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Savouring the Streets: An Empirical Investigation of Street Food Consumption Behaviour in Chandigarh Tricity

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Abstract
In an era where culinary experiences define urban identity, street food consumption has emerged as a vital element of local culture and youth lifestyle. This study investigates the behavioural determinants influencing street food purchase intention among young adults in the Chandigarh Tricity region. Grounded in a multi-dimensional consumer behaviour framework, the research examines the role of eating habits, food safety standards, value for money, and sensory appeal in shaping consumer attitudes, which in turn influence purchase intentions. Additionally, word-of-mouth is assessed as a moderating variable using Hayes' Process Macro. Data were collected from 590 respondents through structured surveys and analysed using regression-based techniques. The results affirm the pivotal role of consumer attitude, influenced most strongly by value for money and eating habits. The moderation effect of word-of-mouth underscores the growing importance of peer influence in informal food markets. Findings offer practical `insights for vendors and policymakers aiming to elevate the street food ecosystem.

Keywords: Street food consumption, Consumer attitude, Food safety, Value for money, Urban youth

Introduction

"Food is our common ground, a universal experience," wrote James Beard, capturing its powerful role in shaping culture, connection, and commerce. Today, food has evolved from basic sustenance to a core element of identity and tourism. Among the varied food consumption formats, street food stands out for its affordability, sensory richness, and cultural depth. Particularly in urban centres, it offers a dynamic culinary experience that bridges tradition and modernity. This study investigates young adults' street food consumption in Chandigarh Tricity, examining how eating habits, food safety perceptions, value for money, and sensory appeal shape attitudes and purchase intentions, while accounting for the moderating role of word-of-mouth.

Post-pandemic tourism has shifted towards authentic, safe, and immersive experiences, with food tourism gaining momentum globally. Street food, consumed by over 2.5 billion people daily (FAO, 2024), is increasingly being leveraged as a tool for local economic development and tourism branding. In India, regions like Chandigarh Tricity—comprising Chandigarh, Mohali, and Panchkula—reflect this trend. Known for its diverse foodscape and young, urban population, the area presents an ideal setting to explore behavioural patterns around informal food consumption.

Although prior studies (e.g., Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016; Choe & Kim, 2018) have identified factors like authenticity, taste, and value as key motivators for street food consumption, few have examined these variables together with the influence of social dynamics. Particularly lacking is an understanding of how word-of-mouth—amplified today by social media—moderates the relationship between consumer attitudes and purchasing decisions.

This study addresses that gap by analysing how key variables—eating habits, perceived food safety, value for money, and scrumptious food features—influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Importantly, it integrates word-of-mouth as a moderating variable to reflect the power of peer influence and digital narratives in shaping food choices, especially among socially connected urban youth. Empirically grounded, each variable is selected for its relevance to both theoretical models and real-world consumer behaviour.

Chandigarh Tricity offers an appropriate backdrop, with its high literacy, tech-savvy youth, and vibrant street food culture that is still rooted in regional authenticity. By exploring psychological, behavioural, and social drivers of consumption in this setting, the study contributes to consumer behaviour literature and offers practical insights for marketers, policymakers, and food entrepreneurs aiming to strengthen India's street food ecosystem.

Literature Review

Acknowledging Eating habits

Eating habits refer to the routine choices individuals make about what, when, and how they eat, shaped by cultural norms, lifestyle patterns, socioeconomic status, and availability (Ghosh, 2019). In urban Indian contexts like Chandigarh Tricity, where life is fast-paced and mobility high, street food plays a significant role in daily dietary behaviour due to its affordability, variety, and convenience (Verma & Singh, 2021).

Young adults—comprising students and early-career professionals—are especially drawn to street food that aligns with their schedules and taste preferences. As Sinha and Sheth (2018) note, frequent eating out often reflects a desire for culinary exploration. Joshi and Mehta (2021) found that over two-thirds of urban college students included street food in their weekly routines, underlining its embeddedness in everyday life.

Cultural conditioning and early exposure to vendor food, as highlighted by Alam and Sayuti (2011), influence these habits over time. Urbanisation and smaller household units have further reinforced street-based eating, particularly for those living away from family (Sharma & Bhardwaj, 2022). Moreover, street food functions as a social experience—consumed during group outings or college breaks—contributing to its popularity among youth (Narang & Goyal, 2023).

Demographic differences moderate these habits. For instance, women are typically more cautious about hygiene, while men prioritise price and quantity (Aggarwal, Jain, & Bansal, 2020). Digital platforms like Zomato and social media further shape these behaviours by spotlighting popular vendors and peer recommendations (Patel, Ranjan, & Sethi, 2022).

While affordability and taste remain dominant drivers, health consciousness is emerging. Halder and Saha (2023) found that many youths attempt to balance indulgence with nutritional awareness. Seasonal and environmental factors also guide choices—like enjoying chaats in summer or momos in winter.

In essence, eating habits reflect a blend of cultural familiarity, socialisation, convenience, and digital influence, particularly among urban youth navigating complex lifestyles.

Drawing from the preceding analysis, the study advances the following hypothesis
H1: Eating habits significantly influence consumer attitude towards street food consumption.

Value for Money

The perceived balance between cost and benefits is what known as value for money. It plays a crucial role in shaping consumer decision-making, especially in price-sensitive markets like India's street food sector (Monroe, 1990). In such contexts, consumers evaluate not just the price but also portion size, taste, service speed, hygiene, and overall utility. For young consumers in Chandigarh Tricity—students, professionals, and middle-income earners—value serves as both an economic and psychological signal of fairness and trust (Jain & Mishra, 2017).

Zeithaml (1988) identified value perception as a key predictor of customer loyalty and repurchase intention. In street food settings, this includes factors such as freshness, vendor behaviour, and accessibility. Kumari and Sharma (2020) found that Indian urban consumers often prioritise perceived value over hygiene and ambience when making food choices, accepting trade-offs if overall satisfaction is met. Bhattacharya and Bandyopadhyay (2022) showed that sensory satisfaction and reasonable pricing enhance value perception even in the absence of premium services. Likewise, Deshmukh and Rane (2023) observed that combo deals and large portions strengthen perceptions of good value among youth. Value is also emotionally driven—Narang and Goyal (2023) reported that consumers feel a sense of accomplishment when choosing affordable yet satisfying options, seeing them as socially smart decisions.

