

A Review on Millet Based Online Food Entrepreneurs: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

This review of literature is based on millets, which is often called as super grains, and their important role in India's farming and society. Millets are valuable as they can grow even in worst climate conditions and are very nutritious for health, being high in fiber, protein, and minerals. This makes them important for food security today. While millets have a rich history and nutritional benefits, their production has decreased recently due to changing farming methods and food preferences. The study also explores business opportunities for home-based food entrepreneurs using millets. The food industry keeps changing, with growing demand for new products and marketing approaches. Today's consumers have many choices, often based on wants rather than needs. Overall, it can be inferred that government officials, business owners, and consumers need to work together to increase millet production and use. This study identifies both challenges and opportunities in millet farming and consumption, aiming to help restore millets as a key part of sustainable farming and nutrition in India.

Keywords: Millet. Home-based Business, Food Entrepreneurs,

INTRODUCTION

Millets, often referred to as ancient grains, have been a fundamental part of agriculture in India for centuries. Millets are rich in fiber and protein; millets also contain vital micronutrients and other beneficial components essential to modern diets. As a gluten-free and antioxidant-rich food, millets are viewed as excellent alternatives for addressing health issues such as diabetes, heart disease, and malnutrition. Moreover, the adaptability of millets in a variety of culinary applications is one of their primary strengths for inclusion in our diets. Beyond their nutritional benefits, millets are recognized for their resilience in extreme climates and their ability to thrive with limited resources, thereby supporting communities throughout the nation [1]. The growth patterns of millets in India have experienced significant changes in production trends over the years. While millet cultivation has a longstanding history, the Green Revolution prioritized rice and wheat, which led to a decline in millet farming. To revive millet cultivation and meet modern agricultural needs, it is crucial to understand how factors such as consumer preferences, irrigation systems, and governmental regulations have influenced millet production and distribution. Over time, millet consumption has decreased and been supplanted by staples like rice and wheat. However, millets are gaining the

acknowledgement they deserve for their nutritional advantages and for promoting sustainable farming practices. Current trends show that new agricultural policies and evolving consumer tastes are impacting millet production. This, alongside the broader changes in agriculture, is evident in millet production figures. Data on regional consumption from Delhi, Chhattisgarh, and Chennai highlights the socio-economic and cultural elements that influence millet usage. By examining how these factors affect millet consumption, it is possible to identify effective policies to increase millet intake in both urban and rural settings. Home-based food entrepreneurship has emerged as a promising avenue to promote millet-based products. Opportunities in this field include developing innovative and value-added items to meet the rising demand for health-focused and sustainable options. Still, millet-based food entrepreneurs face challenges such as limited market reach, competition from established grains, and overcoming negative perceptions of millets [2]. The aim of this discussion is to emphasize the importance of millets in India's agricultural and nutritional landscape by exploring each of these aspects. Collaborative efforts among all stakeholders are necessary to boost millet production, promote millet consumption, and support innovative entrepreneurial ventures [3].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Millets, commonly known as ancient grains, have played a crucial role in Indian agriculture for many centuries. These grains are high in fiber and protein, and they provide essential micronutrients and beneficial elements that are important for contemporary diets. Being gluten-free and rich in antioxidants, millets are seen as excellent options for tackling health concerns such as diabetes, heart disease, and malnutrition [4]. Additionally, their versatility in various culinary uses is one of the major advantages for incorporating them into our meals. Beyond their nutritional value, millets are recognized for their ability

to endure extreme weather conditions and thrive with minimal resources, thereby supporting communities across the country. The production patterns of millets in India have undergone significant transformations over the years. Despite their long-standing agricultural history, millet farming declined following the Green Revolution, which favored rice and wheat. To rejuvenate millet cultivation and address current agricultural demands, it is essential to comprehend how elements such as consumer preferences, irrigation methods, and governmental policies have affected millet production and distribution. Over time, the consumption of millets has diminished and been largely replaced by staples like rice and wheat [5]. Nonetheless, millets are finally receiving the recognition they merit for their nutritional superiority and for encouraging sustainable farming practices. Current trends indicate that new agricultural policies and shifting consumer preferences are influencing millet production. This shift, along with broader agricultural changes, is reflected in millet production statistics. Regional consumption data from areas such as Delhi, Chhattisgarh, and Chennai sheds light on the socio-economic and cultural factors that impact millet usage. By analyzing how these factors influence millet consumption, it's possible to devise effective strategies to enhance millet intake in both urban and rural contexts. Home-based food entrepreneurship has developed as a viable option to promote millet-based products [6]. This sector presents opportunities for creating innovative and value-added goods in response to the growing demand for health-oriented and sustainable choices. However, entrepreneurs in the millet space face obstacles, including limited market access, competition from well-established grains, and overcoming negative perceptions surrounding millets. The purpose of this discussion is to highlight the significance of millets in the agricultural and nutritional landscape of India by delving into each of these components. A cooperative effort among all stakeholders is vital to enhance

