



Curbside Cravings: A Taste Of Customer Preferences In Food Trucks

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ABSTRACT

The burgeoning food truck industry has revolutionized street food, offering a diverse and convenient culinary experience. However, understanding what drives customer preference in this dynamic market remains crucial for success. This research delves into the hearts and stomachs of food truck patrons, exploring how taste, price, ambiance, quality, and quantity intertwine to influence their choices and also whether age has any significant relation with the satisfaction of food truck customers. By analysing customer surveys and conducting in-depth interviews, this study aims to unveil the relative importance of these factors. Ultimately, this research seeks to provide valuable insights for food truck owners and aspiring entrepreneurs. By deciphering the intricate dance between customer expectations and food truck offerings, we can illuminate the recipe for success in this ever-evolving culinary landscape.

Keywords: Industry, Food Truck, Market, Customer, Entrepreneurs.

I.INTRODUCTION:

The aroma of sizzling grills and the vibrant energy of street food vendors have long captivated urban landscapes. In recent years, food trucks have emerged as a culinary force, transforming the way we experience on-the-go dining. Offering a delightful marriage of convenience, variety, and innovation, these mobile kitchens have carved a niche in the ever-evolving food industry. However, in a market saturated with flavour and competition, understanding customer preferences is paramount to the success of any food truck. This research delves into the fascinating world of curbside cravings, aiming to decipher the intricate dance between what customers desire and what food trucks deliver.

This study positions customer preference at the heart of the food truck business model, recognizing it as a powerful tool for growth and prosperity. By understanding the factors influencing customer choices, food truck entrepreneurs can tailor their offerings to resonate with their target audience. This approach translates into increased customer satisfaction, loyalty, and ultimately, a thriving business. Here's how customer preference research empowers food truck businesses:

- **Menu Optimization:** Identifying the types of cuisines, dishes, and portion sizes that customers crave allows food trucks to curate menus that are not just delicious but also commercially viable. Data on taste preferences can guide the selection of ingredients, the development of signature dishes, and the creation of seasonal specials. Additionally, understanding the importance of price sensitivity helps food trucks strike a balance between affordability and profitability.
- **Enhanced Customer Experience:** Customer preferences extend beyond the food itself. Understanding the desired level of ambiance, whether it's a lively atmosphere or a more relaxed setting, empowers food truck owners to create a welcoming environment that complements the food. Furthermore, research on the role of customization in customer preference can inform decisions regarding menu flexibility, catering to dietary restrictions, and offering build-your-own options.
- **Strategic Marketing and Branding:** Customer preferences provide valuable insights for developing targeted marketing campaigns. Social media presence and online reviews are increasingly influential factors

in customer decision-making. Understanding how customers utilize these platforms helps food trucks establish a strong online presence, attract new customers, and leverage positive reviews to enhance brand reputation.

- *Competitive Advantage*: In a crowded food truck landscape, differentiating yourself from the competition is critical. Customer preference research can reveal unique selling propositions. Perhaps your food truck excels in offering specific dietary options, caters to a particular taste preference, or creates a unique dining experience. Highlighting these strengths based on consumer demand empowers you to stand out in the market.
- *Informed Innovation*: Food truck businesses thrive on innovation. Analysing customer preferences allows entrepreneurs to identify emerging trends and adjust to changing customer expectations. This could involve incorporating popular food trends into the menu, offering new payment options, or implementing eco-friendly practices that resonate with environmentally conscious customers.

By delving into the world of customer preferences, food truck owners gain invaluable knowledge that empowers them to create a winning formula for success. From crafting a menu that tantalizes taste buds to fostering a delightful customer experience, customer preference research is the secret ingredient that unlocks the full potential of a food truck business. This research project aims to unlock this secret ingredient, providing food truck owners and aspiring entrepreneurs with the insights necessary to navigate the competitive food scene and secure their place in the hearts (and stomachs) of their customers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW:

In Malaysia, food trucks have become super popular, especially with locals. This is because people see food trucks as cool and cheap places to eat. Also, the government has helped young people start these businesses, like the programs described in a study by **(Ismail et al., 2018)**. Because people like food trucks and the government helps, the food truck business in Malaysia is booming.

