

EFFECT OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS ON FOOD CONSUMPTION PATTERN OF PEOPLE IN KERALA

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Abstract

The present study investigates the impact of social and economic factors on food consumption patterns in Kerala by concentrating on three income groups such as lower, middle and upper. The research explores how social settings, cultural contexts, income levels, and accessibility shape food choices, while also identifying reasons behind shifting food habits beyond these factors. It employed descriptive and analytical methods to collect data from households in three districts, using gender and income as principal determinants. The study employed descriptive and analytical methods to collect data from households across three districts, concentrating on gender and income as key factor. The findings of the study revealed that food consumption is highly reliant on income: higher income groups spend more on outside food- fast food in particular. Gender does not play a role in the perception of social and economic influences. Relying on advertisement and general opinion, respondents reported confusion in choosing healthy food options.

Keywords:- Food Consumption, Gender, Income, Social Factors, Cultural Factors.

Food is essential for human survival; hence the patterns of consumption have a significant effect on human behaviour. These consumption patterns are influenced by a range of factors, including social, economic, demographic,

psychological, and environmental factors (Morrison et al., 2011). Food consumption may begin as a way of meeting basic survival needs, but continues to be moulded by external forces, mirroring larger currents in society. Urbanization and increasing disposable

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incomes have been driving changes in the food system among them.

Urbanisation leads to a change in lifestyles and diets and there is a growing demand for convenience, diversity and quality in food (Kennedy et al., 2004). Additionally, economic growth has resulted in higher disposable income that translates to increase spending on food and beverages, which is a more significant share of household budgets. This change is also impacted by globalization, changing family structure, and evolving cultural norms. The rise-and-shine demand for trendy and colourful food options signifies that food is not only food anymore, it's also a matter of status and lifestyle. Hence, there has been a continuous change in the food consumption patterns, which are dependent on the human requirements in association with the economic and social factors. These transitions illustrate the multidimensionality of diet and its relations with the wider socio-economic context.

2. Review of Literatures

Food consumption patterns in place can be largely structured by the social and economic factors. Income is key, with wealthier households spending more on diverse foods like dairy, meat and processed products, while poorer groups focus on cheap staples such as rice (Haseena et al., 2023; Salim, 2020). This income gap also leads to higher consumption of packaged foods in urban areas that have busy lifestyles, and higher disposable incomes leading to convenience food purchases (Haseena et al., 2023). Another important factor affecting this, particularly in cities, is

employment status. Working people tend to eat packaged foods because they are easier. Moreover, exposure to digital media and advertising has a significant impact on food choice, particularly among young adults promoting universal food trends and purchased food (Haseena et al., 2023). Household size has a significant impact on food consumption, especially in rural populations. Sizeable households eat more staple foods, but as for high-value foods such as meat and dairy, socioeconomic factors income and education drive demand more. Higher-income, better-educated households generally consumed more varied and health-conscious diets, including more fruits and vegetables.

Various socio-economic factors have also transformed eating habits. urbanization, globalization, and economic growth have led to a shift from traditional home-cooked meals to fast food and packaged products, particularly in urban areas. Growing economic prosperity and income lead to increasing demand for high-value foods, including seafood (Salim, 2020). Changes in culture, such as shifts in gender roles, have resulted in more dependence on convenience foods. Lastly, remittances from migrant workers have increased disposable incomes, which, in many households, has allowed for a diet that is more varied and ultimately healthier.

