

**DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER CHOICE AND VENDOR
SUSTAINABILITY IN THE STREET FOOD INDUSTRY: A STUDY IN
KOTTAYAM, KERALA**

Dr.Sajani Somanathan
Associate Professor
Department of Economics
St.Thomas College Ranni
Email: jayaprasadsajani@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the determinants of consumer choice and vendor sustainability in the street food industry, with special reference to Kottayam. Street-vended food forms an integral part of Kerala's informal economy, offering affordable and accessible meal options while providing livelihoods to a large number of small-scale vendors. The research focuses on analyzing the consumption patterns of street food consumers, along with their attitudes and preferences toward street-vended food. Primary data is collected from consumers and vendors through structured questionnaires and interviews, capturing variables such as frequency of consumption, spending behavior, hygiene perception, taste preference, and convenience factors.

The study identifies key determinants influencing consumer choice, including price affordability, taste, accessibility, and perceived cleanliness. It also evaluates consumer attitudes toward food safety, nutritional value, and trust in vendors. On the supply side, the research explores challenges faced by vendors, such as regulatory constraints, competition, and issues related to hygiene standards and infrastructure. The findings reveal a strong relationship between consumer perception of hygiene and repeat purchase behavior, emphasizing the importance of quality assurance for vendor sustainability.

Furthermore, the study highlights evolving consumer preferences influenced by urbanization, lifestyle changes, and increasing health awareness. The research contributes to a better understanding of the dynamics of the street food sector and provides insights for policymakers to improve food safety regulations and support vendor livelihoods. Overall, the study underscores the need for a balanced approach that ensures consumer satisfaction while promoting sustainable practices among street food vendors.

Keywords: Street Food Industry, Consumer Behavior, Consumption Patterns, Vendor Sustainability, Food Safety and Hygiene

Introduction

The street food industry constitutes a vital segment of the informal economy in Kerala, offering affordable, convenient, and culturally diverse food options to a wide spectrum of consumers. In urban and semi-urban areas such as Kottayam, street-vended food has become increasingly popular due to changing lifestyles, urbanization, and rising demand for quick and inexpensive meals. Street food vendors not only cater to the dietary needs of daily commuters, students, and workers but also contribute significantly to employment generation and income creation. Despite its economic and social relevance, the sector remains largely unorganized, often operating with minimal regulatory oversight and infrastructural support. Consumer preferences in this sector are influenced by multiple factors, including taste, price, accessibility, hygiene, and cultural familiarity. At the same time, vendors face several challenges such as competition, lack of formal credit facilities, and concerns related to food safety and hygiene practices. Understanding the consumption patterns and behavioral tendencies of consumers, along with the socio-economic conditions of vendors, is essential to evaluate the sustainability of this sector. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the determinants of consumer choice and vendor sustainability in the street food industry, providing insights into both demand and supply perspectives. The findings are expected to contribute to policy formulation and the development of strategies aimed at improving the overall efficiency, safety, and sustainability of the street food sector.

Review of Literature

Ahlawat et al. (2024) conducted a study on factors affecting consumers' purchase intention of street food in India. The study identified taste as the most dominant factor influencing consumer choice. It also highlighted the importance of hygiene, quality of ingredients, and value for money in shaping purchasing decisions. The researchers found that even though location is relevant, consumers prioritize food quality and cleanliness more. The study concludes that consumer perception of hygiene significantly impacts repeat consumption behavior.

Gupta, Khanna, and Gupta (2018) examined consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions toward street food in Delhi. The study emphasized the role of perceived risks and benefits in shaping

consumer attitudes. It revealed that consumers who perceive higher benefits such as convenience and taste are more likely to consume street food frequently. The research also identified that risk perception, especially regarding hygiene, can negatively affect purchase intention. The study highlights the importance of balancing risk and benefit perceptions in consumer decision-making.

Bhagat et al. (2024) analyzed the influence of food vloggers and digital media on street food consumption. The study found that social media significantly shapes consumer attitudes and preferences toward street food. It showed that credibility and quality of online information influence purchase intentions. The research also indicates that younger consumers are more influenced by digital content. This study highlights the growing role of technology in influencing food consumption patterns.

Daniele, Mookerjee, and Tommasi (2018) conducted a field study on street food safety in urban India. The study found that providing information and training to vendors improves knowledge but does not always lead to behavioral change. It revealed that consumer demand for safe food and cost constraints affect vendor practices. The research emphasized that economic limitations hinder the adoption of hygiene practices. It concludes that both demand-side and supply-side factors influence vendor sustainability.

Jethani (2024) studied the impact of social media on street food culture in India. The study highlighted that social media platforms influence consumer perceptions, preferences, and food choices. It also emphasized that vendors use digital platforms for promotion and visibility. The research showed that online reviews and food trends significantly affect consumer behavior. It concludes that digitalization is transforming the traditional street food industry.