Technological shifts have expanded how consumers perceive value. Mobile payments, instant feedback, and app-based deals (Zomato, Google Reviews) enhance transparency and responsiveness, thereby elevating value perception (Kapoor & Raj, 2023). Tripathi and Singh (2021) noted that value also varies by time and purpose—lunchtime meals focus on speed and cost, while evening snacks are viewed through an experiential lens.

Demographics play a role too: Sinha and Sheth (2018) found that women emphasise hygiene and portion control, while men tend to favour quantity and flavour, indicating a need for segmentation in vendor offerings.

In sum, value for money is a multifaceted concept that merges cost-efficiency with emotional and situational judgments. In urban regions like Chandigarh Tricity, understanding these nuances can help vendors tailor offerings to enhance consumer satisfaction and loyalty.

Drawing from the preceding analysis, the study advances the following hypothesis
H2: Value for money significantly influences consumer attitude towards street food consumption.

Food Safety Standards

Food safety is a pivotal determinant in consumer decision-making, especially in informal food sectors where regulation and enforcement remain inconsistent (FAO, 2020). In India, concerns over hygiene—linked to contamination, water quality, and poor vendor practices—have been cited as major deterrents, particularly among urban youth in high-density areas like Chandigarh Tricity (Rao et al., 2019). While affordability and taste make street food appealing, fears around foodborne illness moderate consumption patterns.

Studies have consistently confirmed the role of hygiene in shaping consumer trust. Mensah et al. (2002) and Seaman and Eves (2008) found that sanitation cues—like vendor cleanliness and food handling—

significantly influence customer choice. Das and Sahoo (2018) further observed that visual hygiene indicators, such as gloves or food covers, increase repurchase likelihood. Bhattacharya (2022) reported that food safety ranked among the top three criteria for youth in Delhi-NCR, with trust built through repeated positive vendor interactions (Sharma & Jain, 2021).

Digital platforms now play a growing role in food safety awareness. Kapoor and Raj (2023) noted that peer reviews and hygiene ratings on platforms like Zomato affect vendor credibility, especially among tech-savvy youth. Similarly, Halder and Saha (2023) found that seasonal risks—like monsoon-related illnesses—amplify hygiene concerns, leading to reduced consumption during high-risk periods.

Policy initiatives such as FSSAI's "Clean Street Food Hub" are formalising hygiene norms, offering certifications that boost consumer trust (Narang & Goyal, 2023). In turn, vendors are adapting to these rising expectations. Bhalla and Meena (2022) found younger vendors more responsive to safety-conscious consumers, embracing visible sanitation practices to stay competitive.

From a behavioural perspective, the Theory of Planned Behaviour suggests that perceived control over health risks—enabled through visible hygiene cues—can positively influence attitudes and purchasing intentions (Ajzen, 2001). In a region like Chandigarh Tricity, where food choices are shaped by health awareness and peer influence, hygiene assurance offers a competitive edge. In conclusion, food safety functions as a multidimensional construct influencing trust, loyalty, and behavioural intentions in street food consumption. Its growing prominence reflects a shift toward health-conscious consumerism, amplified by digital tools and institutional certifications. Based on these insights, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Food safety standards significantly influence consumer attitude towards street food consumption.

Food and Sensory Appeal

Sensory appeal, denoting the arousal of the senses through elements such as flavour, scent, visual aesthetics, and mouthfeel, holds a pivotal influence in determining food choices and eating behaviours, especially in the context of street cuisine. According to Steptoe et al. (1995), sensory attributes are among the most significant motivators in food choice, especially for hedonic products where emotional and experiential gratification is sought. Street food in India, renowned for its rich spices, vibrant colours, and diverse textures, offers an ideal platform for consumers to fulfil such sensory desires.

In urban areas like Chandigarh Tricity, the sensory variety provided by street food vendors—ranging from the crispiness of golgappas to the smoky flavour of tandoori momos—adds considerable value to the food experience. Choe and Kim (2018) emphasised that sensory appeal, particularly taste and smell, enhances perceived authenticity and enjoyment, especially in a cultural tourism context. Singh and Kapoor (2021) further observed that sensory variety not only elevates the perceived enjoyment but also reinforces consumers' emotional connection with the food, contributing to positive attitudes.

Recent research highlights that sensory experiences serve as both cognitive and emotional triggers. Bhattacharya and Bandyopadhyay (2022) found that sensory satisfaction, especially taste, ranked higher than hygiene and pricing in consumer food preferences. Deshmukh and Rane (2023) suggested that mood and situational context often influence how sensory cues are interpreted—hot savoury snacks being preferred in winter, or fruity cold treats in summer. This dynamic nature makes sensory appeal an adaptable and consistently relevant variable in understanding food choice.

The role of digital influence cannot be overlooked. Food bloggers, Instagram visuals, and online food videos amplify sensory appeal beyond the physical encounter. According to Patel, Ranjan, and Sethi

(2022), visual triggers such as food plating, steam rising from hot items, or vibrant chutneys often lead to impulse street food consumption among young adults.

Demographic insights also suggest gendered and psychographic differences. Halder and Saha (2023) found that female consumers valued food aesthetics and hygiene presentation more, while male consumers prioritised strong flavours and quantity. These preferences indicate that sensory appeal is multidimensional and perceived differently across subgroups, necessitating customised marketing strategies.

From a theoretical standpoint, the hedonic consumption model (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) explains why sensory appeal has a disproportionately strong impact in informal food environments. The immediate pleasure derived from flavour, texture, and presentation can override health or rational concerns, making it a dominant predictor of food attitude formation.

