

Consumers Preferences for Street Food Dishes and Satisfaction with Safety and Hygiene Practices of Street Food Vendors in Kolkata

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Abstract

The current research work entitled "Consumers' Preferences for Street Food Dishes and Satisfaction with Safety and Hygiene Practices of Street Food Vendors in Kolkata" focused on (1) determining consumers' preferences for different street food dishes and (2) assessing their satisfaction with street food vendors' hygiene and safety practices. Data were gathered in May–June 2025 using a structured questionnaire administered online based on convenience sampling. Of 210 people approached, 178 completed responses were analyzed. The questionnaire included 45 questions in three sections: demographic information (15 questions), like of 16 street food items on a 5-point Likert scale (Very Much Like to Very Much Dislike), and satisfaction with 14 hygiene practices on a 5-point Likert scale (Highly Dissatisfied to Highly Satisfied). Reliability analysis demonstrated high internal consistency: Cronbach's alpha = 0.888 for all items, 0.849 for preference items, and 0.971 for items related to hygiene. Friedman Test was applied for analyzing dish preferences, which indicated Phuchka being most preferred (Mean Rank = 6.33) and Fruit Salad being the least preferred (Mean Rank = 10.44). Descriptive statistics of hygiene satisfaction indicated overall moderate to low satisfaction, with maximum for glove use, hairnets, and aprons (Mean = 2.88). The findings are important in enhancing street food products and hygiene in Kolkata.

Keywords: *Consumer Preferences, Street Food Dishes, Consumer Satisfaction Level, Safety & Hygiene Practices, Street Food Vendors, Kolkata*

Introduction

Street food is a dynamic and indispensable part of city culture worldwide, particularly in nations such as India, where food diversity has a strong connection with social life and tradition (Kedla et al., 2025). Kolkata, which has been nicknamed the cultural capital of India, shares the same prominence for its historicity and unique foodscape (Amore & Roy, 2020). The streets of the city are paved with innumerable vendors providing a vast array of delicious, cheap, and accessible foodstuffs to millions of buyers on a daily basis. From puchkas (pani puri), kathi rolls, and ghugni chaat to Chinese-influenced noodles and momos, street foods in Kolkata have something to suit a wide range of palates (Mukhopadhyay, 2008). Such gastronomic richness not only fulfills hunger but also serves an important purpose in sustaining livelihoods and injecting the local economy (Njaya, 2014). In such a setting, knowing what consumers like about various street food items becomes crucial, as it captures changing tastes, social pressures, and local food trends (Soliman et al., 2024).

Although the popularity of street food remains high because of its affordability, convenience, and cultural relevance, increased issues regarding food safety and hygiene levels create big issues with regard to public health and consumer confidence (Khairuzzaman et al., 2014). Street food vendors usually work in informal environments with minimal infrastructure, which complicates maintaining the best sanitary conditions (Muinde

& Kuria, 2005). In a metro such as Kolkata, where climatic factors, crowd intensity, and sparse regulatory action further blur the picture, concerns regarding the handling of food, hygiene, and general safety become paramount. Today's consumers are more aware of proper hygiene habits, especially post the COVID-19 pandemic, which has considerably increased sensitivity towards health and safety (Chowdhury & Nandi, 2021; Soon et al., 2022). Therefore, customer satisfaction is no longer reliant on taste and cost, but also on visibly cleanliness, food handling policy, and vendor hygiene level (Tariq & Mubashir, 2023; Wei, 2021).