millet production, encourage millet consumption, and foster innovative entrepreneurial initiatives [7].

Consumer awareness and evolving preferences for millet-based products reflect a growing understanding of millet-based diets. This research utilized a mixed-methods approach in India, fusing qualitative data from interviews and focus groups with quantitative data from online surveys, while also adopting a multi-site strategy to capture a variety of geographical, cultural, and dietary contexts. The findings indicate that consumer attitudes towards food choices have been changing recently due to economic factors and the impact of social media. There is an increasing trend among consumers towards healthy dietary options such as vegan, gluten-free, sugar-free, low-carb, and high-protein diets. Millet-based foods are also becoming increasingly popular among fitness enthusiasts as consumers pursue healthier lifestyles. Millets, known for their low carbohydrate and calorie content, are an excellent source of fiber, protein, and a range of essential micro and macronutrients. Furthermore, millets are viewed as an excellent alternative to rice and wheat products. Millet flours are gluten-free and suitable for creating plant-based, vegan-friendly items, making them ideal choices for vegan consumers and those seeking gluten-free options. Statistically, individuals with a proactive approach to health consciousness are more likely to adopt millets, and the survey conducted by the authors revealed that respondents influenced primarily by their social networks are 37 times more inclined to switch to millets than those who are not. These statistics illustrate that the primary drivers of change are the influence of social media alongside a growing awareness of how diet impacts personal wellness [8].

The consumption patterns of various millet varieties among urban households in Delhi have been analyzed. The authors highlighted the increasing demand for pseudo cereals in urban households of Delhi through a cross-sectional observational study involving 574

middle-income families, investigating factors related to millet consumption, including health advantages, cultural significance, and cooking habits to determine their dietary patterns with various Nutri-cereals. The key findings show that some of the most favored pseudo cereals are Buckwheat, Amaranth, Chia seeds, and Quinoa, which possess a mild, nutty flavor that lends itself to a wide array of dishes. According to the statistical data presented in the study, nearly half of middle-income households primarily consume pseudo cereals, while minor millets are rarely or never included in their diet. Less than 10 percent of these households report occasional consumption of minor millets like Foxtail millet, little millet, Proso, and Kodo millet. Sorghum (jowar) and maize emerge as the most widely consumed millets due to their low calorie content, gluten-free nature, and richness in minerals such as iron, potassium, and zinc. Sorghum or maize is frequently utilized in traditional Indian dishes such as rotis, bhakris, Ambil (a type of maize porridge popular in Maharashtra), and Jowar ki kachoris, largely due to its affordability, extensive cultivation, and numerous health benefits. According to survey data, products based on Sorghum are consumed more frequently compared to other types of millets in urban settings [9].

Most households consume sorghum on a daily or weekly basis, while others incorporate it into their diets a few times monthly or yearly. Barnyard millet (Varai) is frequently eaten as a substitute for rice and is utilized to prepare bread, snacks, porridge, and traditional South Indian foods like idlis and dosas. Rich in protein and dietary fiber, Barnyard millet serves as an excellent protein option for vegans and vegetarians. Interestingly, in the urban areas of Delhi, consumers are aware of Barnyard millet, and it is more widely consumed compared to other types of millet. More than one-third of individuals reported eating Barnyard millet two to five times a year, while nearly 3% indicated they consume it once every quarter or once a month. From this, it is clear that

along with the majority consuming pseudo cereals, there exists a segment of middle-income consumers who prefer traditional millet-based dishes, indicating a demand for millets such as Sorghum, Barnyard, and Finger millet in urban Delhi. It can be understood that millets are consumed less frequently than pseudo cereals, largely due to extensive marketing and a shift towards foreign diets. Celebrities partner with global food brands to promote foreign diets and dishes like smoothies, acai bowls, stir-fries, salads, and soups made with these pseudo cereals [10]. The promotion of products based on pseudo cereals and foreign diets has been recognized as a significant factor driving changes in consumer preferences within the food industry. Furthermore, the decline in millet consumption can also be attributed to a lack of awareness, coupled with the fact that millets remain a staple for the lower-income class, particularly in rural and tribal regions, while people increasingly gravitate towards international cuisines, often neglecting their traditional foods and local specialties [11].