In conclusion, food and sensory appeal significantly shape consumer experiences, generate emotional satisfaction, and foster lasting preferences within the framework of street food consumption, the ensuing hypothesis is accordingly posted

H4: Sensory appeal significantly influences consumer attitude towards street food consumption.

Scrumptious Food Features (Taste and Variety)

Taste and variety are central to food consumption behaviour, especially in hedonic contexts like street food. Sensory elements—taste, aroma, appearance, and texture—collectively enhance the eating experience and significantly shape consumer attitudes (Steptoe et al., 1995). In the Indian setting, particularly urban hubs like Chandigarh Tricity, diverse and spicy street foods embody both culinary tradition and innovation.

Research underscores taste as a dominant driver. Choe and Kim (2018) highlighted authentic taste as key to tourist engagement, while Singh and Kapoor (2021) noted that ingredient variety and regional recipes increase enjoyment and positive attitudes. Bhattacharya and Bandyopadhyay (2022) found taste to be more influential than hygiene or price in vendor selection, especially where options like golgappas, momos, and fusion rolls create rich, evolving foodscapes (Narang & Goyal, 2023).

Taste is also emotional—triggering satisfaction, nostalgia, and loyalty (Deshmukh & Rane, 2023). Influencers and platforms like Instagram amplify this by visually showcasing food appeal (Patel, Ranjan, & Sethi, 2022). Gender and seasonal differences further modulate these preferences, as shown by Halder and Saha (2023) and Tripathi and Singh (2021).

The hedonic consumption model (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) explains this behaviour, where short-term sensory pleasure outweighs health concerns. In dynamic foodscapes like Chandigarh Tricity, sensory-rich attributes such as taste, aroma, and presentation deeply influence consumer perceptions. These elements not only gratify immediate cravings but also foster lasting positive attitudes. Hence, the following hypothesis is articulated

H5: Scrumptious food features significantly influence consumer attitude towards street food consumption.

Consumer Attitude

Consumer attitude refers to a mental inclination that involves assessing a specific object or experience with a positive or negative judgment (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Within the field of food studies, attitude plays a pivotal role as a mediating variable between beliefs and behavioural intentions. The formation of

Customer perceptions of street food are multifaceted, shaped by sensed flavour, hygiene concerns, affordability, prior encounters, peer impact, and socio-cultural background. Positive attitudes toward street food, especially among youth, are formed through repeated satisfactory experiences that align with emotional, cultural, and economic expectations.

Ajzen (2001) posited that attitudes are shaped by behavioural beliefs regarding the anticipated outcomes of a behaviour. In food-related contexts, these beliefs typically revolve around expectations of sensory satisfaction, perceived health benefits or risks, and perceived social validation. For instance, if a consumer believes that eating street food provides enjoyable taste and fosters peer bonding, they are more inclined to form a positive perception of its consumption

Several empirical studies have validated the role of attitude in food-related behavioural frameworks. Dube and Kaur (2020) observed that prior positive experiences, cultural familiarity, and peer endorsement significantly influenced Indian college students' attitudes toward street food. This finding was reinforced by Singh and Shukla (2021), who reported that favourable attitudes were strong predictors of repurchase intention among Delhi-based consumers. Moreover, Bhattacharya and Bandyopadhyay (2022) noted that attitude acts as a stable psychological filter through which consumers assess all subsequent marketing stimuli, such as vendor behaviour, visual merchandising, and word-of-mouth.

The increasing digitalisation of food culture has further shaped attitudes. According to Patel, Ranjan, and Sethi (2022), online reviews, influencer opinions, and digital imagery contribute to the attitude formation process, particularly among tech-savvy urban youth. Consumers exposed to positive online narratives and visually appealing representations of street food are more likely to form favourable attitudes, irrespective of firsthand experience.

Attitude formation is also shaped by demographic and psychographic characteristics. For example, Halder and Saha (2023) found that individuals with a high level of food involvement (those who enjoy exploring and discussing food) exhibit stronger and more stable attitudes toward street food. Meanwhile, risk-averse consumers showed more variable attitudes based on hygiene cues and social influence.

In addition, consumers often rely on heuristic processing in attitude formation, especially in informal food settings. This means that peripheral cues such as vendor friendliness, crowd presence, or aromatic triggers can disproportionately influence attitudes, even in the absence of objective quality assessments (Kumar & Srivastava, 2023).

In theoretical terms, consumer attitude serves as an integrative construct in behavioural prediction models. It mediates the impact of beliefs—formed through past experience or external information—on intentions to engage in a particular behaviour. In this way, attitude not only reflects consumer preferences but actively shapes consumption patterns in the street food sector. Based on these insights, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Consumer attitude significantly influences purchase intention towards street food consumption.

Understanding the dynamics of Word of Mouth

In contemporary consumer behaviour, word-of-mouth (WOM) communication has emerged as a significant social influence mechanism, particularly in the context of food-related decisions. WOM refers to the informal transmission of information from one consumer to another, encompassing traditional face-to-face exchanges and digital formats such as online reviews, social media posts, influencer content, and video blogs. It serves a crucial function in influencing consumer views and

fostering confidence, and validating attitudes formed through personal experience (Arndt, 1967). Street food, being highly experiential and sensory in nature, is particularly susceptible to the influence of WOM. Positive WOM acts as social proof that reinforces a consumer's existing favourable attitude, while negative WOM can suppress even strong behavioural intentions. In densely networked environments such as Chandigarh Tricity, young adults often consult peers, rely on food discovery platforms, or follow local influencers before engaging with new street food vendors. This dynamic creates a context where WOM functions not merely as a source of information, but as a moderator that can strengthen or weaken the relationship between consumer attitude and purchase intention.

Empirical studies underscore this moderating potential. According to Huete-Alcocer (2017), consumers show greater confidence in informal word-of-mouth than in official advertising efforts, especially in high-involvement, low-regulation settings like street food markets. In the Indian context, Gupta and Yadav (2022) found that social media-driven WOM significantly impacted consumer choice, particularly among urban millennials. They further observed that consumers were more likely to act on their purchase intentions when supported by affirming WOM, validating the moderating role of interpersonal influence.

