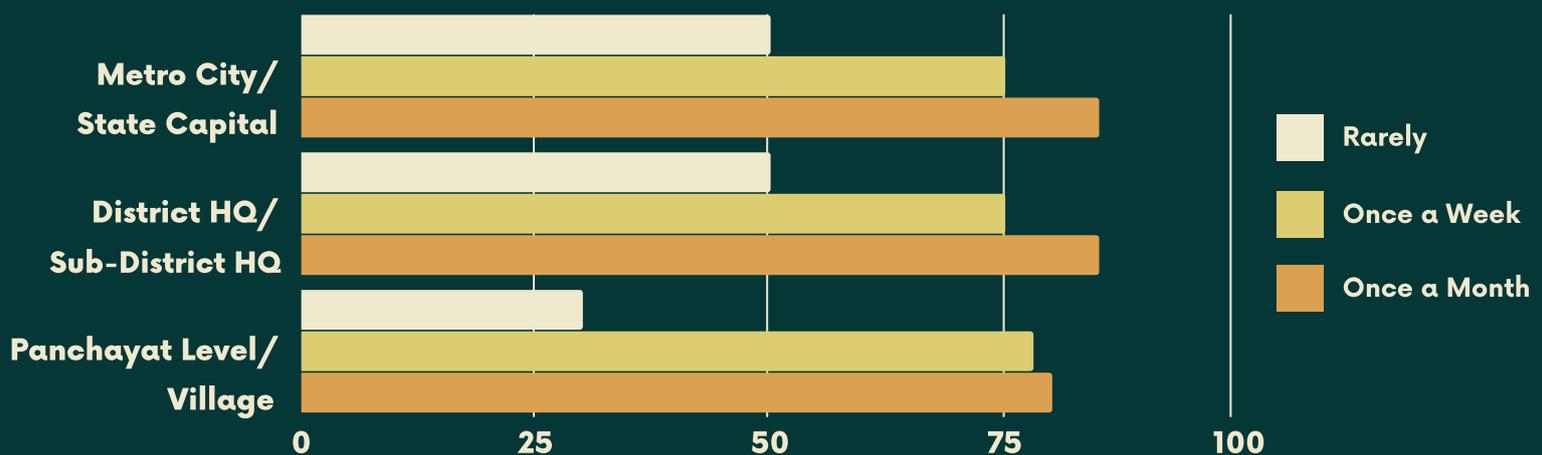
05 : Frequency of Consumption of Packed and Processed Food



- According to 58% respondent guardians, their children consume packed foods on a weekly basis .

- For another 21%, this frequency is once in a month,
- Where as according to only 20% the consumption of packed food takes place at less than a month frequency.
- Figure 6 further shows the residential pattern of behind the consumption of labeled food. The consumption frequency is disproportionately high in the urban areas.

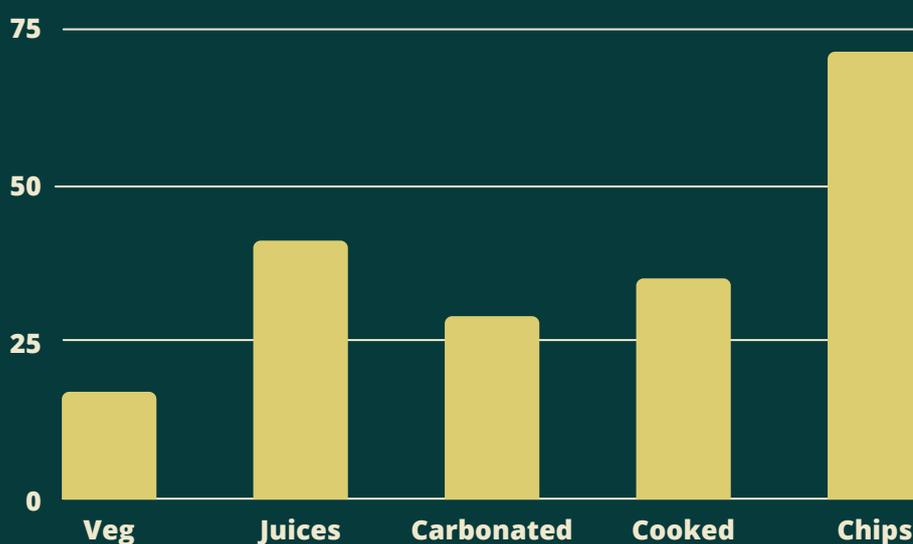
06 : Relation between Food Habit and Residential Status



It is important to know the packed food items most commonly consumed. The respondents were given multiple options (packed vegetables, canned fruit juice, carbonated drinks, cooked foods like pizza, burgers etc, and snack items like potato chips).