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that gender is a significant factor to consider when implementing questionnaires and surveys. Both males and females displayed a similar level of interest in consuming millet. Factors such as gender equality, access to social media, and availability of full-time education can be seen as major contributors to the balanced consumer preferences regarding millet. In general, awareness and knowledge about the health advantages of millets can influence the choice to prefer millets over rice, wheat, and other pseudo-cereals [12]. Occupation plays a crucial role in the food selections made by consumers. Millets are primarily consumed by middle-income and high-income groups rather than low-income populations. Previous research suggested that millets were staples for low-income consumers, but this study reveals that individuals in higher positions in Chhattisgarh are also consuming millets. Those working in government roles and private sector jobs showed a higher

frequency of millet consumption compared to businesspeople, homemakers, and students. This implies that certain occupations, such as government and private employees, may have better access to millet products or greater awareness, resulting in more frequent consumption, especially in metropolitan locations like Chennai. A cross-sectional, observational study was conducted using a survey/questionnaire method and purposive random sampling to evaluate the factors affecting millet consumption. According to the authors, the survey participants were aware of millets' nutritional benefits and have been consuming them at least weekly or monthly. An evenly distributed proportion of respondents reported consuming millet-based foods one to three times a week or at least one to three times per month. Only nine percent of respondents included millets in their daily diet, indicating a relatively low number of individuals consuming millets on a daily basis. Nevertheless, even if millets aren't consumed daily, they are still eaten several times throughout the month. Besides Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, and Hyderabad, Chennai is also a key city in India significantly affected by globalization and the adaptation of foreign and modern cultures. Young adults between the ages of 20 and 35 are increasingly prioritizing their health due to the influence of celebrities, fitness advocates, and well-known doctors on social media. Interestingly, respondents aged 20-35 in Chennai displayed a comparable level of interest in millets as those from older age demographics. Most respondents preferred to consume millets during breakfast, while some opted for millet-based snacks alongside evening tea. Typically, millets are recommended for breakfast as they are rich in protein and complex carbohydrates, which are satisfying and help maintain energy levels throughout the morning. Additionally, millets are difficult to digest, making morning consumption more advisable than having them at dinner. One can replace rice or breads like roti, phulka, and chapati with

millet rice and breads made from millet flour [13]. During hi-tea, people often crave deep-fried and junk foods. Creating quick, tasty bite-sized snacks from millets offers a healthier option for indulgence. According to survey findings, the primary reason respondents opted for millet was its nutritional value and extensive health benefits. Although millets are traditionally consumed by lower-income families, larger households, and rural communities, over time, dishes made from millet have gained popularity among the urban youth. In conclusion, it can be inferred that respondents are familiar with local millet delicacies and recognize their cost-effectiveness compared to wheat and rice, with most enjoying the taste of millet-based meals [14].

This research examines consumer demand, the acceptance of home-cooked meals, and opportunities for home-based food entrepreneurs. A qualitative observational study was conducted using purposive sampling for in-depth interviews with 138 prospective buyers and sellers of homemade food to assess market viability, identify entrepreneurial startup needs in Oman, and explore the obstacles to buying or selling homemade food. The findings indicate a consumer shift from fast food and junk food toward healthier, simpler home-cooked meals. This shift primarily stems from health concerns associated with eating at commercial restaurants and well-known fast food chains [15]. These establishments often engage in various adulteration practices to lower raw material costs and maintain production sustainability. They utilize banned food colors, artificial flavor enhancers, recycled cooking oil, and frozen meat and vegetables to improve flavor, texture, and visual appeal. Flavor enhancers can contain harsh chemicals and synthetic additives, while banned dyes are present in food colors, and chemicals are added to frozen meat to prolong shelf life. Regular consumption of adulterated food from fast food establishments and restaurants can significantly affect overall health. In

contrast, home-cooked meals lack additives such as enhancers or colors and do not use old oil, which is a crucial reason behind the growing preference for homemade food and the prospects for aspiring food entrepreneurs. Respondents are inclined to purchase homemade food for variety; some lack the motivation to cook, are too busy, or seek a healthier diet. From the summary provided by the author, it is evident that there is a rising demand for aspiring food entrepreneurs due to increased awareness and a movement away from junk food offered by restaurants and fast food outlets [16]. This shift in consumer preferences has opened up new opportunities for women and homemakers interested in starting a home cooking business.