This moderating relationship becomes more pronounced in risk-prone consumption environments, such as those where food safety and quality are not guaranteed. In such cases, WOM can serve as a proxy for quality assurance. According to Kapoor and Raj (2023), consumers exhibited higher purchase confidence and satisfaction when their attitudes toward a vendor were reinforced by peer or influencer endorsements. This trend is particularly salient among youth who seek social affirmation and peer consensus before trying new experiences.

The theoretical rationale for this moderating effect is grounded in the persuasion model introduced by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), which suggests that peripheral cues like testimonials and endorsements can heavily influence decision-making in low-involvement or heuristic-driven contexts. In the context of street food, where decisions are often spontaneous and influenced by environmental stimuli, WOM serves as a critical peripheral cue that can validate or override consumer attitude.

In summary, WOM communication not only acts as an external information source but also functions as a regulatory filter that alters the strength of the relationship between consumer attitude and behavioural intent. Its inclusion as a moderating variable in the current study adds depth and real-world applicability to the model, drawing from the analysed studies and regional relevance, the ensuing hypothesis is formulated:

H7: Word-of-mouth communication moderates the relationship between consumer attitude and purchase intention towards street food consumption.

Development of Conceptual Model

The conceptual model for this study brings together key constructs that influence consumer behaviour in the context of street food consumption among young adults in Chandigarh Tricity. As illustrated in Figure 1, the model includes four independent variables—eating habits, food safety standards, value for money, and scrumptious food features—which are shown to directly influence consumer attitude. Consumer attitude, acting as a central mediating construct, subsequently impacts purchase intention. Additionally, word-of-mouth communication is positioned as a moderating variable that influences the strength of the relationship between consumer attitude and purchase intention. The figure also reflects

the use of PROCESS Macro for analysing the moderation effect, providing a comprehensive view of both direct and interactional relationships among the study's constructs.

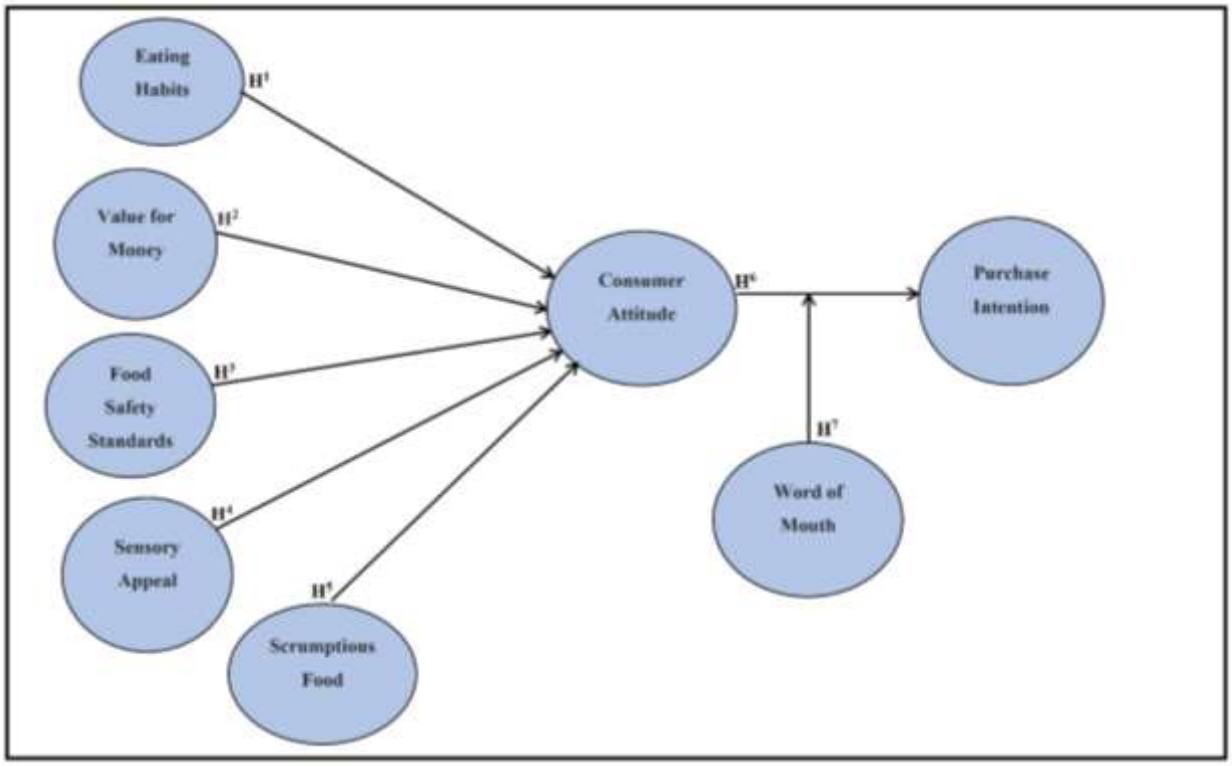

Figure 1: Conceptual model

Research Methodology

This research utilises a quantitative, cross-sectional framework to investigate the key influencing factors of street food consumption among young adults in the Chandigarh Tricity region. A deductive approach was employed to test the hypothesised relationships between key variables: eating habits, value for money, food safety standards, sensory appeal, scrumptious food features, consumer attitude, and purchase intention. Word-of-mouth publicity was incorporated as a moderator in the relationship between consumer attitude and purchase intention.

A structured questionnaire was developed using previously validated scales, with minor contextual adaptations to ensure cultural and regional relevance. The questionnaire was organised into thematic segments, each corresponding to a specific construct within the conceptual framework. Responses were collected both online and offline over five months, targeting individuals aged 18–35 who reported consuming street food at least once a week. Using a purposive non-probability sampling technique, 700 questionnaires were distributed, and 590 valid responses were secured, yielding a response rate of 84.29%. Each item was assessed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The constructs were adapted from established sources including Steptoe et al. (1995), Ajzen (2001), Zeithaml (1988), and Singh and Kapoor (2021). Descriptive statistics, reliability tests, and correlation analyses were performed using SPSS Version 26, while the measurement model was validated through both Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

To examine the interconnections between the constructs within the proposed framework, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was conducted, allowing simultaneous examination of both measurement

and structural models. Model fit indices such as CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and χ^2/df were used to evaluate model adequacy. Finally, Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 1) was utilised to evaluate the influence of word-of-mouth communication as a moderating variable, offering a robust estimation of conditional effects across varying levels of the moderator.