Based on the review of literature, it could be seen that human nature and their psychological factors are influenced by following factors i.e.,

1. Biological factors: Sorensen LB, et al. (2003)

2. Economic factors: De Irala-Estevez J, et al. (2000); Dibsall LA, et al. (2003)
3. Physical factors, social factors: Devine CM, et al. (2003); Feunekes GJJ, et al. (1998),
4. Psychological factors: Oliver G, Wardle J (1999)
5. Attitudes, beliefs: Gibney MJ, (2004),
6. Knowledge: De Almeida MDV, et al. (1997); Kearney M, et al. (2000)

3. Statement of the Problem

Food is one of the prominent factors, which is the fuel oil of human life and people cannot live without having food, hence food and its consumption is always a relevant topic. While looking into the food consumption all over the world, it could be seen that the existence of this industry is depending on four elements i.e., people choices, their capacity to get food items, diversification of food and the health concern of people. When elaborating these factors, it could be seen that, people choices and their ability to get needed food items are influenced by many factors like social, economic, culture etc. While diversification made them choosier, and the health concern is controlling their perceived behaviour. Here the perceived behaviour control is related to the health concern and the rest of the matter is highly associated with the influence of social and income factors. The social classes, social settings, social context and associated cultural settings are very much influencing the food consumption pattern while income factor is performing cost and accessibility part. Many studies found that in India, income

is one of the major determinants of social class and cultural settings. Hence, social mechanism and income distribution is important, because of income is deciding the people's ability to access food items, which means lower income groups may not be able to get high priced food items, but the higher income groups may have. This shows that there is a strong correlation between income and social factors while dealing with people's food consumption pattern. Based on these assumptions this article was examine the effect of social and economic factors on food consumption pattern and tried to find the reasons behind the changing food habits other than social and economic factors.

4. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the effect of social and economic factors on food consumption pattern of three levels income groups in Kerala.
2. To Identity the reasons behind the changing food habits of people in Kerala.

5. Methodology of the Study

Study followed descriptive and analytical research design based on secondary and primary data. Secondary data collected from research thesis, research articles, and scientific theorems. Primary data were collected from three income groups of respondents i.e., lower-income group, middle income group, and upper-income group. Samples were collected from households in Kerala. Three districts were randomly selected from State of Kerala i.e., one districts from each region of Kerala, Trivandrum-

from south region, Ernakulum - from central region and Kozhikode - from North region. Samples were selected by using purposive sampling method with defined criterion. The criterion was respondents must be from pre-defined income groups and study selected only 15 to 45 age group respondents. Male and female were equally distributed.

Pre-defined income groups were formed based on a pre-survey among urban population of selected districts. Based on the survey result three set of income groups were formed. Income group1- Lower income group earn below 20,000 per month. Second income group was named as middle-income group earning 20,000 to 40000 per month and the final income group considered as higher income group earning above 40000 per month. Based on the pre-survey result, study was analyzed the selected respondent's income category and amount of spending per month for having food from outside. Hence, spending pattern are below 1000 per month-Group 1, Second group spending around 1500 to 2500 Rs. per month and the last group average spending 5000 to 10,000 per month.

6. Hypotheses Formulation

6.1 Effect of social factors on food consumption pattern

The study investigates the effect of social factors on food consumption patterns, specifically social settings, social context, and cultural influence. Three types of food consumption way have been analyzed with social factors i.e., Preferring Healthy Food (HF), Mixed Type (MT) and Preferring Fast Food or Hotel Food

(FF). The research also examines the impacts of gender and income differences on food consumption. From these observations, two hypotheses are derived:

H_0 : *Effect of social factors on food consumption pattern is not statistically significant.*

H_a : *Effect of social factors on food consumption pattern is not significantly different across gender and income groups.*

6.2 Effect of Income on Food Consumption Pattern

Food consumption greatly depends on income. Those with higher incomes have the means to buy more expensive and nutritious food, while low-income sectors are unable to access due to purchasing restrictions. Other research has shown that income affects the amount and type of food consumed (Vitaliano 2010).

Here, again study was framed two hypotheses i.e.,

H_0 : *Effect of income factors on food consumption pattern is not statistically significant.*

H_a : *Effect of income factors on food consumption pattern is not significantly different across gender and income groups.*

7. Data Analysis and Discussions

This research article was used both descriptive and inferential statistics. Collected data were pre-tested with Cronbach Alpha test to find the internal consistency of scales. Social Factor consists of four sub variables i.e., social settings, social context, and cultural settings. Likert Scale was used to collect the opinion about the influence of social factor.