Advantages and Opportunities of Millet-based food Entrepreneurs:

The advantages and perks of having a home-based food business and the future scope for Food Entrepreneurs in this research. An exploratory, qualitative study has been done using semi-structured interviews with 22 ethnic entrepreneurs who have started online home-based businesses in the UK to identify how online home-based businesses offer opportunities for ethnic entrepreneurs to 'break out' of traditional highly competitive and low-margin sectors and To adapt the mixed theoretical lens to guide interviews with 22 ethnic entrepreneurs who have started online home-based businesses in the UK. According to the author, Home-based businesses require less amount of investment, manpower and effort as compared to running a business in a commercial space. Home-based food businesses have gained popularity in recent times. Home-based Food Entrepreneurs are offering a wide variety of menus that are affordable, healthy, and hygienic. Also in home-based food businesses, there is no need for bulk preparation as the quantity of food to be produced is less as compared to restaurants [17].

Additionally, there is no need to invest in large equipment and machinery for

production as the size of the business is small. In these kinds of businesses, the amount of food production and wastage is less as compared to a commercial food and beverage outlet, this is one of the major factors influencing cost and investment. Apart from the production cost aspect, the main reason for consumers choosing cloud kitchens is due to menu flexibility. Since the quantity of production is less, the dishes on the menu can be customized after understanding the needs of a consumer. Finance is one of the most important factors to be considered while starting any business. Finance is required to invest in working space, equipment, raw materials, manpower, and miscellaneous expenses. So financial planning is important before starting a business. Small-scale home-based businesses generally do not require a major amount of investment in manpower, equipment, or raw materials as the size of the business is small. One of the major advantages for Food Entrepreneurs is that they do their business from their home unless they are in a situation to rent a separate working space. Hence, Home-based business ideas have created a lot of creative job opportunities for people planning to open a hassle-free small-scale business.

Challenges of Millet-based Food Entrepreneurs:

Based on the main findings, the challenges identified in this research were lack of awareness and familiarity, preparation difficulty, sensory attributes, lack of affordability, inferior image, and consumer distrust. Irrespective of the advertising and marketing of millet-based products, consumers are not ready to show much interest in such products due to a lack of familiarity. Even though Food Entrepreneurs are creating innovative millet-based dishes, consumers are aware of millets only in their regional language thus consumers are still going behind their traditional dishes. Many entrepreneurs stated that one of the biggest challenges that they have faced and are still facing is customers resisting trying their

products. Despite entrepreneurs marketing millets based on their health benefits and spreading awareness about their nutritional, economic, and environmental benefits, customers resisted adopting millets in their regular diet. Social theory and behavioral research show that eating is influenced more by habit and external situations. Another major problem faced by Food Entrepreneurs is preparation difficulty. Millets need to be cleaned, ground and pounded before they can be cooked. Millets also need to be soaked overnight before cooking and require longer cooking time in comparison to wheat and rice. Customers purchase food products that are convenient to clean and cook and thus this becomes a barrier to millet demand. Food Entrepreneurs must have proper knowledge about the process involved in soaking, pounding, washing, and the method of cooking millets. Thus, the diverse processes and complexity involved in cooking millet have also become one the major barriers for Food Entrepreneurs in cooking and promoting millet based products [18].

The challenges related to promotion and advertisement, storage of raw materials, lack of adequate finance, and lack of availability. A mixed methods study, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches has been done. The authors have employed a convenience sampling method to gather data from a sample of 95 respondents associated with millet-driven cloud kitchen businesses in the Delhi NCR region, including various stakeholders to assess the feasibility and scalability of cloud kitchen businesses that focus on millet-based cuisine and identify the key challenges and opportunities within this emerging millet-driven cloud kitchen businesses. As a result of the study, one of the major issues for a millet-based cloud kitchen business is getting high-quality millets regularly. Cloud kitchens require a continuous supply of millets to maintain their menu offerings and quality standards. However, millets sourced from local farmers or suppliers can be unpredictable and businesses may find it difficult to maintain a

