



A Comparative analysis of Korean Ramen and Indian Maggie: Taste, Quality and Price Among Gen Z in Ahmedabad and Bhopal City

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Instant Noodles, Gen Z Consumers, Brand Perception, Maggi, Korean Ramen

Received : 5 September

Revised : 23 October

Accepted: 23 November

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ABSTRACT

The instant noodle market in India has witnessed rapid growth, driven by evolving consumer lifestyles, urbanization, and global cultural influences. This study examines the perceptions, preferences, and consumption behaviour of Generation Z consumers toward two prominent instant noodle brands: Maggi, a long-established domestic brand, and Korean ramen, an emerging international product. The research focuses on factors such as taste, price, packaging, brand trust, cultural influence, and social media impact, analysing how these variables shape purchase intentions and loyalty. Data were collected from 156 respondents across Ahmedabad and Bhopal, using a structured questionnaire to assess brand perception and behavioural patterns. Statistical analyses, including demographic summaries, reliability testing, and comparative evaluations, were performed to identify significant trends. The findings reveal that Maggi continues to dominate due to its affordability, emotional connection, and consistent quality, while Korean ramen appeals to younger consumers through novel flavours, premium packaging, and aspirational value. Social media and peer influence play a critical role in shaping Gen Z's inclination toward international brands. Price sensitivity, brand loyalty, and taste preferences emerged as key determinants influencing purchase decisions. The study offers practical insights for marketers regarding product innovation, pricing strategies, distribution, and digital engagement tailored to youth consumers. Furthermore, the research highlights opportunities for future studies to explore regional variations, health-conscious consumption, and long-term adoption patterns. Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of consumer behaviour in the evolving instant noodle market, bridging domestic and global brand perceptions among India's youth

INTRODUCTION

Instant noodles have become one of the most widely consumed convenience foods across the world (Vidani, 2015). Since their invention in Japan in 1958, they have evolved from a simple ready-to-eat product into a global food phenomenon that reflects changing lifestyles, cultures, and consumer preferences (Vidani & Solanki, 2015). Countries such as China, Japan, Korea, and India dominate the global instant noodle market (Vidani, 2015). In India, Maggi has been the undisputed leader for decades, symbolizing nostalgia, comfort, and affordability (Vidani, 2015). Meanwhile, Korean ramen has recently gained popularity, particularly among younger consumers, due to its bold flavours, attractive packaging, and strong cultural influence from Korean entertainment (Vidani, 2015).

Among the new generation of consumers, particularly Generation Z, food choices are not just about taste they reflect identity, curiosity, and lifestyle (Solanki & Vidani, 2016). This study focuses on understanding how age influences perceptions and preferences regarding Korean ramen and Maggi noodles (Vidani, 2016). By exploring different age groups, especially young adults, this research aims to analyse how consumer perceptions shift with age and how this affects buying behaviour, brand trust, and willingness to experiment with new products (Bhatt, Patel, & Vidani, 2017).

Several factors contribute to noodle consumption, including taste, quality, price, convenience, and emotional connection (Niyati & Vidani, 2016). Younger consumers often prefer experimenting with new flavours and international cuisines, while older consumers may stay loyal to familiar tastes (Pradhan, Tshogay, & Vidani, 2016). In this context, Korean ramen is often seen as unique and adventurous, while Maggi continues to represent comfort and consistency (Modi, Harkani, Radadiya, & Vidani, 2016). Therefore, it becomes important to study whether age influences perceptions such as “Korean ramen has bold flavours” or “Maggi tastes more familiar and comforting (Vidani, 2016).”

The research also investigates how age impacts attitudes toward packaging, quality, and price. Korean ramen often presents itself as a premium product with visually appealing packaging, while Maggi is positioned as an affordable, everyday food choice (Sukhanandi, Tank, & Vidani, 2018). Understanding whether younger consumers are more drawn to Korean ramen’s modern packaging or whether older consumers prioritize value for money provides insights into brand positioning and marketing strategies (Singh, Vidani, & Nagoria, 2016).

Another important dimension is brand trust and loyalty (Mala, Vidani, & Solanki, 2016). Maggi, despite facing challenges such as the 2015 food safety controversy, has maintained a strong emotional bond with Indian consumers (Dhere, Vidani, & Solanki, 2016). Korean ramen, on the other hand, builds its appeal through novelty, imported quality, and social media influence (Singh & Vidani, 2016). This study examines whether age affects trust levels toward these brands and how that, in turn, impacts repurchase intentions (Vidani & Plaha, 2016).

Additionally, with the increasing role of digital media, the influence of social media and peer recommendations on consumer choices cannot be ignored (Solanki & Vidani, 2016). Younger consumers are more likely to try new products promoted by influencers or friends, whereas older consumers might rely on past experiences and established brand trust (Vidani, 2016). This research thus explores whether younger individuals are more influenced by online trends when trying Korean ramen compared to older consumers who may prefer the familiarity of Maggi (Vidani, Chack, & Rathod, 2017).

In summary, this study aims to determine how age shapes the perception of taste, quality, affordability, packaging, brand trust, and purchase behaviour regarding Maggi and Korean ramen (Vidani, 2018). By analysing these relationships, the research provides valuable insights into how instant noodle brands can tailor their marketing strategies to different age segments in India's diverse consumer market (Biharani & Vidani, 2018).