8. Reasons Behind the Changing Food Habits

The Indian food industry has flourished in recent years, with hotels and other establishments serving quality food in a comfortable environment. Yet the industry is failing to adjust to shifts in who is eating what, especially among younger people. Changing food habits are primarily linked to an increase in women in the workforce who are finding it hard to balance household chores owing to lack of time. Other influencing factors include social settings, environments, peer pressure, entertainment, stress, and time pressure. Prior studies underscored the significance of social and economic influences on food consumption. This study examines three social and two economic behavioural factors affecting food habits.

The results of the table 1 indicate that social and economic factors have significant impact on food consumption as their mean scores are more than 3 (t-test value) and statistically significant at 5 per cent. Food consumption patterns are not affected by gender but are highly influenced by income. The test of MANOVA revealed a significant effect for income and not gender. To sum up, the effect of social and economic factors on food habit is not significantly gender varied while the impact of income does.

Table 2 is illustrating the healthy food preference by the consumers in the context of social and economic factors influence. The table shows that most consumers prefer fast food over healthy food, regardless of social and economic factors. In the lower-income group, a

significant portion chooses healthy food. In the middle-income group, preferences shift towards a mix of home-cooked, healthy, and fast food. In the higher-income group, there is a noticeable increase in fast food preferences, despite the social and economic context.

Table 3 is illustrating eleven reasons which are changing the food habits of sample respondents. Here the changes do not mean that fixed changes and this change is always happening around the people because of some special reasons or moment. With all reasons being statistically significant according to the t-test. Gender has no effect on food habit changes, while income significantly impacts these changes.

9. Euclidean Distance Model (Ordinal level of measurement) with Two Dimension

Here, the respondents were ranked their preferences about the reasons which are changing their food habits. Two-dimensional approach has been done with the reasons.

The results show that five factors positively influence changes in food habits: good atmosphere, people's gatherings, entertainment, commitment to people, and stress. All these variables have positive coefficients, thus explaining their impact on consumer food habits.

10. Effect of Income on Food Consumption of People

Here, simple linear equation model was used to measure the effect of income on amount spending for outside food/hotel food/fast food. Result indicates that lower income group spending below

Table 1
Influence of Social and Economic Factors across Gender and Income Group
of Sample Respondents

Social & Economic Factors	One Sample t-test				2-Way MANOVA	
	Mean	SD	t-value	P-value	Gender	Income
Social settings					$\Lambda=.997$ $F_{(3,379)}=.362$ $Sig=.781>0.05$	$\Lambda=.950$ $F_{(6,758)}=3.273$ $Sig=.003<0.05$
Eating from home only	4.52	.770	38.839	.000		
Eating from home and outside	4.50	.531	55.642	.000		
Busy work schedule	4.02	.285	16.688	.000		
Social Context					$\Lambda=.994$ $F_{(3,379)}=.717$ $Sig=.542>0.05$	$\Lambda=.774$ $F_{(6,758)}=17.22$ $Sig=.000<0.05$
Eating with friends	4.14	.679	62.668	.000		
Social support	4.42	.494	32.961	.000		
Family support	4.46	.499	56.551	.000		
Cultural Influence					$\Lambda=.995$ $F_{(3,379)}=.593$ $Sig=.620>0.05$	$\Lambda=.877$ $F_{(6,758)}=8.586$ $Sig=.000<0.05$
Traditional food	4.27	.620	57.552	.000		
Exclusion of some foods	4.61	.488	23.686	.000		
Cultural barriers	4.66	.475	40.320	.000		
Cost					$\Lambda=.989$ $F_{(3,379)}=1.44$ $Sig=.230>0.05$	$\Lambda=.744$ $F_{(6,758)}=20.08$ $Sig=.000<0.05$
Price of food items	4.59	.493	65.022	.000		
Quality as per the price	4.67	.471	68.750	.000		
Quantity as per the price	4.57	.516	74.420	.000		
Accessibility					$\Lambda=.998$ $F_{(3,379)}=.247$ $Sig=.863>0.05$	$\Lambda=.969$ $F_{(6,758)}=8.989$ $Sig=.035<0.05$
Better transportation	4.50	.531	63.460	.000		
Better accessibility	4.01	.185	69.706	.000		
Better income position	4.58	.495	59.751	.000		

