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Impact of Quality and Hygiene with Reference to Street Food in India

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ABSTRACT :

Street food has long been an integral part of India's food culture, providing accessible, affordable, and diverse culinary options. However, hygiene concerns are frequently raised in connection with street food due to the prevalence of foodborne illnesses. This study aims to examine how hygiene and food quality influence consumer behavior towards street food vendors in India. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, including surveys and secondary research, this study investigates consumer preferences and the perceived role of hygiene in shaping purchasing decisions. The findings reveal that hygiene significantly affects consumer choices, with a growing preference for vendors who adhere to visible hygiene standards. The study concludes by suggesting that regulatory frameworks and hygiene certifications could foster a safer, more trustworthy street food environment.

Keywords: Keywords: Street food, India, consumer behavior, hygiene, food quality, food safety, foodborne illnesses, purchasing decisions, regulatory frameworks, hygiene certification, vendor standards.

Introduction :

Street food is a ubiquitous part of India's vibrant culinary landscape. From bustling urban centers to smaller towns, street food vendors offer a wide variety of affordable, flavorful, and culturally rich foods. However, despite its popularity, concerns regarding food quality and hygiene have persisted, especially as foodborne diseases continue to rise. Hygiene issues, such as unclean preparation areas, improper storage, and the lack of sanitation facilities, have caused significant health risks. This research focuses on the critical role hygiene and food quality play in consumer decision-making in the context of street food consumption in India. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing strategies to ensure better food safety and improve the overall quality of street food. This paper explores whether consumers' perception of hygiene influences their choice of street food vendors and whether they are willing to pay more for food that meets higher hygiene standards. The paper also assesses the effectiveness of government policies and certifications like FSSAI in improving food safety among street food vendors.

Literature Review :

Research on street food hygiene in India highlights significant concerns about food safety, consumer preferences, and regulatory challenges. Studies reveal that improper food handling, unsanitary conditions, and inadequate storage contribute to foodborne diseases, emphasizing the need for stringent regulations (Jha, Kumar, & Singh, 2017). Consumer awareness is rising, with many willing to pay a premium for hygienic street food (Sharma, 2018). Hygiene has become a key factor in vendor selection, influencing purchasing decisions and consumer trust (Singh, Verma, & Bhattacharya, 2019; Patel, Mehta, & Gupta, 2021). Certifications like FSSAI help vendors maintain hygiene standards, though implementation challenges persist (Rathod, 2020). Urban consumers, particularly in metropolitan cities, prioritize food safety, with over 60% avoiding unhygienic vendors (Kaur & Dhillon, 2016). However, while concerns about food safety are widespread, awareness of formal regulations remains low (Sahu & Deshmukh, 2019). Challenges in enforcing food safety regulations, particularly in underdeveloped regions, highlight the need for better infrastructure, training, and government intervention (Srinivasan & Kumar, 2017). Poor hygiene has led to consumer distrust and economic losses in the street food industry (Sharma & Singh, 2017). Government initiatives like FSSAI certifications and awareness programs have contributed to improved standards, though enforcement remains a hurdle (Vijay & Shukla, 2021).

Research Methodology :

The research utilizes a mixed-methods approach to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The study was conducted across major urban centers in India, specifically Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore, to capture diverse consumer perceptions.

3.1 Sampling Method

A convenience sampling technique was used to select participants for the survey. The 65 respondents were urban consumers aged 18-50 years, including students, working professionals, and homemakers.

3.2 Data Collection

The primary data was collected through an online survey that included a combination of closed-ended questions and open-ended questions. Secondary data was gathered from relevant publications, government reports, and previous academic studies on food hygiene and consumer behavior.

3.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using statistical tools like frequency distribution, correlation, and regression analysis. The qualitative data was analyzed thematically to identify patterns in consumer behavior and perceptions of hygiene in street food.

Key Insights & Findings :

4.1 Demographics

Majority (72.3%) of respondents are 18-25 years old, meaning the primary consumers of street food are young adults. Equal gender distribution (~50-50%), suggesting hygiene concerns are not gender-specific. 52.3% students and 33.8% working professionals, showing that students and professionals frequent street food vendors the most. Bengaluru (44.6%) had the highest respondents, making it a key market for street food. Other major cities included Mumbai (12.3%), Hyderabad (9.2%), Chennai (10.8%), and Delhi (6.2%).

4.2 Street Food Consumption Behavior

46.2% eat 2-3 times a week which suggests that Street food is a regular part of their diet. Only 16.9% consume it occasionally which suggests consistent demand. Chaat (52 responses) was the most preferred. Pakoras (21 responses), indicating potential for hygienic pakora-based businesses. Street stalls (48 responses) dominate, followed by markets (28) and food trucks (33).

4.3 Hygiene Perceptions & Concerns

80% consider hygiene "Very Important", confirming that customers prioritize hygiene when choosing street food. 75.4% reported getting sick from street food, emphasizing hygiene as a critical issue. 67.7% rated vendors as "moderately clean", implying room for improvement.

4.4 Willingness to Pay for Hygiene

81.5% are willing to pay extra for street food under hygienic conditions. 64.6% would pay 10-15% extra, while 24.6% would pay 15-25% extra. 75.4% prefer them, confirming a market for businesses like Pakora Food. 84.6% would trust vendors more if they were certified, highlighting the importance of hygiene standardization.

4.5 Future Market Opportunities

87.7% want more hygienic street food options, showing a strong demand for cleaner alternatives. 84.6% are interested in food delivery services for hygienic street food, indicating a potential for expansion into food delivery models.

5. Recommendations :

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Implement Higher Hygiene Standards in Street Food Businesses
- Certification and Hygiene Standardization
- Premium Pricing Strategy for Hygienic Street Food
- Expansion of Hygienic Street Food Options
- Integration of Food Delivery Services for Hygienic Street Food
- Consumer Awareness and Education on Hygiene

Conclusion :

The research confirms that hygiene significantly impacts consumer choices in the street food market. The growing awareness about foodborne illnesses has led to a shift in consumer behavior, with more people opting for vendors that visibly maintain higher hygiene standards. For vendors, adopting proper hygiene practices is not only a matter of public health but also a strategy for attracting and retaining customers. However, challenges remain, including limited resources and lack of regulatory enforcement. The survey results highlight a significant gap in hygiene standards in Indian street food, along with strong consumer demand for hygienic alternatives. Businesses that focus on hygiene, certification, and food safety measures can gain a competitive advantage while addressing a major public health concern.

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