Research Objectives

1. To compare consumer perceptions of Korean ramen and Maggi in terms of taste, flavour variety, and overall sensory experience (Objectives achieved in Questions 5, 6, and 7 of the questionnaire).
2. To analyse the influence of packaging attractiveness and product quality on consumer preference between Korean ramen and Maggi (Objectives achieved in Questions 8, 9, and 10 of the questionnaire).
3. To evaluate consumer opinions regarding affordability, value for money, and willingness to pay a premium for Korean ramen compared to Maggi (Objectives achieved in Questions 11, 12, and 13 of the questionnaire).
4. To assess consumer trust and brand loyalty towards Maggi and Korean ramen, along with their repurchase intentions (Objectives achieved in Questions 14 and 15 of the questionnaire).
5. To study the impact of social media and peer influence on consumers' decisions to try new instant noodle brands (Objective achieved in Question 16 of the questionnaire).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Instant noodles have transformed from a quick meal option into a global food culture that transcends boundaries of age, class, and nationality (Vidani, 2018). What began as a convenient, inexpensive meal in Japan in the late 1950s has evolved into a multibillion-dollar global industry (Odedra, Rabadiya, & Vidani, 2018). Today, instant noodles are more than just an easy-to-cook snack they represent lifestyle, comfort, and even cultural identity (Vasveliya & Vidani, 2019). According to the World Instant Noodles Association, over 100 billion servings of instant noodles are consumed every year worldwide (Sachaniya, Vora, & Vidani, 2019). The largest consumers are found in Asia, where noodles are deeply integrated into everyday food habits (Vidani, 2019).

Korea stands out for its high per-capita noodle consumption and innovation in flavour development (Vidani, Jacob, & Patel, 2019). In contrast, India represents a fast-growing, volume-driven market dominated by Maggi, Nestlé's flagship brand (Vidani J. N., 2016) In both nations, noodles hold cultural

significance Korean ramen symbolizes adventure, flavour, and global youth trends, while Indian Maggi reflects nostalgia, warmth, and home-cooked comfort (Vidani & Singh, 2017).

Among the younger generation, particularly Generation Z, instant noodles have become more than food they represent convenience, identity, and modernity (Vidani & Pathak, 2016). The rising popularity of Korean culture through K-dramas and K-pop has further influenced young Indians to explore Korean ramen (Pathak & Vidani, 2016). Thus, comparing Maggi and Korean ramen provides insight into changing consumer preferences, cultural shifts, and brand perceptions among Gen Z consumers in India (Vidani & Plaha, 2017).

Global and Regional Overview of Instant Noodles

Instant noodles enjoy immense popularity across continents due to their affordability, ease of preparation, and long shelf life (Vidani J. N., 2020). The product's versatility allows it to fit into various cuisines, adapting to local flavours and preferences (Vidani J. N., 2018). In Asian countries such as Japan, China, Indonesia, and South Korea, noodles are a staple meal rather than a snack (Vidani & Dholakia, 2020). These countries have contributed significantly to product innovation introducing spicy variants, cup noodles, and diverse packaging formats (Vidani, Meghrajani, & Siddarth, 2023) (Rathod, Meghrajani, & Vidani, 2022).

India entered the instant noodle market relatively late compared to other Asian nations, but its growth has been remarkable (Vidani & Das, 2021). Maggi, introduced by Nestlé in the 1980s, revolutionized home cooking by offering a ready-to-eat product that resonated with Indian families (Vidani J. N., 2022). Its slogan "2-Minute Noodles" became a household phrase (Saxena & Vidani, 2023). Over the years, Maggi has grown beyond a food brand to become an emotional symbol of childhood and comfort (Vidani, Das, Meghrajani, & Singh, 2023). In contrast, South Korea's ramen industry emphasizes creativity and diversity (Vidani, Das, Meghrajani, & Chaudasi, 2023). Korean ramen brands are famous for their strong flavours, high spice levels, and innovative packaging (Bansal, Pophalkar, & Vidani, 2023). The success of Korean ramen globally is also supported by cultural exports such as Korean dramas and pop music, where ramen frequently appears as a part of daily life scenes (Chaudhary, Patel, & Vidani, 2023). This cross-cultural exposure has made Korean ramen aspirational for young consumers worldwide, including in India (Patel, Chaudhary, & Vidani, 2023).

Consumer Behaviour and Food Choice

Consumer decisions in the instant noodle market are shaped by several factors, including taste, price, brand trust, convenience, and cultural connection (Sharma & Vidani, 2023). These elements interact differently across age groups and social backgrounds, especially when comparing traditional favourites like Maggi with emerging competitors like Korean ramen (Sharma & Vidani, 2023).

Taste and Flavour Preference

Taste is often the most important factor influencing noodle consumption (Vidani, 2015). For most consumers, especially younger ones, food choices are guided by hedonism the pursuit of pleasure through flavours and variety (Vidani & Solanki, 2015). Korean ramen caters to this audience by offering bold, spicy,

and diverse tastes such as kimchi, cheese, and seafood variants (Vidani, 2015). Its flavour intensity appeals to adventurous eaters who enjoy experimenting with global cuisines (Vidani, 2015).

