

# Impact Of Changing Taste Preferences Of The Younger Generation On Brand Loyalty And Consumer Perception Of Small Food Eatery Outlets In Hyderabad

Author

## Abstract

**Purpose** — This study examines the impact of evolving taste preferences among younger consumers on brand loyalty and consumer perception of small food eatery outlets operating at night across six localities in Hyderabad, India.

**Design/Methodology** — A structured questionnaire was administered to 583 respondents (362 male, 221 female) aged 15–35 years, recruited through multistage sampling at Koti, Charminar, Ameerpet, Jubilee Hills, Financial District, and Madhapur/DLF. Five hypotheses were tested using Chi-Square, Independent-Samples *t*-Test, One-Way ANOVA, Pearson Correlation, and Multiple Linear Regression. Instrument reliability was confirmed (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.836$ ).

**Findings** — All five null hypotheses were rejected at the 5% significance level. Age cohort is significantly associated with taste preference change [ $\chi^2(4) = 22.03, p < 0.001$ ]. Consumer perception scores differ significantly between small-eatery and chain-outlet preferrers [ $t(581) = 9.00, p < 0.001, d = 0.77$ ]. Social media exposure significantly predicts taste evolution [ $F(3,579) = 117.80, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.38$ ]. Taste preference evolution correlates positively with brand loyalty [ $r = 0.623, p < 0.001$ ], and menu adaptability is significantly associated with brand loyalty [ $r = 0.512, p < 0.001$ ]. The regression model explains 57.4% of variance in brand loyalty (Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.571$ ).

**Originality/Value** — This is one of the first empirical studies to examine youth food-preference dynamics specific to the night-time small-eatery segment in Hyderabad, integrating social media exposure, menu adaptability, and generational cohort as simultaneous predictors of brand loyalty. Practical guidance is provided for operators seeking to retain youth patronage through menu innovation and authentic positioning.

**Keywords:** Taste Preferences; Brand Loyalty; Consumer Perception; Small Food Eateries; Hyderabad; Social Media; Youth; Night-time Dining; ANOVA; Regression.

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## I. Introduction

The rapid transformation of food consumption habits among India's younger population represents one of the most commercially significant shifts in the domestic food service sector. In Hyderabad—a city combining centuries-old street food heritage with rapid IT-sector urbanisation—this transformation is especially pronounced. Young consumers are increasingly drawn to small, independently operated eateries that operate primarily during evening and night hours, offering fast service, low prices, and authentic regional cuisine, rather than to the standardised offerings of multinational chains such as McDonald's, KFC, and Domino's.

The localities selected for this study—Koti, Charminar, Ameerpet, Jubilee Hills, Financial District, and Madhapur/DLF—collectively represent a cross-section of Hyderabad's socio-economic spectrum, from the historic bazaars of the Old City to the post-midnight food corridors of the IT corridor. Youth aged 15–35 years, who constitute approximately 30% of Hyderabad's population of 25 million, are the primary patrons of this night-time small-eatery ecosystem. These consumers display variety-seeking behaviour, health awareness, and susceptibility to social media-driven culinary trends—all of which interact with their degree of loyalty and perception toward specific small eateries.

Despite the economic significance of this segment, academic inquiry into the specific mechanisms through which taste evolution translates to brand loyalty and consumer perception for small, informal eateries remains limited. The present study addresses this gap by testing five empirically grounded hypotheses using a sample of 583 respondents and a battery of quantitative statistical tools.

## Research Objectives

O1: To examine the association between age cohort and degree of taste preference change among youth in Hyderabad.

O2: To determine whether changing taste preferences significantly influence brand loyalty toward small food eatery outlets.

O3: To assess differences in consumer perception between youth preferring small eateries versus large chain outlets.

O4: To evaluate the influence of social media exposure on the degree of taste preference evolution.

O5: To investigate the relationship between menu adaptability and brand loyalty.

### **Research Hypotheses**

**H1<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant association between age cohort and degree of taste preference change among youth in Hyderabad.

**H2<sub>0</sub>:** Changing taste preferences do not significantly influence brand loyalty toward small food eatery outlets.

**H3<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant difference in consumer perception scores between youth who prefer small eateries and those who prefer large chain outlets.