Bhagyanath et al. (2026) examined urban consumer food behavior in Kochi, Kerala. The study found that convenience, taste, and lifestyle changes significantly influence food consumption patterns. It also highlighted increasing health awareness among consumers. The research indicated that consumers balance taste preferences with concerns about hygiene and nutrition. The study provides insights relevant to street food consumption behavior in Kerala.

Wiatrowski, Czarniecka-Skubina, and Trafiałek (2021) analyzed consumer eating behavior and food safety perceptions in street food contexts. The study found that price, personal preference, and food quality are major determinants of consumer choice. It also emphasized that hygiene and service quality influence consumer satisfaction. The research identified different consumer segments based on food preferences. The findings are useful for understanding similar consumption behavior in Kerala.

Harinipriya and Sowbaranika (2025) conducted a study on consumer perception toward street food in South India. The study found that taste, affordability, and accessibility are key factors influencing consumer preference. It also highlighted that hygiene awareness is increasing among consumers. The research revealed that young consumers are the major consumers of street food. The study emphasizes the importance of improving food safety practices.

Khakhlary and Kedia (2023) examined consumer perception of street food in Indian cities. The study found that affordability and convenience are major reasons for frequent consumption. It also identified hygiene concerns as a major limitation. The research indicated that consumers are willing to pay more for safer food. The study highlights the need for improved vendor practices and regulation.

Kumar and Bathla (2025) analyzed demographic influences on street food consumption. The study revealed that age, income, and occupation significantly affect consumption patterns. It found that working individuals and students consume street food more frequently. The research also emphasized that lifestyle changes and urbanization increase demand for street food. The study provides insights into consumption patterns relevant to Kerala contexts.

Research Gap

A review of existing literature reveals that several studies have examined consumer behavior, preferences, and food safety concerns in the street food industry across different regions of India. Most of these studies primarily focus on factors such as taste, price, convenience, and hygiene influencing consumer choice, while a few have explored vendor-related issues such as food safety

practices and economic challenges. However, there is a noticeable lack of integrated studies that simultaneously analyze both consumer behavior and vendor sustainability within a single research framework. Furthermore, limited research has been conducted in the specific context of Kerala, particularly in semi-urban regions like Kottayam, where cultural food habits and consumption patterns differ from metropolitan cities. Therefore, this study attempts to bridge these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of consumer choice, consumption patterns, and vendor sustainability in the street food industry, with special reference to Kottayam.

The street food sector plays a crucial role in ensuring food accessibility and livelihood generation, particularly for economically weaker sections. However, the absence of structured regulation, inconsistent hygiene practices, and limited awareness among consumers raise concerns about food safety and public health. In a growing urban center like Kottayam, the increasing reliance on street food makes it important to understand consumer behavior and vendor conditions. Analyzing these aspects helps in identifying gaps in quality, safety, and sustainability, thereby supporting policymakers and local authorities in framing effective regulations and support systems for the sector.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing popularity of street-vended food in Kottayam, there is limited empirical evidence on the factors influencing consumer choice, their consumption patterns, and the socio-economic conditions of vendors. The lack of systematic understanding of these aspects creates challenges in ensuring food safety, maintaining quality standards, and supporting vendor sustainability. Therefore, there is a need to examine the determinants of consumer preferences and assess the economic and social conditions of vendors to develop a comprehensive understanding of the street food industry.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the buying behavior and consumption patterns of consumers of street-vended food.

2. To identify and analyze the factors influencing consumer preference for street-vended food.
3. To assess the socio-economic conditions of street food vendors.

Research Methodology

This study on “*Determinants of Consumer Choice and Vendor Sustainability in the Street Food Industry*” was conducted with special reference to Kottayam. The research adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine consumer behavior, consumption patterns, and the socio-economic conditions of street food vendors. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of both demand and supply aspects of the street food sector.

The study is primarily based on primary data, which was collected directly from respondents through a well-structured questionnaire. Separate questionnaires were designed for consumers and street food vendors to capture relevant information such as demographic details, consumption patterns, preferences, influencing factors, income levels, and operational characteristics. In addition to primary data, secondary data was also used, which includes journals, books, research articles, and relevant online sources to support the theoretical framework of the study. The sampling technique adopted for the study is simple random sampling, ensuring that each respondent had an equal chance of being selected. This method helps in reducing sampling bias and enhances the reliability of the findings. The sample size consists of 100 respondents, which includes both consumers and street food vendors.

Data was collected from various regions across Kottayam district to ensure diversity and representativeness. The selected areas include Changanassery, Kottayam town, Kanjirappally, Pala, and Neendoor. These locations were chosen to capture variations in consumer behavior and vendor practices across urban and semi-urban settings. For the purpose of analysis, the collected data was systematically classified, tabulated, and analyzed using simple statistical tools such as percentage analysis and frequency distribution. The results were then interpreted to draw meaningful conclusions regarding consumer preferences and vendor sustainability.