We have displayed the response pattern in **Figure 7** . Because of multiple choices the sum of this answer goes beyond 100)

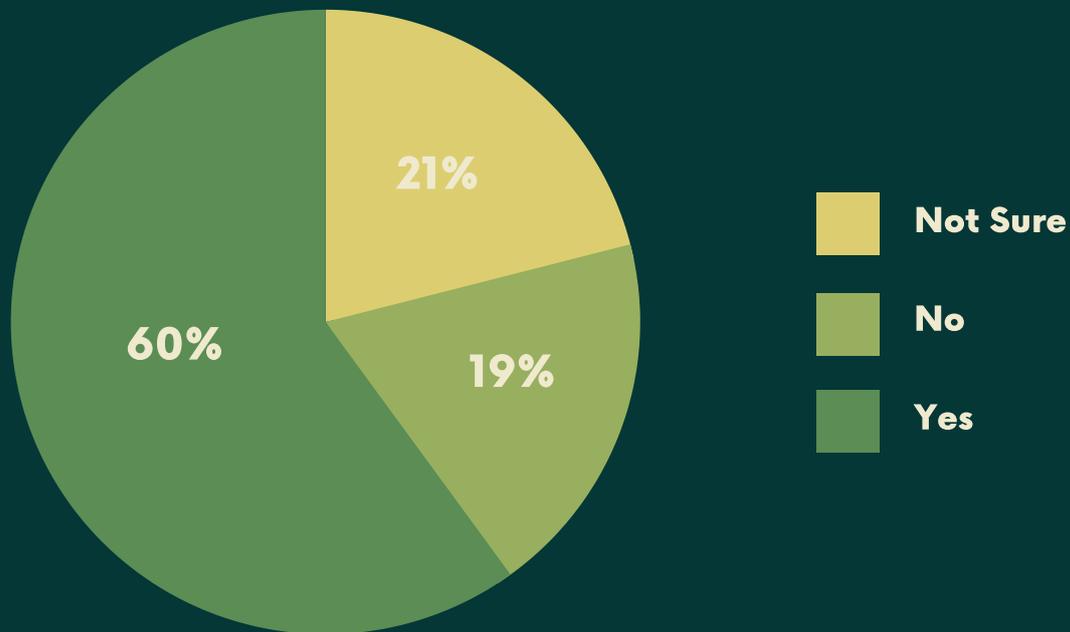
07 : Major Food Items



- 71% of the respondents accepted to have been consuming potato chips, and other snacks.
- 41% consumed processed fruit juices.
- 35% of them said they consume cooked items like pizza, burger or other similar things .
- 29% consumed carbonated and sweetened beverages .
- Only 17% said that they procure their vegetable in packed format.