Source: Primary Data Λ = Wilks' Lambda

Table 2
Healthy Food Preferences of Three Income Respondents regarding the Influence of Social and Economic Factors

Social & Economic Factors	H F	M T	FF	Income								
	M	M	M	IG-1, N=128			IG-2, N=128			IG-3, N=128		
				HF %	MT %	FF %	HF %	MT %	FF %	HF %	MT %	FF %
Social settings	1.2	3.4	4.3	67	12	21	44	52	4	22	20	58
Social Context	1.6	4.2	4.5	34	52	14	12	72	16	15	36	49
Cultural Influence	2.1	2.8	4.1	47	38	15	43	52	5	27	23	50
Cost of Products	2.3	1.8	3.9	59	21	19	21	68	11	21	12	67
Accessibility	2.8	2.9	3.4	62	11	27	12	24	64	28	9	63

Source: Primary Data, M=Mean, HF=Healthy Food, MT=Mixed Items, FF=Fast Food, IG-1=Income Group 1 (Lower Income Group-below 20000 Rs. Per Month), IG-2=Income Group 2 (Middle Income Group-20000 to 40000), IG-3=Income Group 3 (Higher Income Group-Above 40000 up to 1 Lakhs)

Table 3
Reasons for Changing Food Habits across the Gender and Income

Changing food habits-Reasons		M	SD	t	p	Gender	Income
1	A good atmosphere	4.30	.550	46.384	.000	$\Lambda=.980$ $F_{(12,370)}=.645$ $Sig=.804>0.05$	$\Lambda=.431$ $F_{(24,740)}=16.1$ $Sig=.000<0.05$
2	Some special places	4.38	.485	55.826	.000		
3	Friend's parties, functions	4.39	.488	55.956	.000		
4	Peoples' gatherings	4.53	.500	60.215	.000		
5	Entertainment, shows, events etc.	4.30	.841	30.391	.000		
6	Commitment to people	4.16	.794	28.679	.000		
7	Official and unofficial parties	4.20	.812	29.123	.000		
8	Limited time	4.33	.771	33.939	.000		
9	Over stress	4.37	.599	45.075	.000		
10	Job related schedule	4.60	.490	64.481	.000		
11	Continuous Travelling	4.59	.493	46.384	.000		

Source: Primary Data,SD=Std. Deviation, M=Mean, t=t-test value, p=p-value

Table 4
Preferences about the Reasons for Changing their Food Habits

Changing food habits-Reasons		Dimensions 1	Dimensions 2
1	A good atmosphere	.1596	1.0325
2	Some special places		
3	Friend’s parties, functions		
4	Peoples’ gatherings	.6141	.0110
5	Entertainment	.7150	.3153
6	Commitment to people	1.0526	.2181
7	Official & unofficial parties		
8	Limited time		
9	Over stress	.7071	.1255
10	Job related schedule		
11	Continuous Travelling		

Source: Primary Data

1000 Rs. per month, middle income group spending 1500 to 2500 Rs. per month and higher income group spending 5000 to 10000 Rs. per month for having food from outside.

Here, the regression analysis indicates that lower, middle, and higher income groups are positively associated with the amount of spending per month and the result is statistically significant. Standardized coefficient values were used to interpret the result, because of difference in income scale and amount spending scale. All the values were standardized. Regression result clearly indicates that higher income groups are spending more amount for having food from outside

(543.672c+0.768hi). In the case of lower income group, it could be seen that they were not spending more money (543.672c+0.013li), because of their income capacity is not much better to have food from outside.