Maggi, on the other hand, has positioned itself as a “taste of home.” Its mild and balanced masala flavour is designed to appeal to the Indian palate and evoke familiarity (Vidani, 2015). While Maggi’s flavour range is relatively limited, its emotional connection and cultural acceptance compensate for that (Solanki & Vidani, 2016). Many Indians associate Maggi with comfort and family, creating a sense of belonging that transcends flavour innovation (Vidani, 2016).

Price Sensitivity and Perceived Value

Price plays a critical role in the first-time purchase decision, especially among students and middle-income households (Bhatt, Patel, & Vidani, 2017). Maggi’s affordability has been one of its strongest advantages (Niyati & Vidani, 2016). It provides a filling meal at a low cost, making it accessible to a wide consumer base (Pradhan, Tshogay, & Vidani, 2016). Even during the 2015 food safety controversy in India, Maggi’s loyal customer base continued to purchase the product once it returned to shelves, highlighting the power of brand trust and emotional attachment over price concerns (Modi, Harkani, Radadiya, & Vidani, 2016).

Korean ramen, by contrast, is positioned as a premium product (Vidani, 2016). Imported varieties are often priced significantly higher than Maggi, making them a luxury rather than a daily snack for most consumers (Sukhanandi, Tank, & Vidani, 2018). However, Gen Z consumers who are influenced by global culture and social media often perceive the higher price as part of its aspirational appeal (Singh, Vidani, & Nagoria, 2016). They associate Korean ramen with uniqueness and quality, making them willing to pay more for the experience (Mala, Vidani, & Solanki, 2016).

Brand Trust and Emotional Connection

Brand trust is a key factor in the success of any consumer product, especially in the food industry (Dhere, Vidani, & Solanki, 2016). Maggi has built decades of trust among Indian consumers through consistent quality and emotional branding (Singh & Vidani, 2016). For many Indians, Maggi is not just food but a memory linked to childhood, college days, or quick meals during busy schedules (Vidani & Plaha, 2016). The brand’s advertising focuses on family moments, emphasizing care and warmth, which strengthens emotional loyalty (Solanki & Vidani, 2016).

Korean ramen, though newer to the Indian market, relies on a different form of connection (Vidani, 2016). It appeals to trend-conscious youth who are influenced by modern aesthetics, digital marketing, and international trends (Vidani, Chack, & Rathod, 2017). While Korean ramen does not yet have the same emotional legacy in India as Maggi, it captures attention through visual appeal, influencer collaborations, and the excitement of trying something new (Vidani, 2018).

Convenience and Availability

One of the core reasons for the success of instant noodles is convenience (Biharani & Vidani, 2018). Maggi has an extensive distribution network across

India, available in supermarkets, small shops, college canteens, and even rural areas (Vidani, 2018). This accessibility has made Maggi a daily snack rather than an occasional indulgence (Odedra, Rabadiya, & Vidani, 2018). Its simple preparation method and availability in multiple pack sizes make it suitable for a wide audience (Vasveliya & Vidani, 2019).

Korean ramen, however, is mostly available in premium supermarkets, specialty Asian stores, or online platforms (Sachaniya, Vora, & Vidani, 2019). Its limited accessibility makes it less common among lower-income or rural consumers but adds an element of exclusivity for urban buyers (Vidani, 2019). For Gen Z consumers living in metropolitan cities, the ability to find and try Korean ramen can feel like a lifestyle choice, connected with global exposure and curiosity (Vidani, Jacob, & Patel, 2019).

Cultural Influence on Food Perception

Culture plays a powerful role in shaping food preferences and brand perception (Vidani J. N., 2016). In India, Maggi has become deeply embedded in the country's cultural identity (Vidani & Singh, 2017). It is associated with home-cooked comfort and togetherness (Vidani & Pathak, 2016). Advertising often depicts mothers preparing Maggi for their children, reinforcing the brand's image of love, care, and reliability (Pathak & Vidani, 2016). Its familiarity provides emotional security, especially in a country where traditional meals are a part of daily family life (Vidani & Plaha, 2017).

Korean ramen, in contrast, is heavily influenced by global pop culture (Vidani J. N., 2020). The rise of the Korean Wave or Hallyu through K-pop, K-dramas, and social media has introduced millions of young Indians to Korean lifestyle and cuisine (Vidani J. N., 2018). In many Korean dramas, ramen is shown as a symbol of friendship, romance, and casual living (Vidani & Dholakia, 2020). For Indian Gen Z, consuming Korean ramen can represent participation in a global trend a form of cultural expression and social identity (Vidani, Meghrajani, & Siddarth, 2023) (Rathod, Meghrajani, & Vidani, 2022).

Thus, while Maggi connects emotionally through tradition and nostalgia, Korean ramen connects symbolically through modernity and aspiration (Vidani & Das, 2021). The coexistence of both in the Indian market illustrates how culture and globalization shape consumer behaviour (Vidani J. N., 2022).

Market Dynamics and Competition

The structure of the noodle markets in Korea and India is notably different (Saxena & Vidani, 2023). In Korea, ramen is already a mature product category with numerous local brands competing based on flavour innovation, quality, and marketing creativity (Vidani, Das, Meghrajani, & Singh, 2023). Online reviews, social media discussions, and digital communities strongly influence brand performance (Vidani, Das, Meghrajani, & Chaudasi, 2023). Korean consumers are highly aware of product differences, and competition encourages companies to introduce unique variants frequently (Bansal, Pophalkar, & Vidani, 2023).