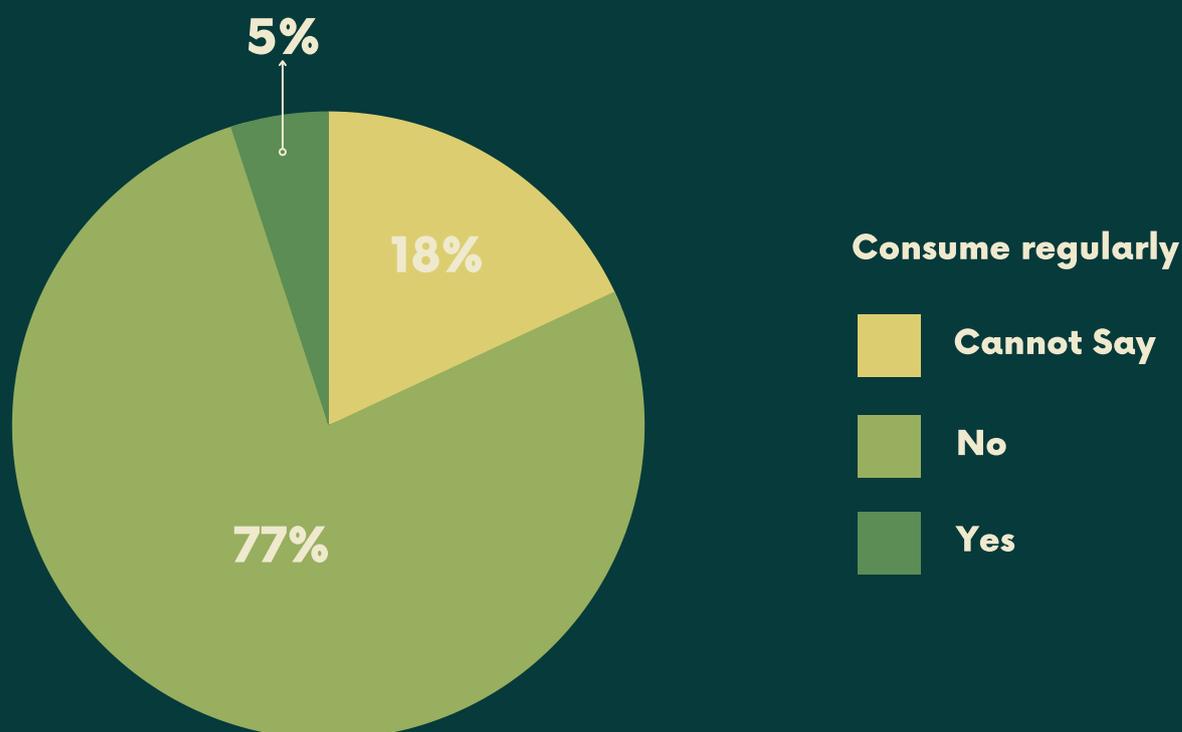
At the beginning of the survey, the enumerators discussed the possible health implications of consumption of excess sugar, salt and fat with the respondents. This orientation was instrumental in deriving quality responses from the respondents, as the general consciousness about these items is not well circulated among the consumers in India. Then, we asked the respondents whether they consider that the current food habit of the family members should concern them or not. The response pattern has been summarised in the **Figure 8**.

08 : Level of Concern About the Food Habit



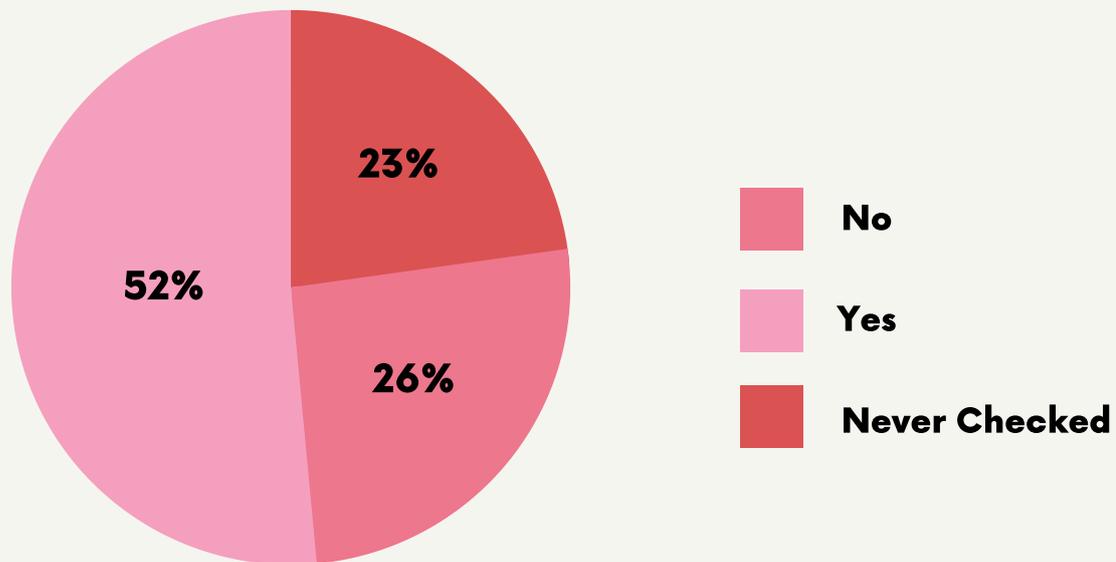
- ▶ 60% of the respondents expressed their concern over the food consumption pattern of their family.
- ▶ Only 19% of the respondents replied that they have no reasons to worry .
- ▶ It was an important task to measure how the households would behave if they are successfully convinced about the adverse effects of these foods, based on scientific pieces of evidence. There was a specific question in the questionnaire to arrest this trend. **Figure 9** depicts the response .