Results and Interpretation

This section offers a comprehensive interpretation of the empirical insights derived from the administered survey among young adults in the Chandigarh Tri City region. The aim of this section is to assess the interconnections among the hypothesised study variables in the study through descriptive statistics, reliability testing, and multiple regression analysis. Each hypothesis is examined individually, with thorough interpretation based on the data. The hypotheses were evaluated with a 95% confidence interval ($p < 0.05$).

Exploratory Statistics and Reliability Analysis

Descriptive statistics provide an overview of the respondents' evaluation of each construct. As presented in Table 1, all six variables recorded average scores close to or above 3.80 on a five-point Likert scale, indicating a generally positive tendency among respondents towards street food consumption. Notably, the highest mean value was recorded for scrumptious food features (M = 4.03), highlighting the strong appeal of taste and variety in influencing young consumers. The lowest average score (M = 3.67) was noted for food safety standards, underscoring the continued concern around hygiene in street food consumption.

Table 1: Population Metrics

The population characteristics of the participants reveals a fairly balanced distribution across gender, with 49.5% identifying as male, 47.5% as female, and 3.1% preferring not to specify. The age group of 23-26 years constituted the largest segment (40.3%), trailing behind were individuals aged 27-30 years (34.1%) and those between 18–22 years (25.6%). A majority of the participants were single (60.2%), while 35.1% were married. In terms of educational background, 38.5% were graduates and 24.4% postgraduates. Occupationally, 22% were students, and 33.7% worked in the private sector. Regarding annual income, the largest earning group fell within the Rs3–6 lakh annually range (32.9%). The residential distribution showed participants from Chandigarh (37.4%), Mohali (33.2%), and Panchkula (33.4%), with the vast majority (89%) residing in urban areas.

Table 4-1 Demographic statistics of the respondent groups (N=590).

Category	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	292	49.5
	Female	280	47.5
	Prefer not to specify	18	3.1
Age	18–22 Years	151	25.6
	23–26 Years	238	40.3
	27–30 Years	201	34.1
Marital Status	Single	355	60.2
	Married	207	35.1

	Prefer not to say	28	4.7
Education	High School	110	18.6
	Intermediate	109	18.5
	Graduate	227	38.5
	Postgraduate	144	24.4
Occupation	Student	130	22
	Government Job	109	18.5
	Private Job	199	33.7
	Self-Business	108	18.3
	Others	44	7.5
Annual Income (INR)	Up to 3 Lakhs	95	16.1
	3–6 Lakhs	194	32.9
	6–10 Lakhs	141	23.9
	Above 10 Lakhs	160	27.1
Residential Area	Chandigarh	197	33.4
	Mohali	196	33.2
	Panchkula	197	33.4
Locality	Rural	65	11
	Urban	525	89

To assess the internal reliability of each construct, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated. As indicated in Table 2, all values surpassed the suggested minimum of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), demonstrating acceptable scale reliability.

Conducting Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

The principal component analysis, employing varimax rotation, successfully extracted nine clearly defined components. As evidenced in Table 4-2, all essential assumptions for exploratory factor analysis were appropriately met, confirming the robustness of the identified factor structure.

Table 4-5: Compliance with EFA Assumptions

Assumptions of EFA	Conditions	Reference: (Hair et al., 2010)	Assumptions
Reliability of the instrument (Cronbach's alpha) (α= 0.913)	$0.70 \leq \alpha \leq 0.90$	(Cronbach, 1951)	**Acceptable**
Sample size is 590	n>200	Kyriazos (2018)	Met
Barlett's test of sphericity is significant	$p < 0.001$	(Tobias & Carlson, 1969)	Met
KMO value is 0.911 measure of sampling adequacy	> 0.70	(Nkansah, 2011)	Met
Satisfactory communalities values	> 0.50	(Yong & Pearce, 2013)	Met

The explained total variance is 78.367 %	> 50%	(Howe, 1999)	Met
The variability for the initial factor is 16.197 %	< 50%	(Howe, 1999)	Met

Aligned with the study's analytical model, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed using varimax rotation to clarify the data structure and facilitate interpretation of the underlying constructs. The Rotated Component Matrix (RCM) indicated that all item loadings surpassed the commonly accepted threshold of 0.6, signifying robust associations between observed indicators and their corresponding latent variables (Hardle et al., 2024). Accordingly, the analysis yielded five essential components relevant to this investigation: eating habits (EH), value for money (VFM), food safety standards (FSS), sensory appeal (SA), and scrumptious food features (SFF). These factors encapsulate the major behavioural dimensions shaping young consumers' attitudes toward street food in the Chandigarh Tricity region and are summarised comprehensively in Table 4-3.

Table 4-6: Rotated Component Matrix (Factor Loadings)

Variables	Metric 1	Metric 2	Metric 3	Metric 4	Metric 5	Metric 6	Metric 7
EH1	0.842						
EH2	0.805						
EH3	0.861						
VFM1		0.823					
VFM2		0.847					
VFM3		0.834					
FSS1			0.812				
FSS2			0.840				
FSS3			0.867				
SA1				0.872			
SA2				0.849			
SA3				0.858			
SFF1					0.816		
SFF2					0.841		
SFF3					0.864		
ATT1						0.846	
ATT2						0.878	
ATT3						0.834	
ATT4						0.819	
PI1							0.873
PI2							0.855
PI3							0.866
PI4							0.849

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Factor validation analysis is a robust quantitative technique employed to verify and affirm the structure

of measurement models by assessing the relationships between observed indicators (survey items) and their corresponding latent constructs (underlying variables). In the context of this study, this method was utilised to evaluate the proposed measurement model that incorporates the primary influencing dimensions—Eating Habits (EH), Value for Money (VFM), Food Safety Standards (FSS), Sensory Appeal (SA), and Scrumptious Food Features (SFF)—as well as the outcome variables, namely Attitude of Consumers towards Street Food (ATT) and Purchase Intention (PI).