This research paper seeks to answer these two sides of street food consumption—consumer demand and safety perception—through examining what kind of street food dishes are most favored by the citizens of Kolkata, and how they feel about the cleanliness and safety protocols of street food vendors. The first objective of the study is the identification of consumers' preferences towards different street food dishes offered in Kolkata that can provide an insight into which kinds of food items have the maximum demand, and what factors, such as taste, tradition, price, or convenience, affect consumer preferences. The second goal is to assess the extent of customer satisfaction with the safety and hygiene measures followed by street vendors in Kolkata, providing an opinion poll of public attitude towards cleanliness, food storage, vendor personal hygiene, and usage of protective gear like gloves or head covers. The findings of this research should be useful to both policymakers and street food vendors alike. For one, it will assist municipal governments and food safety authorities to come up with more efficient training and inspection schemes that enhance hygiene levels. For another, it can assist vendors to adapt their operations to suit consumer needs and thereby build greater confidence, encourage repeat business, and foster sustainability over the long term. Finally, the research hopes to assist in the development of a safer and more consumer-friendly street food culture in Kolkata, without sacrificing its authenticity or accessibility.

Review of Literature

Consumer Preferences and Consumption Patterns of Street Food

Street food is critically important to urban food culture, providing cheap, convenient, and culturally rich food for customers of all socioeconomic backgrounds (Privitera & Nesci, 2015). Street food has moved beyond its stereotypical vision and become part of day-to-day consumption in most cities, particularly in India (Asif & Hussain, 2023). Consumer choice of street food is influenced by various factors including taste, price, convenience, cultural affinity, and variety availability (Atinkut et al., 2018). Specifically in a culturally diverse city like Kolkata with its well-documented culinary heritage, street food serves not just as a source of nutrition but also a representation of local culture (Sarkar et al., 2024). Foods such as phuchka, kathi rolls, jhal muri, and ghugni chaat are an integral part of the city's food culture and favored among various age groups (Mukhopadhyay, 2008). Eating habits indicate street food as a favorite among working professionals, students, and travelers due to its ease of preparation, readiness for consumption, and affordability (Jeaheng & Han, 2020). In addition, eating street food tends to accompany lifestyle habits like time constraint, scant cooking time, and liking of hot and tasty food (Steyn et al., 2011). Most recent research also shows that customer loyalty is high when suppliers continually adhere to taste and portion size (Gupta et al., 2018; Morano et al., 2018). Moreover, street food is usually eaten in casual social areas, making it more popular among peer groups as well as young people. Taste, nevertheless, remains the prevailing preference driver, while hygiene and food safety concerns are slowly becoming critical in consumer decision-making (Kamboj et al., 2020). It is important that policymakers, urban planners, and food safety officials know these tastes and eating habits in order to be able to facilitate the street food economy without compromising public health standards.

Safety and Hygiene Standards in Street Food Vending

Street food vending safety and hygiene are paramount parameters that have a direct bearing on public health and customer satisfaction (Seo & Lee, 2021). Street food, popular beyond measure for its flavor, cost, and convenience, is mostly cooked and served in open air, laying it opens to contamination (Salamandane et al., 2023). In highly populated cities such as Kolkata, where street food vending is a cornerstone of everyday existence, the absence of regulated infrastructure—clean water, appropriate garbage disposal, and sanitary food preparation facilities—reads as major obstacles to maintaining food safety. Several studies have noted that street food vendors have little training in hygiene practices, and they have limited knowledge about food safety regulations (Rosales et al., 2023; Wallace et al., 2022). The reuse of cooking oil, poor personal hygiene of vendors, absence of refrigeration, and non-gusty storage of raw and cooked food products are usual issues. Moreover, exposure to flies, dust, and pollution also raises the level of microbial contamination (Oladunjoye & Aluko, 2024). The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has rolled out programs like the "Clean Street Food" campaign for training and certifying vendors in maintaining hygiene and safe food handling (Reddy et al., 2020). Yet, their enforcement and surveillance are uneven across cities. In Kolkata, where street food is not just a cultural icon but also a source of livelihood, hygiene is not just an issue of public health but also vital to maintaining consumer confidence. More and more consumers are becoming aware of food stall cleanliness, glove and head cover usage by vendors, and visible hygiene of utensils and serving habits (Chiang et al., 2025). Thus, increasing awareness, routine inspection, vendor education, and community participation need to take place in order to improve hygiene levels (Karunapema, 2021). A combination of government regulation with the involvement of vendors can build a safer street food setting without undermining its cultural and economic importance.