consistent supply. This can result in changes in menu offerings, prices, and quality, which, in turn, affect customer satisfaction and loyalty. Additionally, Cloud kitchen businesses must face complicated regulatory restrictions related to food safety, labeling, and packaging. Following the rules may be both time-consuming and expensive, which is a great burden for small businesses or startups. Apart from this, cloud kitchens should pay attention that their products based on millet meet all the food safety standards, label requirements, and packaging regulations. Non-compliance with regulations can lead to fines, reputational damage, and even the closure of a business. In addition, regulations may vary from one region to another, or from one country to another, which is why it is extremely important to keep track of the changes in the legislation and to comply with them. Lastly, cloud kitchens face a major marketing challenge. Cloud kitchens must create a market for millet-based products which can be a difficult task in a competitive and crowded food market [19]. Cloud kitchens must come up with effective marketing strategies to reach out to health-conscious, foodies, and environmentally aware individuals. This can include social media advertising, influencer partnerships, email marketing, and targeted advertising. However, marketing budgets can be minimal and cloud kitchens need to be creative and resourceful in their marketing efforts to stand out in a crowded market. Therefore, apart from the difficulty in making and lack of awareness, Food Entrepreneurs face various problems thus leading to huge amounts of losses, struggling to thrive in their business, and eventually to the shutdown of their venture [20].

The Nutritional Revitalization:

Millet is a powerhouse of nutrition, filled with proteins, dietary fiber, vitamins, and minerals. For instance, Ragi and Bajra offer greater health and wellness benefits compared to wheat and rice. Their lower glycemic index makes them an excellent

choice for those with diabetes, while their high fiber content promotes digestion and supports weight management. Entrepreneurs have noted this trend, launching a variety of millet-based products for health-conscious consumers. Millet contains niacin, which is vital for maintaining healthy skin and organ function. Additionally, dark-colored grains are rich in beta-carotene, which converts to vitamin A, aids in combating free radicals, and bolsters the immune system. Millets are abundant in both soluble and insoluble dietary fiber. The insoluble fiber acts as a prebiotic, supporting beneficial gut bacteria. This fiber also increases stool bulk, helping to maintain regularity and diminish the risk of colon cancer. Millets are high in soluble fiber as well, which can capture fats in the digestive system and help lower cholesterol levels in the bloodstream. This can potentially decrease the risk of atherosclerosis or heart disease. Furthermore, millets are good sources of magnesium, which may help prevent heart failure. The way your body processes sugars plays a significant role in aging. Millets are rich in tannins, phytates, and phenols, which assist in protecting your cells from damage and reduce the risk of conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol. Finger millet is particularly high in B vitamins, essential for brain function and healthy cell division. To produce healthy red blood cells, vitamin B9, or folate, is necessary. Like other grains such as wheat or corn, millet is not a low-calorie option, so it should be consumed in moderation. A typical serving of cooked millet is approximately 1 cup, and it expands when prepared.

CONCLUSION

Millets are becoming increasingly popular within the health food market, with numerous entrepreneurs utilizing them as healthier alternative ingredients. However, there is a scarcity of consumer research examining the obstacles and potential associated with millet consumption. Additionally, while various studies have explored the challenges and opportunities

encountered by entrepreneurs generally, there has been less focus on food entrepreneurs. A notable gap exists in academic literature regarding studies specifically about millet entrepreneurs, which this research aims to address. This study enhances existing knowledge on the opportunities and challenges present in the millet food market from the perspective of millet entrepreneurs in India. Opportunities identified for millet entrepreneurs include growing awareness, a return to traditional practices, and the influence of product labeling. Challenges they face comprise a lack of awareness and familiarity, difficulties in preparation, sensory attributes of millets, affordability issues, a negative perception, consumer distrust, and longer cultivation cycles. Millet entrepreneurs running restaurants and cafés were not familiar. Conversely, owners of organic grocery stores benefitted from increased consumer awareness regarding healthy and immunity-boosting foods. While this study makes notable contributions, it has its limitations. Firstly, it concentrates solely on millet entrepreneurs in India, which may limit the applicability of the findings to other entrepreneurs in the health food sector or in different cultural contexts.

Future researchers could enhance the generalizability of these findings by including various cultural backgrounds, geographic locations, and health food entrepreneurs.

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