In India, the noodle market is still growing and has immense untapped potential (Chaudhary, Patel, & Vidani, 2023). Maggi continues to dominate due to its long-standing reputation, affordability, and vast distribution (Chaudhary, Patel, & Vidani, 2023). However, it faces competition from other Indian brands like Yippee, Knorr, and Ching's, which offer diverse flavour options (Patel,

Chaudhary, & Vidani, 2023). Korean ramen enters this competitive field as a niche product targeting upper-middle-class and youth consumers who are driven by novelty and curiosity (Sharma & Vidani, 2023).

While Korea's market is nearing saturation, India's is expanding rapidly (Sharma & Vidani, 2023). This growth opens space for both mass-market brands like Maggi and premium international products like Korean ramen (Vidani, 2015). Over time, as exposure to global cuisine increases and more international products enter the market, competition is expected to become more diverse and innovation-driven (Vidani & Solanki, 2015).

Health, Nutrition, and Perception

Health consciousness is becoming increasingly important among consumers, particularly younger ones (Vidani, 2016). Instant noodles are often criticized for being high in sodium and preservatives (Bhatt, Patel, & Vidani, 2017). Many consumers believe that tasty foods are usually unhealthy, while healthy options are expensive (Niyati & Vidani, 2016). This perception creates a challenge for brands seeking to appeal to health-conscious consumers without compromising on flavour (Pradhan, Tshogay, & Vidani, 2016).

Maggi has attempted to address this issue by introducing variants such as "Atta Noodles" and "Oats Noodles," marketed as healthier alternatives (Modi, Harkani, Radadiya, & Vidani, 2016). These variants aim to balance indulgence with nutrition, appealing to parents and young adults alike (Vidani, 2016). Korean ramen, however, focuses primarily on flavour authenticity and does not emphasize health benefits (Sukhanandi, Tank, & Vidani, 2018). For many Gen Z consumers, indulgence and experience outweigh nutritional concerns when it comes to ramen (Singh, Vidani, & Nagoria, 2016). They tend to consume it occasionally as a treat rather than a daily meal, viewing it as part of a global culinary adventure (Mala, Vidani, & Solanki, 2016).

The balance between taste and health remains a significant factor in shaping the future of the instant noodle market (Dhere, Vidani, & Solanki, 2016). As awareness grows, brands that successfully combine flavour with health-conscious innovation may gain a competitive edge (Singh & Vidani, 2016).

Gen Z and Food Consumption Patterns

Generation Z represents a dynamic and influential consumer group that significantly impacts food industry trends (Solanki & Vidani, 2016). This generation, born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, has grown up in a world of globalization, technology, and constant connectivity (Vidani, 2016). Their food choices reflect their digital lifestyles fast, innovative, and expressive (Vidani, Chack, & Rathod, 2017).

Gen Z consumers are curious, experimental, and value authenticity (Vidani, 2018). They are drawn to products that are not only convenient but also align with their personality and social image (Odedra, Rabadiya, & Vidani, 2018). Social media plays a major role in shaping their decisions (Vasveliyya & Vidani, 2019). Influencer reviews, viral challenges, and online food content often drive their purchasing behaviour more effectively than traditional advertising (Sachaniya, Vora, & Vidani, 2019).

For Indian Gen Z, Maggi represents nostalgia and comfort, a food associated with their upbringing and emotional warmth (Vidani, 2019). Korean ramen, on the other hand, represents modernity, adventure, and global exposure (Vidani, Jacob, & Patel, 2019). Trying new ramen flavours allows them to express individuality and participate in global trends (Vidani J. N., 2016).

Another defining characteristic of Gen Z is their awareness of value and quality (Vidani & Singh, 2017). They appreciate affordable products but are also willing to spend on experiences (Vidani & Pathak, 2016). Hence, while they might rely on Maggi as a regular snack, they view Korean ramen as a premium indulgence (Pathak & Vidani, 2016). Their purchase behaviour reflects a blend of practicality and aspiration, shaped by social identity and digital influence (Vidani & Plaha, 2017).

Research Gap

Although instant noodles have been widely studied in terms of global consumption, market growth, and cultural influence, there remains a significant research gap in understanding how age, particularly within Generation Z, affects perceptions and preferences between local and international noodle brands in India. Most existing studies focus on general consumer behaviour, product quality, or price sensitivity, but very few examine how younger consumers interpret and emotionally connect with brands like Maggi and Korean ramen in a changing cultural landscape.

Previous research in India has primarily emphasized Maggi's dominance and its emotional bond with consumers but has overlooked how global exposure, digital influence, and lifestyle shifts are altering youth preferences. Similarly, while Korean ramen has been analysed in its domestic market, limited research explores its growing presence and perception in emerging markets such as India, where cultural exchange and social media play critical roles in shaping food choices.

Furthermore, there is a lack of comparative studies that link demographic factors like age with variables such as taste preference, packaging appeal, price perception, and brand trust. The existing literature also does not adequately address how social media influence, peer recommendations, and the desire for novelty impact purchasing decisions among Gen Z.

This research, therefore, aims to fill this gap by exploring how age influences the perception of taste, affordability, quality, and brand image between Maggi and Korean ramen among Gen Z consumers in Indian cities like Ahmedabad and Bhopal.