(Burr, 2010) tells us that fancy food trucks are a big deal these days. People love them for the wide variety of affordable food they offer, and because they keep up with the latest trends. The Southern Nevada Health District (2010) says these food trucks are basically kitchens on wheels, where they cook and sell all sorts of food. They can be full-service, where everything is made to order, or self-service, where you grab what you want and go. No matter what, food trucks give people all kinds of ways to eat and are changing the food scene for the better.

Because most Malaysians are Muslim, what's considered halal (permitted according to Islamic law) is extremely important. This isn't just about what people can eat, but also how food is raised and prepared. In Malaysia, halal food goes beyond just following dietary rules **(Hashim & Othman, 2011)**. It's about buying food that is raised and produced in a responsible way. This makes food in Malaysia more meaningful. If you want to understand Malaysian food culture, you need to consider these details. It's not just about personal taste - it's about a whole way of life that reflects the country's religion and traditions.

According to this study **(Carpenter, 2015)**, many food trucks fail because they all offer similar things. The key to success is having something special that sets you apart, even if it's not the cheapest option. People might think that super low prices mean bad quality food. So while being unique and affordable are both important, focus more on what makes your food truck special. This will help you be successful in the long run.

This Research **(Kalirajan & Bhide, 2007)** showed that many food processing companies aren't using their workers effectively. This leads to lower production than possible. Even though companies use similar equipment and get similar results, most weren't very efficient over a recent six-year period. In fact, a surprising 85% of businesses were less than 60% efficient. This means the industry could potentially increase output by 40% without needing more workers or equipment, if they just did things in a smarter way. Basically, these companies are missing out on a big chance to make more products because they aren't using their people well. The study suggests that the industry should widely adopt better practices to improve production.

The study of **(Delaware, 2022)** talks about the recent boom in fancy food trucks across the USA. It's interesting because even though food vendors have been around forever, these trucks are new and exciting. They offer a wide variety of delicious and affordable food, making them popular with everyone from regular folks to foodies. These trucks aren't just at fairs anymore, they're a big part of the modern food scene. They use social media to let people know where they are and to get people excited, and this trend keeps growing even after almost ten years. The infographic will explore how these special food trucks became so popular and why so many Americans love them.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

This research, titled "Curbside Cravings: A Taste of Customer Preferences in Food Trucks," aims to analyse the factors influencing customer choices in the food truck industry. The specific objectives of this study are:

1. **To identify the relative importance of taste, price, ambiance, quality, and quantity in influencing customer preference for food trucks.** This objective will utilize surveys and interviews to understand which factors hold the most weight in a customer's decision-making process. By quantifying

this data, the research will reveal a hierarchy of needs that food truck operators can leverage to optimize their offerings.

2. **To investigate the role of social media presence and online reviews in shaping customer perception of food trucks.** This objective will analyse customer behaviour on social media platforms and review websites to understand how online activity influences their choices. The research will explore how food trucks can effectively utilize social media to build brand awareness, engage with customers, and manage online reviews to enhance their reputation.
3. **To identify potential segments within the customer base based on food truck preferences.** By analysing survey data, the research will explore if distinct customer segments exist with specific preferences for cuisine type, price range, or dining experience. This knowledge allows food truck owners to develop targeted marketing strategies and tailor their offerings to cater to different customer groups.
4. **To develop a set of actionable recommendations for food truck business owners based on the research findings.** This objective aims to translate the research insights into practical strategies that food truck operators can implement to enhance customer satisfaction, attract new customers, and ultimately increase their profitability. This set of recommendations can be a valuable resource for existing and aspiring food truck entrepreneurs.

These interconnected objectives will provide a comprehensive understanding of customer preferences in the food truck industry. By achieving these goals, this research will contribute valuable knowledge to the field of commerce, enabling food truck businesses to operate more effectively and create a winning formula for success.

IV. HYPOTHESIS:

H_{O1} There is no significant relationship between taste, price, ambiance, quality, quantity and customer preference for a specific food truck.

H_{A1} There is a significant relationship between taste, price, ambiance, quality, quantity and customer preference for a specific food truck.