09 : Possibility of Changing Food Habit



- ▶ An overwhelming majority of 77% said that they would stop consuming the packed food if they are shown concrete evidence establishing the relation between sugar fat and salt with various non-communicative diseases like high blood pressure and blood sugar.
- ▶ Consciousness about the food contents is sparse in India. This study, aware of this phenomenon had placed certain questions to measure this problem. The enumerators asked the respondents that whether or not the respondents carefully read the labels! Figure 10 represents the response pattern.

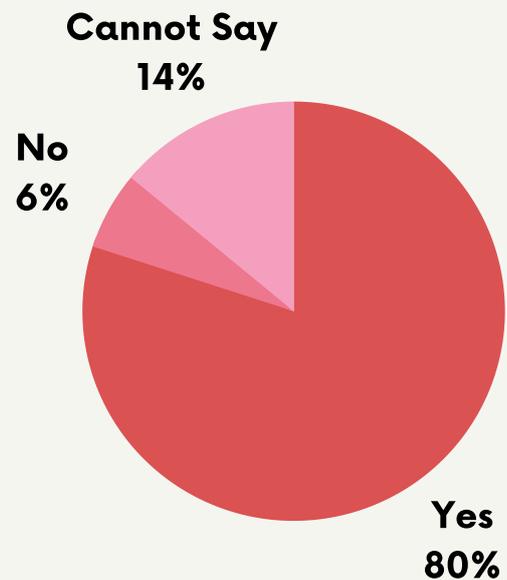
10 : Awareness About Food



- According to 52% respondents, the labels of the food products they buy, carry all the necessary information about the contents.
 - 23% of them said that they do not check the labels carefully.
 - According to 26% the labels provide adequate information about the food content.
- ★ The findings of the previous queries make it ostensibly clear that there is a window of opportunity for a third party arbitration in this case. Comprehensive steps from the statutory authorities would definitely empower the consumers to arrive at informed choices for their family members. It comes under the purview of the government authorities to initiate measures towards this end. Gauging the public appetite for a possible government intervention was also a mandate of the study. **Figure 11** depicts the acceptance level of government intervention in this.

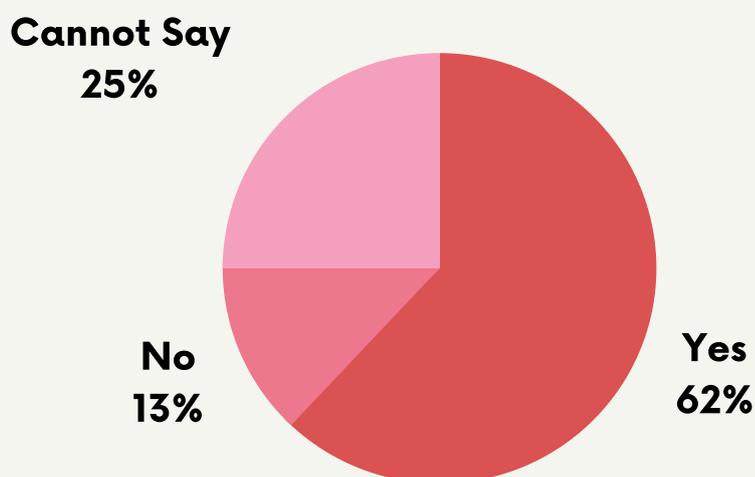
11 : Government Intervention

- An overwhelming majority of 80% of respondents opined that the government should make it mandatory to print the scientifically stipulated levels of food contents on the labels of the packed food.