Consumer Satisfaction with Hygiene Practices in the Street Food Sector

Customer satisfaction with food safety and hygiene procedures within the street food industry has become a significant determinant in buying behavior and repeated consumption (Ahmad Suraini et al., 2023). While the concept of taste, price, and convenience used to rule customer choices, increased consciousness regarding health and food safety has led the attention toward hygienic food preparation, vending cleanliness, and personal hygiene by vendors (Phaswana, 2024). Even in cities like Kolkata, where street food culture is strong, customers are judging the vendors with visible hygiene cues like clean equipment, glove or head cover usage, covered food, and adequate waste disposal. Satisfaction differs among consumers based on their expectations, socio-demographic profile, and past experiences. Research has indicated that customers who see vendors ensuring personal hygiene are most likely to be repeat customers and provide recommendations for the food shop to other people (Nordhagen et al., 2022; Shonubi et al., 2025). Conversely, overt lack of attention to cleanliness tends to lead to dissatisfaction and rejection despite the food being very tasty or low in price (Kee et al., 2024). Regulation through awareness campaigns by institutions such as FSSAI has helped educate consumers regarding food safety standards and make them more aware and demanding in their purchases (Mohan & Singh, 2024). But still, there is some lacuna between consumer expectation and practices that are actually being adopted by most vendors. In order to improve consumer satisfaction, there is a need to popularize hygiene training of vendors, regular monitoring, and establishing a feedback system through which consumers can report unhygienic practices. Finally, customer satisfaction in this sector is not only an indication of their personal comfort and trust but also the general quality and sustainability of the street food system (Parikh et al., 2022).

Objectives of the Study

- To identify consumers' preferences for various street food dishes available in Kolkata.

- To evaluate the level of consumer satisfaction regarding the safety and hygiene practices adopted by street food vendors in Kolkata.

Research Methodology

The current research paper entitled "Consumers' Preferences for Street Food Dishes and Satisfaction with Safety and Hygiene Practices of Street Food Vendors in Kolkata" was conducted to achieve two key research objectives: (1) to explore the consumers' preferences for different street food dishes sold in Kolkata, and (2) to analyze the extent of consumer satisfaction about the safety and hygiene measures followed by street food vendors. Data collection was done from May to June 2025 with a structured questionnaire planned with proper diligence. The design process entailed a systematic literature review on street food consumption, further fine-tuned through supervision by a research supervisor to achieve clarity, relevance, and appropriateness in relation to the research aims. The last questionnaire, designed with Google Forms, was delivered online through email invitations and social media channels with convenience sampling to identify street food consumers in Kolkata. From 210 people approached, a response of 182 was achieved, from which 178 responses were valid following proper data screening for analysis. The survey questionnaire was into three sections: the first section gathered demographic data using 15 questions; the second section had 16 items that gauged consumer likes for most liked street food items on a 5-point Likert scale (Very Much Like to Very Much Dislike); and the third section had 14 items that gauged consumer satisfaction in terms of safety and hygiene procedures on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Highly dissatisfied to highly satisfied. Overall, the survey contained 45 items with high internal consistency ascertained using Cronbach's alpha values: 0.888 for all items, 0.849 for preference items, and 0.971 for hygiene-related items. To determine the data, Friedman Test was used in SPSS for the first purpose, whereas descriptive statistical analysis was utilized for the second purpose. These approaches facilitated an effective assessment of consumer taste and satisfaction against the backdrop of Kolkata Street food culture.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Parameter	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	103	57.9
	Female	74	41.6
	Prefer not to say	1	.6
Age	18-25 Years	52	29.2
	26-35 Years	45	25.3
	36-45 Years	42	23.6
	46-55 Years	25	14.0
	Above 55 Years	14	7.9
Marital Status	Married	83	46.6
	Unmarried	95	53.4
Educational Qualification	Primary	4	2.2
	High School	19	10.7
	Bachelor's Degree	79	44.4
	Master's Degree and Above	68	38.2
	Others	8	4.5
Type of Job	Students	43	24.2