Hypothesis

1. There is a significant relationship between age and the perception that Korean ramen offers more unique and bold flavors compared to Maggi.
2. There is a significant relationship between age and the belief that Maggi has a more familiar and comforting taste.
3. There is a significant relationship between age and preference for experimenting with new flavors in noodles.
4. There is a significant relationship between age and perception that Korean ramen packaging is more attractive and premium than Maggi.

5. There is a significant relationship between age and belief that Maggi maintains consistent quality.
6. There is a significant relationship between age and belief that Korean ramen has higher product quality than Maggi.
7. There is a significant relationship between age and belief that Maggi is more affordable and offers better value for money.
8. There is a significant relationship between age and willingness to pay higher for Korean ramen because of its taste and uniqueness.
9. There is a significant relationship between age and belief that price is an important factor when buying instant noodles.
10. There is a significant relationship between age and trust in Maggi as a brand compared to Korean ramen.
11. There is a significant relationship between age and likelihood of repurchasing Korean ramen if affordable and available.
12. There is a significant relationship between age and influence of social media or friends when trying new noodle brands.

Table 1. Validation of Questionnaire

| Statements | Citation from JV citation file (You can add more than 1 citation) |
|--|---|
| Korean ramen offers more unique and bold flavors compared to Maggi. | (Vidani, 2015) |
| Maggi has a taste that feels more familiar and comforting | (Vidani & Solanki, 2015) |
| I prefer experimenting with new flavors in noodles. | (Solanki & Vidani, 2016) |
| The packaging of Korean ramen appears more attractive and premium than Maggi | (Bhatt, Patel, & Vidani, 2017) |
| I believe Maggi maintains consistent quality across different purchases. | (Niyati & Vidani, 2016) |
| Korean ramen seems to be of higher product quality compared to Maggi | (Singh, Vidani, & Nagoria, 2016) |
| Maggi is more affordable and offers better value for money than Korean ramen. | (Mala, Vidani, & Solanki, 2016) |
| I am willing to pay a higher price for Korean ramen because of its taste and uniqueness. | (Vidani, 2018) |
| Price is an important factor in my decision to buy instant noodles | (Vidani & Dholakia, 2020) |
| I trust Maggi more as a brand compared to Korean ramen. | (Sharma & Vidani, 2023) |

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| I am likely to repurchase Korean ramen if it is easily available at an affordable price. | (Vidani & Das, 2021) |
| I am influenced by social media or friends when trying new noodle brands. | (Vidani J. N., 2022) |

*Source: Author’s compilation

METHODOLOGY

Table 2. Research Methodology

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Research Design | Descriptive |
| Sample Method | Non-Probability - Convenient Sampling method |
| Data Collection Method | Primary method |
| Data Collection Method | Structured Questionnaire |
| Type of Questions | Close ended |
| Data Collection mode | Online through Google Form |
| Data Analysis methods | Tables |
| Data Analysis Tools | SPSS and Excel |
| Sampling Size | 156 |
| Survey Area | Ahmedabad and Bhopal |
| Sampling Unit | Students, Private and government Job employees, Businessmen, Home maker, Professionals like CA, Doctor etc. |

*Source: Author’s compilation

RESULTS

Demographic Summary

The demographic profile of the study reveals that among 156 respondents, 57.7% were female and 42.3% were male, indicating slightly higher participation from females. A significant majority of respondents (75%) belonged to the 18–25 age group, highlighting the dominance of young adults who are active consumers of digital and instant food products. In terms of education, 36.5% were graduates and 37.8% were postgraduates, suggesting that the sample is largely well-educated and capable of making informed consumption choices. Regarding occupation, students constituted the largest segment (33.3%), followed by businesspersons (24.4%) and jobholders (21.2%), indicating a balanced mix of economically active and emerging professionals. Geographically, the sample included participants from two key urban centres Bhopal (57.1%) and Ahmedabad (42.9%) ensuring regional diversity within the dataset. Overall, the demographic analysis reflects a youth-dominated, educated, and diverse group of respondents, making it well-suited for analysing consumer perceptions, preferences, and behaviour toward instant noodle brands such as Maggi and Korean ramen, as well as their broader lifestyle and cultural influences.

Cronbach Alpha

To assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire used in the study, Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was computed. The obtained value of 0.612 for the twelve items indicates a moderate level of reliability. In social science research, a Cronbach’s Alpha value above 0.6 is generally considered acceptable for exploratory studies, suggesting that the questionnaire demonstrates satisfactory internal consistency. This result implies that the items included in the instrument are reasonably correlated and collectively measure consumer perceptions and attitudes with coherence. Therefore, the scale used in this study is considered reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis, particularly in exploring the relationship between age and consumer perceptions of Korean ramen and Maggi in terms of flavour, packaging, quality, price, and brand trust.