Further, as we can see in [Figure 12](#), 62% of the respondents communicated that they would permanently cease consuming packed food that does not mention the share of sugar fat and salt in it.

12 : Impact of Government Intervention

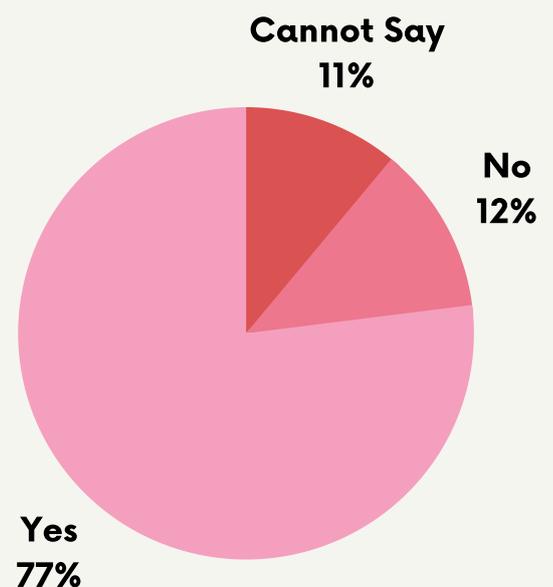


- ▶ 62% said that they would permanently quit consuming foods without proper labelling if the government or other credible agencies provide them with proof of the adverse impacts.
- ▶ Only 13% of the respondents affirmed that they would continue to consume the packed foods without proper labelling.
- ▶ Another 25% remained non-committal to a distinct answer.

13 : Perception About Safety

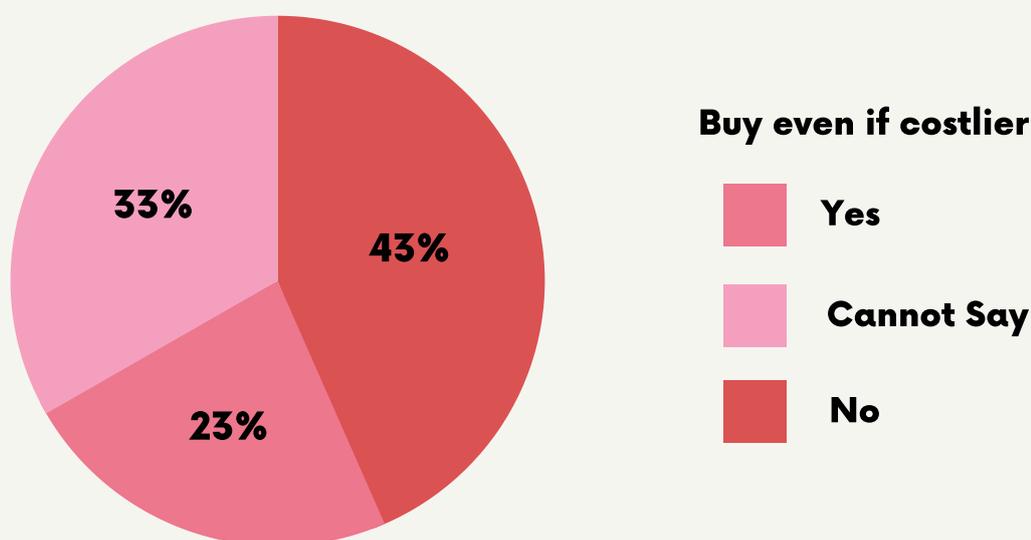
- ▶ According to 77% respondents, this kind of initiative undertaken by government or other government-controlled bodies would make them feel safer.

Packed food have a specific consumer base in Indian markets. Because of their marketing strategies, they often succeed to carve out a strong base of brand loyalists. Therefore, a strong government intervention asking consumers to refrain from consuming certain products, albeit with scientifically proven results, may backfire or fall flat in a market with brand loyalists.



- Based on this idea, we decided to investigate the penetration of brand loyalty in this commodity segment. The questionnaire asked the respondents if they would continue to consume the same brands, even if their preferred brand offers the same quality at a higher rate than other brands.