11. Findings

- 1. Social and economic factors show a great relevance for consumption pattern, and the consumers’ opinions on the influence of both were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Social and economic factors influencing food consumption, according to respondents, did not differ much between male and

Table 5
Effect of Income on food consumption of people

Income group		Regression Result and Equations (Standardized Values)
1	Lower Income Group	Amount of Spending (as)= 543.672+0.013 (Lower Income)
2	Middle Income Group	+0.289 (Middle Income)
3	Higher Income Group	+0.768 (higher Income)
	Complete equation	as=543.672c+0.013li+0.289mi+0.768hi

Source: Primary Data.All income groups effects are statistically significant at 5 per cent significant level, R²=.652 (65 Per cent). Regression ANOVA= p-value=.000<0.05

- female consumers. Hence, gender does not play a significant role in the perception of social and economic factors.
- There were differences in opinion of respondents regarding the impact of social and economic elements based on income groups, implying that income is an important factor in influencing food consumption patterns.
 - Higher-income groups spend more on food from restaurants and fast-food outlets, and lower-income groups spend less. Middle-income brackets are moderate spenders.
 - Most (87 per cent) were confused about how to select healthy food, relying on advertisements and general opinion due to unawareness of the contents of food.
 - Higher income correlates with higher consumption of fast food and food purchased at restaurants, yet not

many people are aware of the health risks related to this type of diet.

- The study revealed that consumers did not have an adequate knowledge of health education, as they were generally not aware of the nutritional composition of food and the health risks they pose to their health.

12. Suggestions

- Health education classes should be included in school and college curriculum. Schools and colleges need to incorporate nutrition education into science, home economics and physical education programs so that students learn about its importance on a daily basis.
- NGOs, government agencies, as well as educational institutions can be partnered to generate awareness related to food safety, nutrition and perils of unhealthy food. Schools, colleges, and community centers could host workshops, seminars, and

campaigns to educate people about the benefits of healthy eating and the dangers of unhealthy food choices. These initiatives need to be interactive, incorporating hands-on experience such as cooking demonstrations or meal planning sessions.

3. It would be mandatory for restaurants, food delivery services and fast food to display the nutritional content of the food on the menus, websites, and mobile apps. Informed food choices will be aided by clear labelling of ingredients, calories, fat content and allergens. Nutrition labels should also be simple enough for people to pick healthy food from menu cards in restaurants.
4. Building systems for rural health management and education is essential in rural areas, where health education may be more difficult to obtain. Local community centres, panchayats and NGOs must be empowered to conduct health education initiatives directed towards the rural folk, informing them about the significance of nutrition, risks of fast food and how to prepare a healthy diet with locally found food items.
5. Making sure that the whole population has access to healthy food at an affordable price is of paramount importance. Local governments, food producers and restaurants must work together to make available nutritious, age-appropriate meals, particularly in schools, hospitals and senior citizen centres. These healthy meals should

be available to all people, regardless of income. By informing consumers about these options, they will be incentivised to go for a healthier diet instead of consuming processed or fast food.

13. Conclusion

The research indicates that social and economic factors have significant influence on the foods that the consumers eat and income in particular affects consumers' food choices. Even though health risks that come with unhealthy eating habits have become more recognised, so many people are still drawn to fast food by convenience, advertising and peer pressure. Indeed, this change in eating habits notably the increasing reliance on fast food could have wider implications for long-term health, particularly among younger people who tend to have little knowledge of the nutritional value of what they are eating. The recommendations made seek to form a holistic approach that combines education, awareness, and transparency within the food industry to remedy such problems. The school-level initiatives of health education, public health campaigns, and clear labelling of food products can all help empower consumers to make informed choices. Similarly, it is important to promote healthy food at affordable prices to all income groups, more so to rural people, to have a culture of eating healthy. In summary, the use of targeted health education, regulatory measures, and public awareness initiatives can effectively reduce the adverse effects of unhealthy food choices. Such efforts will lead to a change in food culture helping to curb the epidemic of diet-related diseases and creating a healthier, satisfied consumer.

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