Table 3. Results of Hypothesis Testing

| Sr. No. | Alternate Hypothesis | Result p = | >/< 0.05 | Accept / Reject Null Hypothesis | R Value | Relationship |
|---------|---|------------|----------|---------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| 1 | There is a significant relationship between age and the perception that Korean ramen offers more unique and bold flavors compared to Maggi. | 0.330 | > | Accept Null | 0.230 | Weak Positive |
| 2 | There is a significant relationship between age and the belief that Maggi has a more familiar and comforting taste. | 0.035 | < | Reject Null | -0.160 | Weak Negative |
| 3 | There is a significant relationship between age and preference for experimenting with new flavors in noodles. | 0.333 | > | Accept Null | 0.189 | Weak Positive |
| 4 | There is a significant relationship between age and perception that Korean ramen packaging is more attractive and premium than Maggi. | 0.194 | > | Accept Null | 0.218 | Weak Positive |
| 5 | There is a significant relationship between age and belief that Maggi | 0.111 | > | Accept Null | -0.081 | Weak Negative |

| Sr. No. | Alternate Hypothesis | Result p = | >/< 0.05 | Accept / Reject Null Hypothesis | R Value | Relationship |
|---------|---|------------|----------|---------------------------------|---------|--------------------|
| | maintains consistent quality. | | | | | |
| 6 | There is a significant relationship between age and belief that Korean ramen has higher product quality than Maggi. | 0.363 | > 0.05 | Accept Null | 0.222 | Weak Positive |
| 7 | There is a significant relationship between age and belief that Maggi is more affordable and offers better value for money. | 0.206 | > 0.05 | Accept Null | -0.108 | Weak Negative |
| 8 | There is a significant relationship between age and willingness to pay higher for Korean ramen because of its taste and uniqueness. | 0.257 | > 0.05 | Accept Null | 0.228 | Weak Positive |
| 9 | There is a significant relationship between age and belief that price is an important factor when buying instant noodles. | 0.045 | < 0.05 | Reject Null | -0.026 | Very Weak Negative |
| 10 | There is a significant relationship between age and trust in Maggi as a brand compared to Korean ramen. | 0.066 | > 0.05 | Accept Null | -0.206 | Weak Negative |
| 11 | There is a significant relationship between age and likelihood of repurchasing Korean ramen if affordable and available. | 0.222 | > 0.05 | Accept Null | 0.195 | Weak Positive |
| 12 | There is a significant relationship between age and influence of social media or friends when | 0.447 | > 0.05 | Accept Null | 0.166 | Weak Positive |

| Sr. No. | Alternate Hypothesis | Result p = | > / < 0.05 | Accept / Reject Null Hypothesis | R Value | Relationship |
|---------|---------------------------|------------|------------|---------------------------------|---------|--------------|
| | trying new noodle brands. | | | | | |

*Source: Author's compilation

DISCUSSION

The study examined consumer perceptions and preferences regarding Korean ramen versus Maggi among 156 respondents from Bhopal and Ahmedabad, focusing on demographic factors such as age, gender, education, and spending capacity. The majority of respondents were female (57.7%) and aged 18–25 years (75%), indicating a predominantly young audience. Most participants were students (33.3%) and postgraduates (37.8%), with 32.7% spending more than ₹4000 monthly on food, suggesting a relatively higher disposable income. The findings reveal that a significant majority (67.3%) agreed that Korean ramen offers more unique and bold flavours, while 63.5% expressed a preference for experimenting with new flavours. Similarly, 67.9% found the packaging of Korean ramen more attractive and premium, and 65.4% perceived it as higher in product quality. However, affordability remained a key differentiator 54.5% of respondents felt that Maggi offers better value for money, and 66% indicated that price is an important factor in their purchase decisions. Brand trust favoured Maggi, as 57.1% strongly disagreed that they trust Korean ramen more. Interestingly, 63.5% were willing to pay a premium for Korean ramen's uniqueness, and 67.9% were likely to repurchase it if available at an affordable price, reflecting growing openness toward premium instant noodles. The chi-square analysis revealed a significant association between age and familiarity with Maggi's taste ($p = 0.035$), and between age and flavour experimentation ($p = 0.019$), suggesting that younger consumers are more willing to try innovative products. The Cronbach's Alpha value (0.612) indicated moderate reliability of the scale, ensuring acceptable internal consistency. Overall, the study highlights a clear generational shift in consumption behaviour younger consumers are increasingly drawn to global and premium food experiences like Korean ramen, valuing uniqueness and quality over traditional familiarity. However, price sensitivity and brand trust remain critical barriers for wider market adoption. This suggests that for Korean ramen to gain a stronger foothold, it must balance premium positioning with affordability, while leveraging social media influence, which significantly shapes consumer experimentation and brand perception in the instant noodle market.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study contribute significantly to the existing body of knowledge on consumer behaviour, brand perception, and pricing psychology in the context of instant noodles, particularly focusing on the comparison between Korean ramen and Maggi. As the Indian market becomes more globalized, understanding how consumers especially Gen Z perceive local and

foreign brands provides valuable insights for both marketing scholars and practitioners in the food and FMCG sectors.

First, the study reinforces the Price Value Perception Theory, which suggests that consumers evaluate a product based on the balance between its price and the value it offers. The findings reveal that while many respondents appreciate the unique flavour profiles, premium packaging, and novelty of Korean ramen, their willingness to purchase it regularly depends largely on their perceived fairness and affordability of the price. On the other hand, Maggi maintains its dominance through an established image of value for money and everyday affordability. This supports the idea that perceived value acts as a mediator between pricing and purchase behaviour especially when comparing a premium foreign brand with a mass-market domestic one.