V. **H_{O2}** There is no significant difference in the level of satisfaction across different age groups.

VI. **H_{A2}** There is a significant difference in the level of satisfaction across different age groups.

VII. METHODOLOGY:

- **Research Area:** The study will focus on the three largest cities in Chhattisgarh by area: Raipur, Bilaspur, and Durg. These cities cover 226 sq km, 205 sq km, and 182 sq km respectively. Since the businesses of interest are not evenly spread throughout these cities, research will be conducted by using a stratified random sampling approach. This means those areas will be selected within each city that are known to have a higher concentration of such businesses
- **Research Design:** This study will employ a descriptive research design. Descriptive research aims to gather information and describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon. Here, we will utilize a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a well-rounded understanding of customer perspectives.

- **Research Instruments:**

1. **Survey Questionnaire:** A self-administered survey questionnaire will be the primary research instrument. The questionnaire will be designed to be clear, concise, and easy for respondents to understand. It will include:
 - **Demographic questions:** Age, gender, occupation, etc.
 - **Likert scale questions:** These will measure the relative importance of factors like taste, price, ambiance, quality, and quantity on a customer's decision-making process.
 - **Multiple-choice questions:** These will explore specific preferences like cuisine type, frequency of food truck visits, and utilization of social media for food truck discovery.
 - **Open-ended questions:** These will allow customers to elaborate on their experiences and provide qualitative insights beyond pre-defined options.
2. **In-depth Interviews:** A smaller sample of food truck customers will be selected for in-depth interviews. This qualitative approach will provide a deeper understanding of customer motivations, preferences, and thought processes when choosing a food truck. Interviews will be semi-structured, allowing flexibility to explore emerging themes and follow up on interesting responses.

- **Research Techniques:**

1. **Convenience Sampling:** Due to practical limitations, convenience sampling will be used. This method involves selecting participants who are readily available and accessible within the Bilaspur area. For the survey, food truck locations with high customer traffic will be targeted.

2. **Pilot Testing:** Both the survey questionnaire and interview guide will be pilot-tested on a small group before full-scale implementation. This allows refinement of the questions to ensure clarity, relevance, and effectiveness in capturing the desired information.

• **Sample Size:**

- **Survey:** The study aimed for a sample size of 540 participants. This ensures a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, allowing for generalizable conclusions about food truck customer preferences and satisfaction.
- **Interviews:** A smaller sample size of 100 to 150 participants will be targeted for in-depth interviews. This allows for rich qualitative data while remaining manageable for analysis.

• **Data Analysis:**

- Survey data will be analysed using statistical software like SPSS. Quantitative data (Likert scale, multiple choice) will be analysed using descriptive statistics, frequency tables, and potentially Factor Analysis and Kruskal Wallis test to identify any significant relationships between variables.
- Qualitative data (open-ended questions, interviews) will be analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in customer responses.

By utilizing a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, this research methodology aims to gather comprehensive data on customer preferences in Bilaspur's food truck industry. The findings will provide valuable insights for food truck owners and aspiring entrepreneurs, enabling them to tailor their offerings and marketing strategies to resonate with their target audience.

VIII. INTERPRETATION:

• **DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS**

Descriptive analysis is like a bridge connecting what we see happening (observations) to educated guesses (hypotheses) about the food truck industry. It allows us to move past one-off stories and instead create a strong base of knowledge. This foundation is built on real data, so any theories we develop about the industry will be grounded in the actual experiences and preferences of food truck customers.

1. Source of Awareness

Table 1: Source of Awareness

Statistics					
Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance	
2.7722	3.0000	4.00	1.24464	1.549	
Sources					
	Family & Friends	Mouth Publicity	Social media	Self-Observation	Others
Frequency	151	30	160	189	10
Percentage	28	5.6	29.6	35	1.9

This table summarizes information about how people learned about something, based on a dataset of 540 entries. It uses different statistics to show how the data is distributed. The average score (mean) is 2.77. If you listed all the scores from lowest to highest, the middle score (median) would be 3. The standard deviation is 1.24, which means the scores are somewhat scattered around the average. There's also a statistic called variance, which is related to the standard deviation and is 1.55. Finally, the most common score (mode) in the data set is 4.

Seeing the Food Truck around town was the most popular way people learned about it, with over a third (35.0%) noticing it themselves. Social media followed closely behind at 29.6%, suggesting it's a powerful tool for spreading the word about Food Trucks. Friends and family came in at a close third (28.0%) for informing others. Word-of-mouth recommendations were less common (5.6%). All other sources combined only accounted for a small portion (1.9%) of the people who became aware.