As articulated by Brown (2015), within the broader realm of structural equation modelling, factor validation plays a pivotal role in confirming the conceptual soundness of constructs and ensuring their empirical legitimacy. Specifically, this analytical process helps to establish whether the survey items accurately and reliably capture the theoretical constructs they intend to measure. This step is essential to ensuring the reliability and validity of the measurement framework before proceeding to analyse the causal and correlational relationships among variables. In this study, factor validation was employed to confirm the measurement integrity of the constructs EH, VFM, FSS, SA, SFF, ATT, and PI, thereby ensuring that each variable is conceptually and empirically distinct. This validation process strengthens the study's overall credibility and supports the rigour of subsequent analyses involving consumer attitudes and intentions related to street food consumption among young adults in Chandigarh Tricity.

Convergent Validity and Reliability

To ensure the robustness of the measurement framework, this study assessed both internal consistency and construct validity. As shown in Table 4-4, all item loadings exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.50, confirming that the observed indicators effectively capture the latent constructs: Eating Habits (EH), Value for Money (VFM), Food Safety Standards (FSS), Sensory Appeal (SA), Scrumptious Food Features (SFF), Attitude (ATT), and Purchase Intention (PI). This supports strong **convergent validity**, indicating each construct's indicators align well with their intended theoretical dimensions.

All constructs exhibited composite reliability scores exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hardle et al., 2024), indicating robust internal consistency. This affirms that the items within each construct are conceptually aligned and consistently capture the intended latent dimensions. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each construct surpassed the 0.50 benchmark, signifying that the constructs account for more variance than can be attributed to measurement error (Campbell & Fiske, 1959).

Collectively, the substantial factor loadings, reliable composite scores, and acceptable AVE values affirm both the internal reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model. These outcomes establish a reliable psychometric base for proceeding to the structural model evaluation and hypothesis verification.

Table 4-7: Measurement Model Assessment (N = 590)

Variables (Cronbach's Alpha)	Items	Item Loadings	CR	AVE
Eating Habits (EH) (α = 0.845)	I regularly eat street food as part of my meals.	0.812	0.851	0.658
	I prefer street food over home-cooked meals.	0.791		
	Eating street food fits well with my busy lifestyle and schedule.	0.850		

Value for Money (VFM) (α = 0.832)	Street food offers good portion size.	0.827	0.843	0.641
	Street food offers good value for money.	0.801		
	Perception of street food as a worthwhile purchase.	0.797		
Food Safety Standards (FSS) (α = 0.851)	I am concerned about the hygiene and health standards of street food.	0.805	0.860	0.672
	Proper food safety standards positively influence my street food purchase decision.	0.844		
	Trust in street food preparation practices.	0.837		
Sensory Appeal (SA) (α = 0.655)	Aroma's influence on purchase decision.	0.523	0.681	0.442
	Good visual appeal of street food.	0.583		
	Good texture and mouthfeel of street food.	0.614		
Scrumptious Food Features (SFF) (α = 0.862)	Street food with rich, robust flavours provides a greater level of satisfaction.	0.829	0.873	0.691
	The level of spiciness in street food affects my attitude towards consuming it.	0.802		
	Flavour variety enhances my preference for street food.	0.870		
Attitude (ATT) (α = 0.876)	I have a generally positive attitude towards purchasing street food.	0.841	0.882	0.655
	I prefer street food over other types of food options.	0.825		
	The affordability of street food affects my decision to buy it.	0.804		
	Satisfaction with street food influences my purchase intention.	0.831		
Purchase Intention (PI) (α = 0.884)	Recommendations and opinions from friends and family affect my intention to buy street food.	0.850	0.890	0.666
	The perceived quality of street food influences my intention to purchase it.	0.848		
	I intend to purchase street food in the near future.	0.805		
	I am likely to choose street food the next time I eat out.	0.837		
Word of Mouth Publicity (WOM) (α = 0.835)	I am more likely to try street food if my friends or family recommend it.	0.802	0.858	0.605
	Positive experiences shared by others	0.815		

	influence my decision to buy street food.			
	I often rely on social media reviews or online ratings before trying new street food stalls.	0.798		
	If I have a negative experience with street food, I will definitely warn others not to try it.	0.786		

Discriminant Validity Analysis

To establish that the constructs in the study are empirically distinct and do not exhibit significant conceptual overlap, discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) method proposed by Henseler et al. (2015). HTMT evaluates whether the correlation between indicators of different constructs (heterotrait) remains lower than those within the same construct (monotrait), providing a robust metric for ensuring discriminant validity.

HTMT values below 0.85 are generally regarded as evidence of satisfactory discriminant validity (Yusoff et al., 2020). In this study, HTMT values for all construct pairs—namely Eating Habits (EH), Value for Money (VFM), Food Safety Standards (FSS), Sensory Appeal (SA), Scrumptious Food Features (SFF), Attitude (ATT), and Purchase Intention (PI)—were found to be below the threshold, as shown in Table 4-5.

These results confirm that the constructs are statistically distinct and measure unique conceptual domains. This separation is essential for the integrity of the structural model, as it ensures that each variable's influence on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions can be interpreted with confidence. The confirmation of discriminant validity thus strengthens the theoretical contributions and empirical rigor of the present study.