	Service	80	44.9
	Self-Employed	30	16.9
	Daily Wage Earner	12	6.7
	Others	13	7.3
Monthly Income	Not Earning	44	24.7
	Up to 10K	10	5.6
	11 K-25 K	18	10.1
	26 K- 50 K	35	19.7
	50 K- 1 Lakh	50	28.1
	Above 1 Lakh	21	11.8
Residential Status	Resident of Kolkata	136	76.4
	Tourist	8	4.5
	Temporary Resident/Migrant	34	19.1
Location of Your Workplace	North Kolkata	59	34.5
	Central Kolkata	44	25.7
	South Kolkata	68	39.8
Total Family Members	1-2 Members	23	12.9
	3-4 Members	98	55.1
	5-6 Members	48	27.0
	More than 6 members	9	5.1

Profile of Respondents Related to Kolkata's Street Food Consumption

Table 2: Profile of respondents related to Kolkata's Street food consumption

Parameter	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Frequency of Eating Street Food	Daily	9	5.1
	Weekly	47	26.4
	2-3 Times a Week	49	27.5
	Occasionally	73	41.0
Street Food Consumption Habit	I prefer to eat alone	19	10.7
	I prefer to eat with family	65	36.5
	I prefer to eat with friends	88	49.4
	I prefer to eat with colleagues	6	3.4
Type of Street Food Cuisine Preferred	North Indian cuisine	28	15.7
	Chinese cuisine	75	42.1
	South Indian cuisine	10	5.6
	Continental cuisine	12	6.7
	Bengali cuisine	35	19.7
	Others	18	10.1
I Generally Consume Street Food	Breakfast	2	1.1
	Snacks	131	73.6
	All of the above	45	25.3
Reason for Eating Outside	Stay outside from home for long time	57	32.0
	Impossible to bring food from home	20	11.2
	Street food is tastier	57	32.0

	Socializing	44	24.7
Reason to Eat Street Food	Inexpensive	32	18.1
	Easily Available	104	58.8
	Freshness of food	7	4.0
	Time Saving	34	19.2

Consumers' Preferences for Various Street Food Dishes Available in Kolkata

The first research objective is to analyze consumers' liking for different street food items being served in Kolkata. Questions were posed to respondents on 16 well-known street food items of Kolkata on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Very much like to very much dislike. A total of 178 valid responses were obtained. To obtain this aim, Friedman test is conducted on SPSS software. The result gives mean ranks to each of the dishes, which can be used to rank the dishes based on consumer preference. Therefore, the Friedman Test properly solves the problem of comparing consumer preferences for several related street food dishes in a statistically sound way.

Table 3: Friedman Test Results for Consumer Preferences Across Selected Street Food Dishes in Kolkata

Test Statistics ^a	
N	178
Chi-Square	279.578
df	15
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. Friedman Test	

The Friedman Test outcome in Table 3 shows that there is a statistically significant difference in consumer tastes among the 16 street food dishes chosen in Kolkata. With a Chi-Square of 279.578, degrees of freedom (df) of 15, and an Asymptotic Significance (p-value) of .000, the test affirmatively shows that all the dishes are not equally liked by the respondents. Because the p-value is smaller than 0.05, it deduces there are substantial differences in consumer preferences for each of the street food dishes. This validates the aim of determining unique consumer preferences among the chosen dishes.