2. Food Culture

Table-2: You have a great food culture in your city

Statistics					
Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance	
3.7796	4.0000	4.00	.86014	.740	
Sources					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

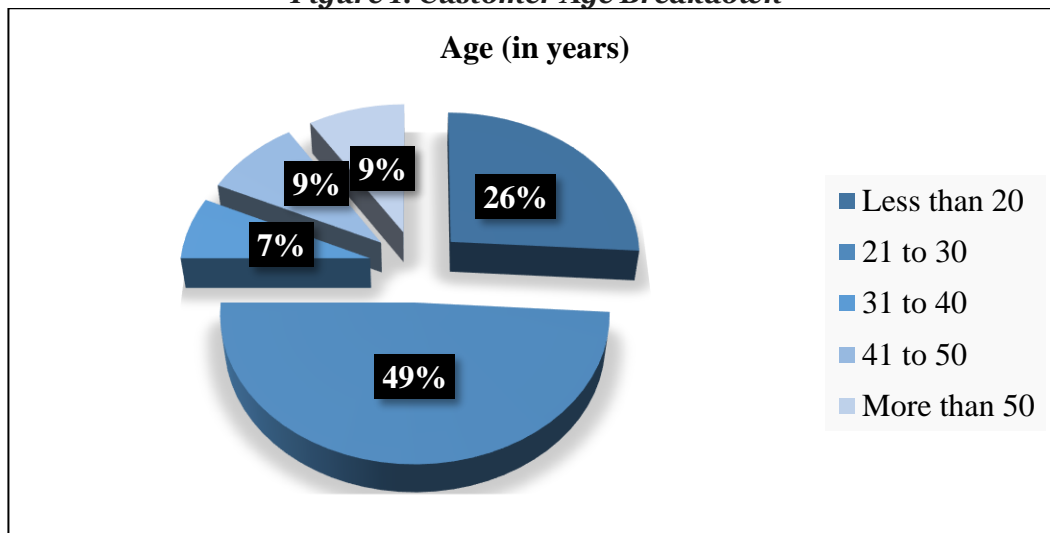
Frequency	5	36	134	263	102
Percentage	0.9	6.7	24.8	48.7	18.9

This table dives into how people feel about their city's food scene. Based on 540 survey responses, it seems a strong majority believe they have a great food culture. The average score (mean) is 3.78, with a median of 4.0. This slight difference suggests more people leaned towards strongly agreeing (higher scores) than slightly agreeing (lower scores). Backing this up, the standard deviation is a low 0.86, indicating most responses clustered around the mean (3.78). Overall, the data suggests a positive outlook on the city's food offerings. This survey found that most residents are proud of their city's food scene. Nearly half (48.7%) agreed, and another 18.9% strongly agreed, that their city has a great food culture. This adds up to two-thirds (67.6%) of people believing they have something special to offer. Only a small fraction disagreed (15.7%) – 6.7% disagreed and 9% strongly disagreed. There was also a neutral group, accounting for nearly a quarter (24.8%) of respondents.

3. Customer Age Breakdown

The Figure mentioned below shows that nearly half (49%) of food truck customers are young adults between 21 and 30 years old. The second-largest group is teenagers, making up 26% of customers. Which means 75% of their business comes from people under 31. There are a few reasons for this.