Table 4-8: Discriminant Validity Analysis

Items	EH	VFM	FSS	SA	SFF	ATT	PI	WOM	HTMT < 0.85
EH	1								Pass
VFM	0.432	1							Pass
FSS	0.481	0.460	1						Pass
SA	0.398	0.410	0.437	1					Pass
SFF	0.454	0.471	0.495	0.478	1				Pass
ATT	0.522	0.505	0.544	0.492	0.533	1			Pass
PI	0.508	0.497	0.510	0.475	0.524	0.568	1		Pass
WOM	0.410	0.420	0.438	0.399	0.430	0.502	0.519	1	Pass

Analysis of Model Fit Indices

The structural model demonstrates an overall satisfactory fit based on established goodness-of-fit benchmarks. As detailed in Table 4-6, absolute fit indices such as the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df), RMR, GFI, and AGFI all fall within acceptable ranges—specifically, χ^2/df remains below 3.0, and RMR is minimal, indicating a sound match between the hypothesised model and the observed data. Comparative fit indices, including NFI, CFI, and TLI, exceed the 0.90 threshold, while RMSEA falls below the 0.08 cutoff, supporting the model's parsimony and explanatory power. The non-significant chi-square test ($p > 0.05$) further affirms the model's structural compatibility with the data. Overall, these indices validate the robustness of the model for examining the proposed relationships.

Notably, while most hypothesised paths were significant, the path from sensory appeal to consumer attitude (H4) was not, underscoring the complexity of sensory evaluations in consumer decision-making.

Table 4-9: Model Fit Indices and Evaluation

Fit Measure	Recommended Threshold	Observed Value	Reference	Acceptable (Yes/No)
Chi-square (χ^2)	$p > 0.05$	95.250	Hair et al., 2010	Yes
Degrees of Freedom (df)	–	75	–	–
Chi-square/df (χ^2/df)	1.00 – 5.00	1.270	Kline, 2016	Yes
Root Mean Square Residual (RMR)	< 0.08	0.038	Hu & Bentler, 1999	Yes
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	> 0.90	0.945	Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993	Yes
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	> 0.80	0.920	Byrne, 2010	Yes
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	> 0.80	0.950	Bentler & Bonett, 1980	Yes
Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI)	> 0.50	0.730	James et al., 1982	Yes
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	> 0.90	0.980	Bollen, 1989	Yes
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	> 0.90	0.975	Tucker & Lewis, 1973	Yes
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	> 0.90	0.980	Bentler, 1990	Yes
Parsimony Goodness of Fit Index (PGFI)	> 0.50	0.660	Mulaik et al., 1989	Yes
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	< 0.08	0.042	Steiger, 1990	Yes

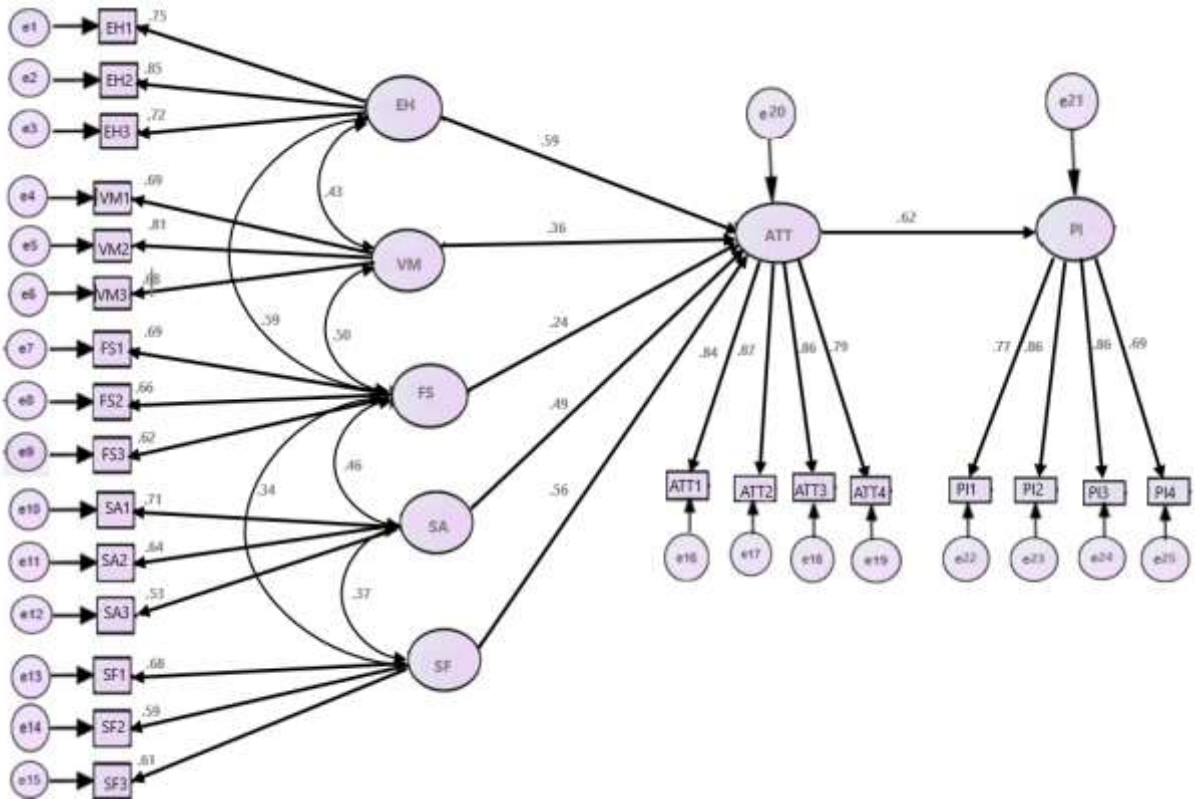

Fig 16: Model Estimation

Analysing the Moderating impact

In light of the results provided in Table 5, the analysis of moderating effects using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) reveals that Word-of-Mouth Publicity (WOM) significantly moderates the relationship between Attitude (ATT) and Purchase Intention (PI). The results are summarized as follows:

Table 4-13: Assessing Moderation with PROCESS Macro

Model Term	Coeff	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	4.8221	1.0257	4.7021	.0000	2.8065	6.8377
ATT_T	0.5283	0.0895	5.9022	.0000	0.3527	0.7039
WOM_T	0.3142	0.0952	3.3017	.0010	0.1273	0.5011
ATT_T × WOM_T (Int_1)	0.0945	0.0278	3.3986	.0008	0.0401	0.1489

The interaction effect (Int_1: ATT_T × WOM_T) is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.0945$, $t = 3.3986$, $p = 0.0008 < 0.05$), indicating that WOM moderates the relationship between consumer attitude and purchase intention. This supports Hypothesis 7.