14 : Brand Loyalty

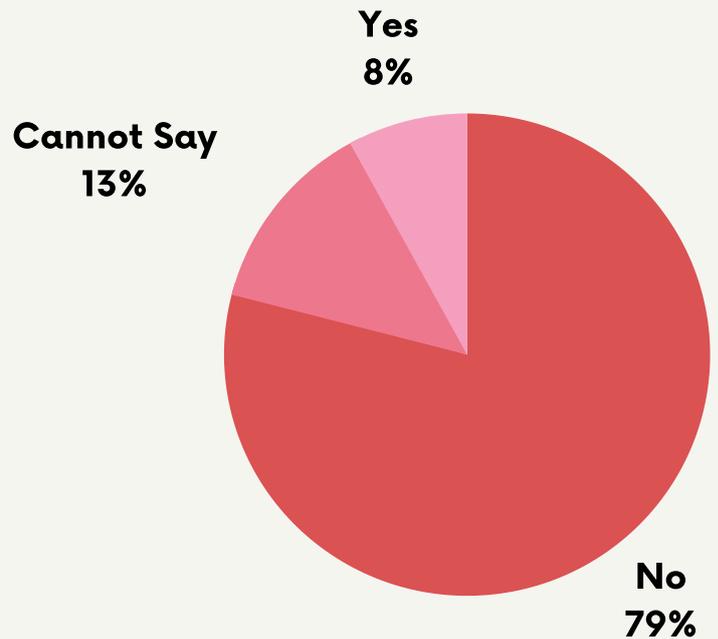


- Only 23% of the respondents said that they would continue with their packed food, even if they are costlier.
- This shows that the 'brand loyalty' regarding these foods are yet to reach an alarming level. There are incidents where the packed food industries, exploiting the scale effect of their operation starts to offer their products at a lesser than expected rate.

This kind of pricing often works as an incentive for the consumers to stick to the packed food. We enquired our respondent about this possibility. The reply shows that, at least in the Indian market the packed foods are not very cheap when compared to their unpacked counterpart. Figure 15 depicts the answer pattern to this question.

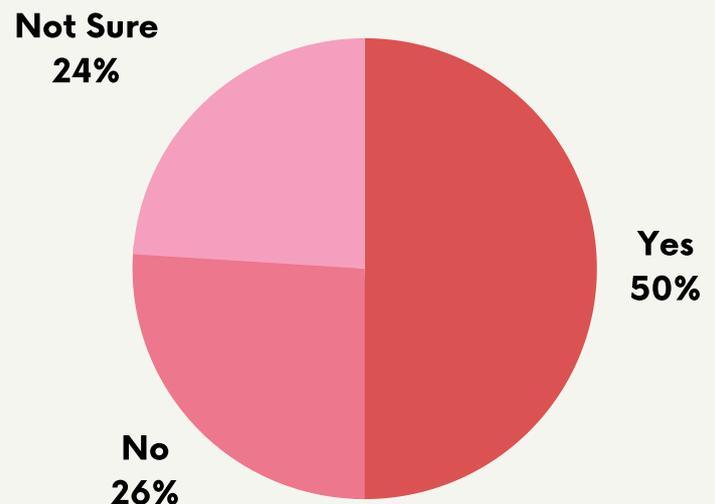
15 : Low Price , The Reason?

- ▶ Only 8% of the respondents said that, they consume packed foods because they are cheap.
- ▶ 79% denied this to be the reason.
- ▶ 13% could not answer this with certainty.



16 : Would they Pay Extra?

- ▶ Only 26% of the respondents said that they are not ready to pay more in order to ensure proper labelling on their packed food.
- ▶ Half of the respondents are ready to pay more in order to ensure proper labelling.
- ▶ Another 24% were uncertain about this.



CONCLUSION

This study comprehensively infers the following:

- 1. The emerging food pattern among urban youngsters is a matter of concern.**
- 2. The predominance of packed food is visibly concentrated around the urban areas.**
- 3. There is a lack of procedural clarity regarding the rules of distinctly mentioning the contents inside the pack.**
- 4. There is a need for intervention from the government to ensure that proper mentioning of food content is made mandatory on the foils of packed foods.**
- 5. Any such intervention would be appreciated by the consumers.**

APPENDIX 1 : QUESTIONNAIRE

Declaration: Identity and other information shared in this questionnaire would be anonymised and used to study collective behaviour only. No individual information will be used for only other purposes than this particular research. The information would be kept in password protected computers and would be deleted after the study.