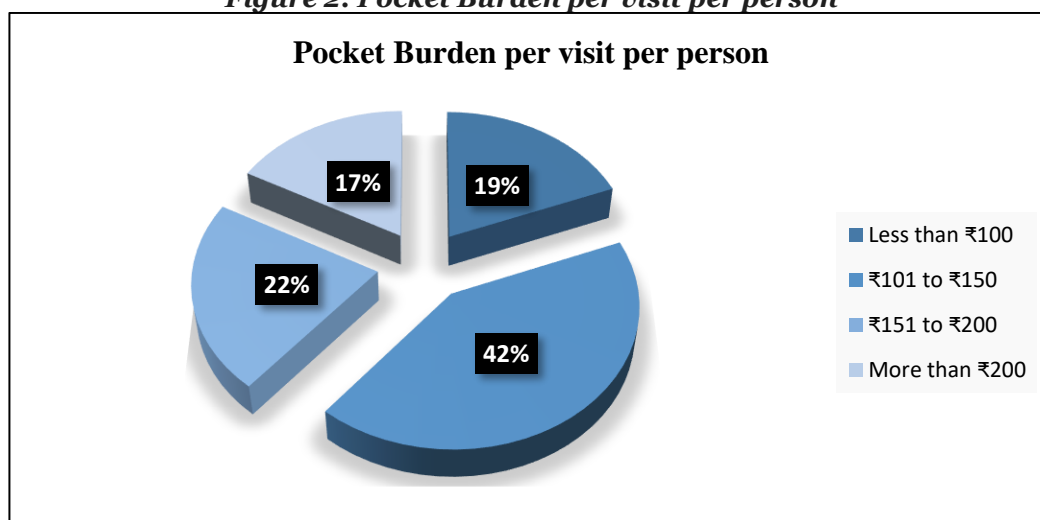
Figure 1: Customer Age Breakdown



First, young adults often have tighter budgets. Second, the whole food truck scene is seen as trendy and social, which is a bigger draw for younger people. And finally, younger adults tend to be more adventurous with their food choices. Customers in their thirties (31-40 years old) and forties (41-50 years old) are less common, at 9% and 7% respectively. The smallest customer segment is those over 50 years old, at only 9%.

4. Pocket Burden

Figure 2: Pocket Burden per visit per person



The pie chart reveals that most food truck visits (42%) fall in the ₹101 to ₹150 price range. The next most popular option is ₹151 to ₹200, at 22%. Fewer folks spend less than ₹100 (19%) or over ₹200 (17%). Overall, it looks like food trucks are a budget-friendly way to eat. This makes sense because food trucks usually have lower costs than restaurants, allowing them to offer lower prices.

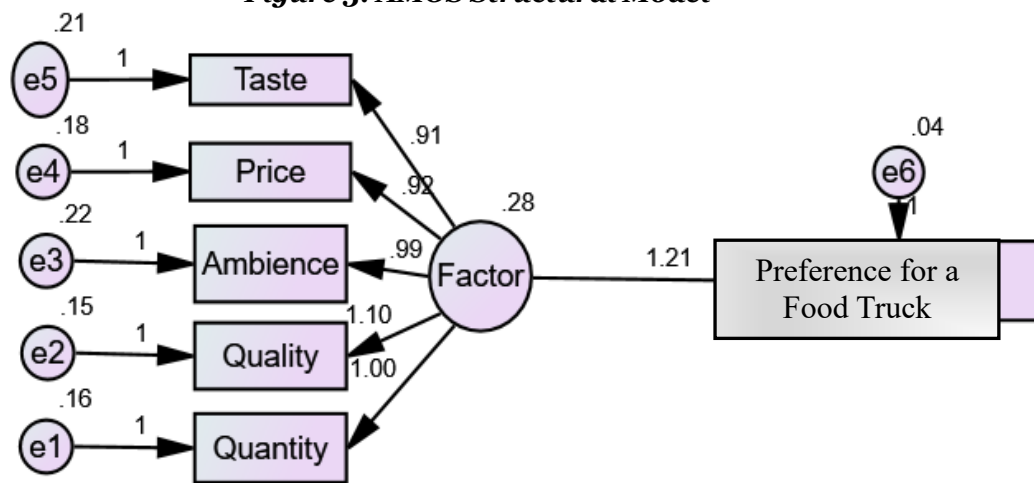
• HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Hypothesis testing is a scientific method to see if a hunch (the hypothesis) holds weight in the real world. It involves setting up two opposing ideas: the null hypothesis, which says the variables have no effect or relation, and the alternative hypothesis, that it has some sort of relation or impact over each other, after collecting data and analyzing it to see how likely it is that the results happened by chance. If the data is very unlikely due to chance, you reject the null hypothesis and support your hunch. It's a way to use evidence to see if your initial ideas are on the right track.

H₀₁ There is no significant relationship between taste, price, ambiance, quality, quantity and customer preference for a specific food truck.

H_{A1} There is a significant relationship between taste, price, ambiance, quality, quantity and customer preference for a specific food truck.