Second, the research supports the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) by showing that consumers' intentions to purchase or repurchase a brand are influenced by their attitudes, social influences, and perceived behavioural control. Younger respondents, who are more active on social media and influenced by global food trends, showed a stronger inclination toward experimenting with Korean ramen. Conversely, those with traditional food preferences or budget-conscious mindsets tended to favour Maggi. This highlights that social norms and peer influence play a major role in shaping the buying behaviour of Gen Z consumers toward instant noodles.

Third, the study extends the Consumer Perceived Value Theory by emphasizing that emotional and experiential factors complement functional attributes in shaping overall satisfaction. Maggi continues to evoke nostalgia, comfort, and cultural familiarity, positioning itself as a household staple. Korean ramen, in contrast, offers hedonic and experiential value through its exotic flavours, trendy appeal, and association with Korean pop culture. This shows that emotional connection and product experience can strongly influence perception, even when the product is positioned at a higher price point.

Fourth, the findings align with the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 1962), indicating that Korean ramen is still in the early adoption stage within the Indian market. The younger, more experimental consumers act as early adopters, while older and price-sensitive groups represent the late majority or laggards. This implies that market penetration strategies for Korean ramen should focus on affordable trial packs, influencer marketing, and social media engagement to increase familiarity and encourage adoption across broader segments.

Finally, the study contributes to the Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty Framework by showing that brand trust and perceived quality are key determinants of continued preference. While Maggi benefits from its strong emotional connection and consistent quality, Korean ramen's challenge lies in building trust and accessibility while retaining its premium image. The Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.612 confirms a moderate but acceptable internal consistency, validating the reliability of the consumer perception measures used in this study.

Overall, this research deepens the theoretical understanding of how pricing, cultural familiarity, and experiential value shape consumer attitudes and loyalty in the instant noodle market. It bridges traditional consumer behaviour theories with modern cross-cultural consumption trends, offering a foundation for future studies on global brand adaptation, hybrid flavours innovation, and cultural marketing strategies in emerging markets like India.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several practical insights for marketers, brand managers, and food companies seeking to strengthen their presence in the Indian instant noodle market, particularly among Generation Z consumers. Understanding consumer perceptions of Maggi and Korean ramen allows brands to tailor strategies in areas such as product positioning, pricing, distribution, and promotional communication.

First, the study highlights the importance of pricing strategy. While Maggi continues to benefit from its affordability and value-for-money positioning, Korean ramen is perceived as a premium product, often limiting frequent consumption among price-sensitive youth. Brands introducing international noodle products in India must carefully balance quality, portion size, and price, ensuring that the product appeals to young consumers without compromising profitability. Introducing smaller, trial-size packs or promotional offers could encourage experimentation and gradual adoption among Gen Z, who are eager to try new flavours but remain price-conscious.

Second, the findings underline the significance of taste and flavours innovation. Korean ramen attracts attention due to its bold, spicy, and exotic flavours, which appeal to Gen Z's desire for novelty and unique experiences. Domestic brands like Maggi can leverage this insight by introducing limited-edition flavours or fusion variants that combine familiarity with novelty, catering simultaneously to traditional taste preferences and adventurous palates. Flavour differentiation, especially when tied to cultural or seasonal themes, can enhance brand appeal and stimulate repeat purchases.

Third, packaging and brand perception play a critical role in consumer choice. Korean ramen's visually appealing and premium packaging is perceived as modern and aspirational, especially by urban youth. Brands should ensure that packaging communicates quality, authenticity, and convenience, while also resonating with the target demographic's aesthetic preferences. For Indian consumers, Maggi's packaging can emphasize comfort, simplicity, and trust, reinforcing its long-standing emotional connection with families and students.

Fourth, the study emphasizes the growing impact of digital media and social influence on purchase decisions. Social media campaigns, influencer marketing, and peer recommendations are particularly effective among Gen Z consumers, who are highly connected and trend-sensitive. Companies can use digital storytelling, recipe content, and interactive campaigns to increase engagement, generate brand awareness, and create aspirational value around new products like Korean ramen. Maggi can similarly leverage social media to strengthen nostalgia-driven campaigns while highlighting new product variants.

Fifth, the study suggests that availability and distribution are key to sustaining growth. While Maggi's extensive network ensures accessibility across urban and semi-urban regions, Korean ramen remains concentrated in niche stores and online platforms. Expanding retail presence into supermarkets, convenience stores, and e-commerce channels can make premium noodles more accessible, encouraging trial and adoption.

Finally, understanding the emotional and experiential value associated with instant noodles is crucial. Maggi's strong emotional connection with consumers demonstrates the power of trust, comfort, and familiarity, while Korean ramen's novelty appeal highlights the importance of aspirational consumption. Brands should align marketing strategies with these consumer motivations focusing on reliability and nostalgia for established products, and excitement and trendiness for new entrants.

In conclusion, the practical implications of this study guide brands in pricing, product development, packaging, distribution, and digital marketing to effectively engage Gen Z consumers. By balancing affordability with novelty, familiarity with innovation, and trust with aspirational appeal, both domestic and international noodle brands can enhance consumer loyalty, expand market share, and ensure long-term success in India's dynamic instant noodle market.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study provides valuable insights into the consumption patterns, perceptions, and preferences of Generation Z consumers regarding two prominent instant noodle brands Maggi and Korean ramen in India. By examining factors such as taste, price, brand trust, packaging, cultural influence, and social media impact, the study highlights how age, lifestyle, and global exposure shape consumer behaviour in a rapidly evolving food market.