Despite careful planning, the study has certain limitations such as time constraints, limited geographical coverage within the district, and reliance on respondents' personal opinions, which may involve some degree of bias. However, efforts were made to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data collected.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of data collected from respondents in Kottayam provides valuable insights into both vendor characteristics and consumer behavior within the street food industry. The findings reveal important patterns relating to age, experience, income, operational practices, and consumer preferences, which together help in understanding the determinants of consumer choice and vendor sustainability.

The age distribution of vendors indicates that the majority of respondents (50%) belong to the 40–50 age group, followed by 35% who are above 50 years. This suggests that street food vending is largely dominated by middle-aged and older individuals, possibly due to their experience and limited alternative employment opportunities. Younger participation is noticeably absent, which may indicate changing career preferences among the younger generation or a lack of attractiveness of this sector.

With regard to experience, 35% of vendors have 4–6 years of experience, while 30% have 2–4 years of experience. Only 15% have more than 6 years of experience. This indicates that while the sector has a moderate level of experience among participants, long-term sustainability and retention of vendors may be limited due to operational challenges or shifting opportunities.

Income analysis shows that 60% of vendors earn a daily income between ₹2000 and ₹4000, while 25% earn above ₹4000. This suggests that street food vending can be a relatively profitable business in the region. The profitability data further supports this, with 95% of respondents reporting profits and only 5% reporting losses. These findings highlight the economic viability of the street food industry and its potential as a sustainable livelihood option.

The borrowing pattern reveals that 85% of vendors do not rely on external borrowing, indicating financial independence and low dependency on credit. This could be due to low initial investment requirements or reliance on personal savings. In terms of labour employment, 85% of vendors employ only 1–2 workers, suggesting that most operations are small-scale and family-based. This reflects the informal and micro-enterprise nature of the industry.

An important finding is that 100% of vendors possess health department certificates, indicating compliance with basic regulatory requirements. This may positively influence consumer trust and satisfaction, particularly in relation to hygiene and safety concerns.

From the consumer perspective, 50% prefer snack items, while 35% opt for non-vegetarian food, and 15% prefer beverages like tea and coffee. This highlights the dominance of quick and convenient food options in street food consumption. Regarding frequency, 32% of respondents consume street food daily, while 30% consume it weekly, indicating a high level of dependence on street food for regular dietary needs.

Expenditure patterns show that 52% of consumers spend below ₹100 per visit, suggesting that affordability is a key factor driving consumption. Only 20% spend above ₹200, reinforcing the perception of street food as a low-cost alternative to formal dining.

The type of vending outlet also plays a role in consumer preference, with 65% of vendors operating fixed stalls and 35% using mobile vending units. Fixed stalls may provide a sense of reliability and stability, which could attract more customers. In terms of accessibility, 40% of consumers travel less than 1 km, while 38% travel 1–2 km, indicating that proximity is an important but not exclusive factor in choosing vendors.

Among influencing factors, hygiene emerges as the most significant determinant (38%), followed by popularity (36%) and special dishes (22%). This indicates that consumers are increasingly concerned about cleanliness and quality, while also valuing reputation and uniqueness. Interestingly, only 4% consider proximity to home as a major factor, suggesting that consumers are willing to travel for better quality or taste.

Social influence also plays a key role, with 48% of consumers relying on friends for recommendations, followed by advertisements (36%) and family members (16%). This highlights the importance of word-of-mouth communication in shaping consumer choices.

Finally, consumption patterns reveal that 42% of consumers prefer eating at the stall, while 34% opt for takeaway, and 24% use both options. This indicates a balanced preference between convenience and on-site consumption experience.

Overall, the findings suggest that the street food industry in Kottayam is economically viable and consumer-driven, with hygiene, affordability, and social influence playing crucial roles in determining consumer choice and vendor sustainability.

Conclusion

The present study on “*Determinants of Consumer Choice and Vendor Sustainability in the Street Food Industry*” with special reference to Kottayam provides a comprehensive understanding of both consumer behavior and vendor dynamics in the street food sector. The findings clearly indicate that the street food industry plays a significant role in meeting the daily food requirements of consumers while also serving as a vital source of livelihood for many small-scale vendors.

The study reveals that consumer choice is primarily influenced by factors such as hygiene, taste, affordability, and popularity of vendors. Among these, hygiene has emerged as the most critical determinant, reflecting the growing awareness and concern for food safety among consumers. At the same time, affordability continues to be a major reason for the high frequency of street food consumption, especially among regular consumers who rely on it for daily meals. Social influences, particularly recommendations from friends, also play a key role in shaping consumer preferences.

From the vendors’ perspective, the study highlights that most street food businesses are small-scale, require low investment, and generate a stable income. The majority of vendors reported profitability, indicating the economic viability of the sector. However, the limited use of labor,

moderate levels of experience, and operational constraints suggest that there is scope for improvement in terms of business expansion and long-term sustainability.

Overall, the study concludes that the street food industry in Kottayam is both economically sustainable and socially relevant. However, enhancing hygiene standards, improving infrastructure, and providing institutional support to vendors can further strengthen the sector. A balanced approach that addresses consumer expectations and vendor challenges is essential for ensuring the sustainable growth of the street food industry.

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