Figure 3: AMOS Structural Model



A statistical method called structural equation modelling has been used in this hypothesis testing, built using AMOS software, to analyse the relationships between the variables. The model is considered to have a good fit if several criteria are satisfied. Ideally, a key measure called Chi-square divided by degrees of freedom (CMIN/df) should be less than 5. Additionally, other fit indices like the GFI, TLI, and CFI should all be greater than 0.90. A model could also be considered acceptable if it has a low standardized root mean square residual (RMR) and a root mean square error approximation (RMSEA) below 0.08. The analysis showed that most of these criteria were met, with very high values for GFI (.997), TLI (1.004), CFI (1.000), and a low RMR (.003). The RMSEA was also acceptable at less than 0.08. However, the CMIN/df value was lower than the usual threshold for a good fit, at 0.473.

The squared multiple correlation of the data was observed to be .903. This means 90.3% of the variation in preference can be explained by considering taste, price, atmosphere, how good the food was, and how much food they got.

The study showed how much people liked a food truck based on factors like taste, price, atmosphere, how good the food was, and how much food they got. Findings showed a strong positive connection (almost perfect with a score of .950) and were very reliable (with a t-value greater than 2 and a p-value much lower than .001). This results in rejection of the idea that there was no connection (the null hypothesis) and accepting the idea that these factors do influence how much people like the food truck (the alternative hypothesis). Specific details about how well the model fit and the results of the hypothesis test are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Hypothesis Results

Hypothesized Relationship	Standardized Estimates	t-value	p-value	R-Square (Preference for a Food Truck)
Impact of Taste, Price, Ambiance, Quality and Quantity on preference for a food truck	.950	>2	<.001	.903
Model Fit				
CMIN/df = .473	GFI = .997		TLI = 1.004	
CFI = 1.000	SRMR = .003		RMSEA = 0.008	
Decision	Rejection of Null Hypothesis and Acceptance of Alternate Hypothesis.			

H₀₂ There is no significant difference in the level of satisfaction across different age groups.

H_{A2} There is a significant difference in the level of satisfaction across different age groups.

To evaluate the significant difference in the level of satisfaction across different age groups Kruskal-Wallis test has been applied. The test revealed a significant difference (Asymp. Sig. = .006) in the level of satisfaction across different age groups (Less than 20 = 140; 21 to 30 = 262; 31 to 40 = 40; 41 to 50 = 48; Above 50 = 50). This means that the Null Hypothesis is being rejected and the Alternate Hypothesis is accepted.

Table 4: Hypothesis Results

Ranks	Age				
	Less than 20	21 to 30	31 to 40	41 to 50	Above 50
N	140	262	40	48	50
Mean Rank	259.30	258.36	283.27	346.66	282.12
Test Statistics					
Kruskal-Wallis H = 14.510		df = 4		Asymp. Sig. = .006	
Decision	Rejection of Null Hypothesis and Acceptance of Alternate Hypothesis				

IX. CONCLUSION:

The burgeoning world of food trucks has captured the imagination of both vendors and consumers alike. This research paper, titled "Curbside Cravings: A Taste of Customer Preferences in Food Trucks," has delved into the fascinating world of mobile culinary experiences. One of the most striking revelations from our research is the dominance of self-observation as the primary source of food truck awareness. This highlights the power of word-of-mouth marketing and the importance of creating a visually appealing and enticing presence.

Furthermore, our study underscores the positive perception of food culture held by nearly half the population. This presents a fertile ground for food trucks to flourish, catering to a customer base that is eager to explore diverse culinary options. By offering unique and innovative dishes, food trucks can position themselves as vibrant contributors to a city's culinary landscape.

Perhaps the most significant finding of our research is the overwhelming demographic skew towards customers below 31 years of age. This youthful customer base prioritizes affordability, which aligns perfectly with the generally perceived value proposition of food trucks. Food truck owners can capitalize on this by ensuring their menus offer delicious and satisfying meals at competitive prices.

Our research hypothesis centered on the critical link between various food truck attributes and customer preference. Food truck success is not solely determined by taste, price, ambiance, quality, or quantity in isolation. Instead, it is the harmonious orchestration of these elements that creates a truly memorable dining experience, enticing customers to return for more.

Another intriguing discovery lies in the significant difference in satisfaction levels across various age groups. While the research does not delve into the specific reasons behind this disparity, it opens doors for further exploration. Perhaps older demographics have different expectations when it comes to food truck dining, placing a greater emphasis on factors like seating arrangements or a more formal setting. Understanding these nuances can empower food truck owners to tailor their offerings to cater to a wider customer base.

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