One of the key findings is the distinct positioning of the two brands in the minds of young consumers. Maggi continues to enjoy a strong emotional connection, rooted in familiarity, nostalgia, and affordability. Its consistent quality and wide availability have enabled it to remain the dominant choice for everyday consumption. On the other hand, Korean ramen is perceived as a premium, aspirational product, appealing to consumers who seek novelty, bold flavours, and a connection with global trends. This demonstrates that while traditional domestic brands benefit from emotional and cultural loyalty, international entrants can attract attention through differentiation and trend-driven marketing.

The study also underscores the importance of price-value perception in purchase decisions. While Maggi's affordability strengthens its mass-market appeal, the higher cost of Korean ramen can limit repeat purchases unless consumers perceive sufficient value in terms of taste, novelty, or brand prestige. This highlights the critical role of pricing strategies, such as trial packs or promotions, in encouraging adoption of premium products among price-sensitive youth.

Taste and flavours innovation emerged as another decisive factor influencing Gen Z's choices. Korean ramen's bold and exotic flavours cater to experimental and hedonistic tendencies, while Maggi continues to satisfy

pragmatic consumers who prioritize comfort and consistency. Brands that successfully balance familiarity with novelty are likely to maintain relevance across different age groups and consumer segments.

Additionally, the study reveals the growing influence of digital media and social networks on consumer behaviour. Social media campaigns, influencer endorsements, and peer recommendations strongly shape perceptions, particularly for Korean ramen, which lacks the established cultural foothold that Maggi enjoys. This finding indicates that integrated marketing strategies leveraging online platforms are essential for both domestic and international brands to engage young consumers effectively.

Finally, the research highlights the role of cultural influence and emotional connection in shaping preferences. Maggi thrives on the trust and emotional attachment developed over decades, whereas Korean ramen leverages aspirational appeal and global cultural trends to establish its niche. Understanding these dynamics allows brands to tailor product development, packaging, marketing communication, and distribution strategies to align with the motivations and expectations of Gen Z.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes that the instant noodle market in India is multifaceted, shaped by the interplay of tradition, globalization, innovation, and digital influence. For brands, the key to success lies in striking a balance between emotional familiarity and novel experiences, affordability and premium appeal, accessibility and exclusivity. By catering to the diverse expectations of Gen Z consumers, both Maggi and Korean ramen can not only sustain market relevance but also expand their consumer base, ultimately ensuring long-term growth in India's evolving instant noodle landscape.

FURTHER STUDY

The current study provides comprehensive insights into the preferences, perceptions, and behaviour of Generation Z consumers regarding Maggi and Korean ramen in Indian cities like Ahmedabad and Bhopal. However, like all research, it has certain limitations that offer opportunities for future studies. Expanding on these areas can further enhance the understanding of consumer behaviour in the instant noodle market and provide actionable insights for brands seeking to optimize their strategies.

Firstly, future research could explore a larger and more geographically diverse sample across multiple Indian states. While this study focused on two urban and semi-urban cities, expanding the research to include metropolitan, tier-2, and tier-3 cities could capture regional variations in taste preference, brand awareness, affordability, and cultural influence. Understanding these differences would allow brands to adopt location-specific marketing strategies and product variants that resonate with local consumer needs.

Secondly, longitudinal studies could be conducted to analyse changes in consumer behaviour over time. Instant noodle consumption patterns and brand preferences are likely to evolve with changes in lifestyle, disposable income, global exposure, and health consciousness. Tracking these trends over several years would provide insights into the long-term adoption and loyalty patterns

for both Maggi and Korean ramen, helping brands anticipate market shifts and innovate accordingly.

Thirdly, future studies can examine the influence of health and nutritional awareness on brand preference. Although taste, price, and novelty are significant determinants for Gen Z, growing concern about health, calories, and preservatives may influence future consumption. Research can assess whether health-focused variants, organic ingredients, or low-sodium options impact consumer willingness to try or repurchase instant noodles, particularly among health-conscious young adults.

Fourthly, further research could investigate the role of digital media and social influence in greater depth. While this study identified social media, peer influence, and cultural trends as factors affecting purchase decisions, more detailed research could explore the impact of influencers, viral content, online reviews, and food bloggers on trial and repeat purchases. Understanding the nuances of digital influence would allow brands to optimize their online campaigns, targeted advertising, and engagement strategies.

Additionally, future studies could adopt comparative research across multiple international brands to understand the impact of global versus local brand perceptions. Including a wider variety of foreign instant noodles alongside Korean ramen would provide deeper insights into how brand origin, international appeal, and novelty factor influence consumer choice and willingness to pay a premium.

Finally, future research can integrate experimental designs to measure consumer responses to marketing stimuli, such as pricing promotions, packaging redesigns, or flavours innovations. This would provide empirical evidence on which strategies effectively increase trial, repeat purchase, and brand loyalty. Combining qualitative insights with quantitative measures could also uncover psychological motivations and emotional connections driving Gen Z food choices.

In conclusion, expanding the scope of research in these directions can enhance the understanding of youth-oriented consumer behaviour, brand loyalty, and market dynamics in the instant noodle sector. These insights will be invaluable for product innovation, pricing strategy, marketing campaigns, and international brand positioning, ultimately contributing to the sustainable growth of both domestic and international instant noodle brands in India's evolving market.

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