General Question

- Do you have children?

- Yes
- No

- Age

- 18-25 yrs
- 25-40 yrs
- 40-55 yrs
- Above 55 yrs

- Gender

- Male
- Female
- Other

- Family Size

- Upto 4 members
- 4-8 Members
- More than 8 Members

- Family Status

- Joint
- Nuclear
- Single

- Educational Qualification

- Upto Secondary
- Graduate
- Post Graduate

- Income Bracket

- Upto Rs. 3 Lakhs p.a.
- Rs.3-6 Lakhs p.a.
- Rs. 6-10 Lakhs p.a.

- Residential Status

- Metro City / State Capital
- District HQ / Sub-District HQ
- Panchayat Level / Village

Awareness Level

- How regularly do you or your children consume packaged or processed food?

- Everytime we buy food, it is a packed food
- Once a week
- Once a month
- Rarely

- What type of foods do you usually consume that is bought off the shelf? (multiple answers allowed)

- Chips, cookies
- Cooked thing like Pizza or Fried Chicken
- Carbonated drinks
- Fruit juices
- Packed vegetables
- Other

- Processed food has been associated with a number of dangerous illnesses. They are considered a risk factor for diabetes, heart disease and cancers. Overconsumption leads to childhood obesity. Do you think it is a cause of concern for your and your family's diet?

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure

- If some products contained very high levels of these ingredients, would you still consume them regularly?

- Yes
- No
- Cannot say

- Is the quantity of salt, sugar, fats and other unhealthy ingredients clearly labelled on the packaged foods that you buy?

- Yes
- No
- I never checked

- There are scientifically set permissible limits for fats, sugar and salt. Do you want the government to make it statutory for the packed food producers to declare the amount of salt, fats and sugar on the packets along with the scientifically permissible limits of the same?

- Yes
- No
- Cannot say

- Would you stop eating packaged food, if you get to know that the quantity of salt, sugar and fats in them are more than scientifically permissible limits?

- Yes
- No
- Cannot say

- Would you feel safer if the packaged food you consumed had simple labels to indicate if the sugar, salt, and saturated fat is below the WHO prescribed scientific limits?

- Yes
- No
- Cannot say

- Do you buy packaged food because it is cheaper?

- Yes
- No
- Yes, and it is convenient too, as they are nicely packed
- I order from e-commerce sites, and that is the way they deliver these items.

- Would you buy if the packaged food is costlier than the non - packaged food?

- Yes
- No
- Cannot Say

- Would you buy packed food with permissible limits even if they are costlier than those which are healthy?

- Yes
- No
- Not actually

- Would you pay extra for a packed food to be under the permissible limit or healthy content?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

APPENDIX 2 : TALLY LIST OF QUESTION AND FIGURES

Query	Figure
<i>How regularly do you or your children consume packaged or processed food?</i>	<i>Figure 5 , 6</i>
<i>What type of foods do you usually consume that is bought off the shelf? (multiple answers allowed)</i>	<i>Figure 7</i>
<i>Processed food has been associated with a number of dangerous illnesses. They are considered a risk factor for diabetes, heart disease and cancers. Over consumption leads to childhood obesity. Do you think it is a cause for concern with you and your family's diet?</i>	<i>Figure 8</i>
<i>If some products contained very high levels of these ingredients would you still consume them regularly?</i>	<i>Figure 9</i>
<i>Is the quantity of salt, sugar, fats and other unhealthy ingredients clearly labelled on the packaged foods that you buy?</i>	<i>Figure 10</i>
<i>There are scientifically set permissible limits for fats, sugar and salt. Do you want the government to make it statutory for the packed food producers to declare the amount of salt ,fats and sugar on the packets, along with the scientifically permissible limits of the same?</i>	<i>Figure 11</i>
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<i>Would you buy packed food with permissible limits even if they are costlier than those which are healthy?</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>Would you pay extra for a packed food to be under the permissible limit or healthy content?</i>	<i>Figure 16</i>