To understand this moderation effect in more detail, conditional effects of ATT on PI were examined at low, medium, and high levels of WOM.

Table 14: Conditional Effects of ATT on PI at Different Levels of WOM

WOM_T Level	Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
2.0000	0.4215	0.0702	6.0043	.0000	0.2836	0.5594
3.0000	0.5283	0.0895	5.9022	.0000	0.3527	0.7039

4.0000	0.7161	0.0986	7.2621	.0000	0.5225	0.9096

- At a **low level of WOM** (WOM_T = 2.0000), the effect of ATT on PI is 0.4215 (*SE* = 0.0702, *t* = 6.0043, *p* < 0.001).
- At a **moderate level of WOM** (WOM_T = 3.0000), the effect is 0.5283 (*SE* = 0.0895, *t* = 5.9022, *p* < 0.001).
- At a **high level of WOM** (WOM_T = 4.0000), the effect is 0.7161 (*SE* = 0.0986, *t* = 7.2621, *p* < 0.001).

These results confirm that **as WOM increases**, the positive impact of consumer attitude on purchase intention becomes stronger, validating the proposed **moderation hypothesis (Ha7)**. The inclusion of the interaction term also led to an incremental R^2 increase of 0.0213, confirming improved explanatory power of the model.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study yield substantial theoretical and practical insights. Theoretically, the results reinforce the validity of the conceptual framework, confirming the pivotal role of consumer attitude in influencing purchase intention. This supports the foundational work of Ajzen (2001) and Fishbein & Ajzen (1975), underscoring how evaluative judgments form the basis of behavioural outcomes, particularly in street food consumption among young adults.

The validation of H1—highlighting the influence of eating habits on consumer attitude—aligns with earlier findings by Ghosh (2019) and Sinha and Sheth (2018), who emphasized the role of habitual exposure and cultural familiarity in fostering positive food perceptions. In the Chandigarh Tricity region, where eating out is a social and routine activity, repeated engagement with street food shapes consumer trust and preference. Support for H2, which establishes food safety as a significant determinant of attitude, reflects increasing public awareness post-COVID. Studies by Das and Sahoo (2018) and Seaman & Eves (2008) echo these findings, emphasizing the importance of vendor hygiene, visible cleanliness, and safe handling practices. Regulatory efforts like FSSAI's "Clean Street Food Hub" initiative can amplify these impacts by institutionalizing best practices.

H3, indicating that value for money is a dominant predictor of attitude, agrees previous research by Zeithaml (1988) and Kumari & Sharma (2020). In cost-sensitive environments like Chandigarh Tricity, affordability, portion size, and service satisfaction, collectively influence perceptions of fairness and value, guiding consumers' attitudinal responses.

Interestingly, H4 regarding the impact of sensory appeal on consumer attitude was not supported, suggesting that while taste and presentation are valued, they may not independently drive attitude formation in the absence of hygiene and economic considerations. This contrasts with earlier findings (e.g., Steptoe et al., 1995; Choe & Kim, 2018), highlighting a need to further explore appropriate touches in sensory evaluation.

H5 was strongly supported, reaffirming that consumer attitude is a critical antecedent to purchase intention. This aligns with Singh & Shukla (2021) and other attitude-intention research, reinforcing the need for vendors to prioritise experience-building factors that shape consumer evaluations—ranging from value delivery to health safety. The moderation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS Macro revealed that word-of-mouth communication significantly strengthens the relationship between consumer attitude and purchase intention. Peer influence, social media narratives, and digital reviews serve as persuasive cues that reinforce existing perceptions, adding an interactional dimension to consumer decision-

making. These findings support previous literature on the growing influence of social trust in informal food markets (Gupta & Yadav, 2022).From a practical standpoint, the results suggest actionable strategies for street food vendors, urban policymakers, and tourism boards. Efforts should focus on improving hygiene visibility, offering competitive pricing strategies, and leveraging digital platforms for customer engagement and feedback. Curated street food festivals, digital loyalty programs, and hygiene certifications can further legitimise and promote the sector.

In conclusion, this study underscores that young urban consumers evaluate street food based on a balanced mix of habitual familiarity, economic reasoning, hygiene assurance, and social influence. Attitude plays a central role in mediating these factors, ultimately driving behavioural outcomes like purchase intention. The rejection of the sensory appeal pathway further highlights the complex and evolving nature of food preferences in urban India. Broadly, the study reveals that the dynamics of street food consumption are not only influenced by personal and economic considerations but are also shaped by public perceptions and peer discourse. These findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of urban consumer behaviour and offer valuable directions for enhancing the credibility, appeal, and growth of India's street food ecosystem.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

This study offers actionable insights for street food vendors, urban planners, and food tourism stakeholders in the Chandigarh Tricity area. Vendors should prioritise hygiene visibility, fair pricing, and consistent service to build consumer trust. Digital engagement through reviews and influencer marketing can further drive word-of-mouth and loyalty. Authorities may promote certified "Clean Street Food Hubs" to improve public confidence. The findings also suggest targeting young consumers through customised offers and menu innovation.

Theoretically, the research extends consumer behaviour literature by integrating attitude as a mediating variable. It highlights the relevance of contextual variables like food safety and eating habits in informal markets. Lastly, the moderation effect of word-of-mouth underscores the role of social influence in shaping behavioural intentions, advancing existing models of food consumption.

Limitations and Future Scope

This study is limited by its exclusive focus on young adults within the Chandigarh Tricity region, potentially restricting the generalisability of findings to broader or rural populations. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported survey data may introduce social desirability or recall biases. Future research could incorporate mixed-method or longitudinal designs to track changing consumption behaviours across different cities and demographic segments, enriching the understanding of street food engagement in diverse Indian contexts.

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