Table 4: Mean Ranks of Consumer Preferences for Selected Street Food Dishes in Kolkata (Based on Friedman Test Results)

Street Food Dishes	Mean Rank
Phuchka	6.33
Momo	6.78
Roll	6.98
Famous Bengali Sweets like Sandesh, Mishti doi, Rasgulla etc	7.10
Fish Fry	7.13
Chowmin	8.15
Luchi with Cholar Dal	8.15
Papri chaat	8.41
Dosa & Idli	8.54
Jhalmuri	8.97

Shingara	9.15
Telebhaja	9.79
Ghugni Chaat	9.79
Lunch meal	9.98
Litti chokha	10.31
Fruit salad	10.44

Table 4 lists the mean ranks of consumer preferences for 16 sampled street food items in Kolkata, as per the Friedman Test. The values of lower mean ranks show greater consumer preference. Out of the selected dishes, Phuchka was found to have the maximum preference with the lowest value of mean rank being 6.33, followed by Momo (6.78), Roll (6.98), and Popular Bengali Sweets such as Sandesh, Mishti Doi, Rasgulla, etc. (7.10). These findings indicate the popularity of old and favorite local dishes among Kolkata consumers. Other moderately liked dishes are Fish Fry (7.13), Chowmin (8.15), Luchi with Cholar Dal (8.15), Papri Chaat (8.41), and Dosa & Idli (8.54). In contrast, less popular dishes are Jhalmuri (8.97), Shingara (9.15), Telebhaja (9.79), and Ghugni Chaat (9.79). The least liked meals were Lunch Meal (9.98), Litti Chokha (10.31), and Fruit Salad (10.44)—all depicting greater mean rank values reflecting lower popularity among consumers. These observations illustrate considerable variation in consumer preference, as further established by the results of Friedman Test (Chi-Square = 279.578, df = 15, p = .000), reflecting statistical significance. Therefore, the initial research goal—"To examine consumers' preferences for different street food dishes available in Kolkata" is well achieved. The data not only shows us what food is most and least popular but also gives us actionable insights for street food vendors and stakeholders to match their product ranges with customer demand and popular taste expectations.

Consumer Satisfaction Regarding the Safety and Hygiene Practices Adopted by Street Food Vendors in Kolkata

The second aim of the study is to assess the degree of consumer satisfaction with respect to the safety and hygiene practices followed by street food vendors in Kolkata. For the purpose of fulfilling the second aim of the study, descriptive statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS. This was adopted to assess the average degree of consumer satisfaction with respect to different safety and hygiene practices followed by street food vendors in Kolkata. Descriptive statistics, and especially mean values, assist in aggregating responses gathered on a 5-point Likert scale, giving an unambiguous picture of which practices are seen most positively or negatively by consumers. Such analysis is helpful to point out detailed areas of concern or satisfaction, thereby providing actionable information for enhancing hygiene standards.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics Showing Consumer Satisfaction Levels on Safety and Hygiene Practices of Street Food Vendors in Kolkata

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean
Food Freshness by seen	178	1	5	395	2.22
Personal Hygiene of Vendor	178	1	5	491	2.76
Separation of duster (cleaning for kitchen and hand wiping)	178	1	5	492	2.76
Cleanliness of Utensils	178	1	5	462	2.60

Use of Gloves, hair net or Apron	178	1	5	513	2.88
Handwashing Practices	178	1	5	494	2.78
Cleanliness of Stall Area	178	1	5	462	2.60
Waste Disposal at Stall	178	1	5	465	2.61
Protection from Dust/Flies	178	1	5	495	2.78
Availability of Safe Drinking Water	178	1	5	482	2.71
Use of Covered Containers	178	1	5	459	2.58
Food Licensing(Fssai certification)	178	1	5	485	2.72
Serving Temperature	178	1	5	349	1.96
Quality of ingredient on display or seen	178	1	5	413	2.32
Valid N (listwise)	178				

Table 5 gives a summary of responses from 178 consumers about their satisfaction with different safety and hygiene practices found in street food stalls. Descriptive statistics were applied in the analysis of data in SPSS, where the mean values on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Highly Dissatisfied to 5 = Highly Satisfied) are the mean level of consumer satisfaction for each of the hygiene-related variables. This kind of analysis best fits the second aim of the research, i.e., "to evaluate the level of consumer satisfaction regarding the safety and hygiene practices adopted by street food vendors in Kolkata."

The findings point out that the general consumer satisfaction levels for the majority of safety and hygiene practices are in the moderate to low category since the majority of the mean values range from 2.22 to 2.88. The most satisfying was "Use of Gloves, Hair Net or Apron" with a mean rating of 2.88, suggesting that consumers noticed and valued the vendors' application of basic protective wear. Equally, "Protection from Dust/Flies" (Mean = 2.78) and "Handwashing Practices" (Mean = 2.78) also reflect relatively higher satisfaction levels, indicating some vendors are upholding visible hygiene practices during food handling. The other aspects of hygiene like "Personal Hygiene of Vendor" (Mean = 2.76), "Separation of Duster for Kitchen and Hand Wiping" (2.76), "Food Licensing (FSSAI Certification)" (2.72), and "Availability of Safe Drinking Water" (2.71) are also almost at the levels of moderate satisfaction. This implies that consumers are aware of some attempts from vendors in establishing hygiene, but the practice is not systematically followed or possibly lacks full consumer expectation standards.

Conversely, a number of indicators suggest areas of concern that have lower satisfaction scores. "Food Freshness by Seen" had a mean of 2.22, while "Quality of Ingredients on Display or Seen" had a mean of 2.32, both indicating consumer skepticism regarding visible food product quality and freshness. More importantly, "Serving Temperature" had the lowest mean score of 1.96, suggesting strong dissatisfaction with whether hot foods are served hot and cold food cold — a very important element of food safety. Also reflected are items such as "Use of Covered Containers" (2.58), "Cleanliness of Utensils" (2.60), "Cleanliness of Stall Area" (2.60), and "Waste Disposal at Stall" (2.61), which indicate that consumers perceive hygiene at the preparation and serving area could be greatly improved. These relatively low-to-moderate scores across several areas reflect inconsistency in hygiene regimen, perhaps because of ignorance, training, or resource constraints among street food vendors.

Therefore, finally, the second research goal of the research is well achieved through this descriptive statistical analysis. It well establishes proof of consumer perception and satisfaction levels concerning hygiene and safety practices among street food vendors in Kolkata. The key findings indicate that consumers are more satisfied with some efforts like protective wear and dust protection but are overall disappointed in serving temperatures, freshness of food, and overall sanitation, highlighting areas of high priority requiring urgent attention. These findings can inform health departments, local government, and food safety regulators to formulate specific training initiatives, awareness campaigns, and stronger enforcement for improving public health success and consumer trust in street food culture.

Conclusion

The current research work entitled "Consumers' Preferences for Street Food Dishes and Satisfaction with Safety and Hygiene Practices of Street Food Vendors in Kolkata" was carried out with two major aims: to determine consumers' preferences for different street food dishes offered in Kolkata and to assess the consumer satisfaction level with respect to the safety and hygiene practices followed by street food vendors. The results pertaining to the first goal, by applying the Friedman Test, indicated statistically significant differences in customer preferences. Out of the 16 chosen dishes, Phuchka ranked the highest (Mean Rank = 6.33) followed by Momo, Roll, and Famous Bengali Sweets. On the other hand, dishes like Fruit Salad (Mean Rank = 10.44), Litti Chokha, and Lunch Meal were least preferred. These findings mention a high preference for traditional and flavorful street foods among Kolkata consumers. The second aim was met with descriptive statistical analysis, where the levels of satisfaction with hygiene and safety practices were assessed on the basis of mean scores. The results indicated moderate to low levels of satisfaction on most indicators, with the highest being for glove use, hair net wear, and apron wear (Mean = 2.88), and the lowest for serving temperature (Mean = 1.96). This suggests that while some level of hygiene is valued, the gaps are still significant, especially in temperature management, freshness of food, and overall cleanliness of stalls. In summary, both goals were successfully met, offering implementable recommendations for street food sellers and regulatory bodies to improve product quality and hygiene measures, ultimately leading to a safer and more enjoyable street food experience for consumers in Kolkata.

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