**H4<sub>0</sub>:** Social media exposure does not significantly influence the degree of taste preference evolution among youth.

**H5<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between menu adaptability of small eateries and youth brand loyalty.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **Taste Preference Evolution Among Youth**

Taste preferences are not static; they evolve continuously under the influence of socio-cultural exposure, peer interaction, media consumption, and life-stage transitions (Frez-Muñoz et al., 2021). In the Indian context, this evolution among the 15–30 age group has been documented as a shift from traditional home-cooked meals and region-specific cuisine toward hybrid, multi-cuisine, and street food formats (Kulshreshtha & Sharma, 2022). The proliferation of food delivery platforms and social media content has accelerated this shift, exposing younger consumers to diverse culinary options at unprecedented frequency (Chen et al., 2024).

K B and K Kallarakal (2021) observed that taste customisation and variety-seeking drive repeat patronage at food outlets catering to Bengaluru youth, a finding broadly applicable to other Indian metropolitan contexts. The emergence of health consciousness, demand for transparency in ingredient sourcing, and a preference for low-sugar and low-oil preparations—particularly post-COVID-19—represent newer dimensions of taste evolution that small eateries must address (Prabhu et al., 2016).

### **Brand Loyalty in the Food Service Context**

Brand loyalty in food service is defined as the consistent tendency to patronise a specific outlet, characterised by repeat purchase, word-of-mouth referral, and resistance to competitive switching (Oliver, 1999). In the small eatery context, loyalty is often mediated by perceived value—the ratio of quality and experience to price paid—rather than by brand equity in the conventional marketing sense (P Najeemudeen & Panchanatham, 2021). Price sensitivity among youth aged 15–25 further complicates loyalty formation: outlets that offer authentic flavour at low prices are capable of building loyalty rapidly, particularly among students and early-career professionals (Chang, 2010).

Menu adaptability—the degree to which an eatery updates its offerings to align with emerging taste trends—has been identified as a key moderator of youth loyalty. Outlets that remain static in their menus risk alienating experimentally inclined younger patrons, while those that introduce seasonal or trend-responsive items benefit from increased visit frequency and positive word-of-mouth (Kulshreshtha & Sharma, 2022).

### **Consumer Perception and Brand Image**

Consumer perception of small eateries is shaped by a constellation of attributes including authenticity, hygiene, value-for-money, ambience, and locality identity (K B & K Kallarakal, 2021). In contrast to large chains, small eateries derive their brand image from tacit, experiential associations—the memory of a specific flavour, the night-time atmosphere of a particular locality, the perceived hospitality of owner-operators—rather than from formal brand communication. Research in fast food settings confirms that perceived authenticity and local identity are particularly salient to younger consumers who value distinctiveness and non-standardised dining experiences (Frez-Muñoz et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2024).

### **Social Media's Role as a Taste Accelerant**

Social media platforms—particularly Instagram, YouTube Shorts, and Zomato's content ecosystem—function as accelerants of taste preference evolution among Indian youth. Content featuring "hidden gem" eateries, late-night food walks, and street food reviews regularly generates high engagement among the 15–25 cohort, directly influencing patronage decisions (Chen et al., 2024). This phenomenon is amplified in the Hyderabad context, where food vlogging and review culture around Old City chaat counters, Madhapur biryani stalls, and Ameerpet chai corners have generated substantial online followings.

**Theoretical Framework: Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R)**

This study is anchored in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), which conceptualises environmental stimuli (S) as influencing internal cognitive and affective states in the organism (O), which in turn drive behavioural responses (R). In the present context, social media content and evolving taste exposures constitute the stimulus; taste preference evolution, consumer perception, and brand evaluation constitute the organism (internal processing); and brand loyalty behaviours—repeat visits, word-of-mouth, and resistance to switching—constitute the response. This framework accommodates both individual-level variables (age cohort, gender) and contextual factors (menu adaptability, night-time service environment) within a unified explanatory structure.

**III. Research Methodology**

**Research Design and Approach**

The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design with a descriptive and causal approach. Primary data were collected via a structured, self-administered questionnaire. The quantitative design was chosen for its capacity to test hypotheses with inferential statistical tools and to generalise findings across a defined population. The questionnaire comprised six sections: (i) demographic profile, (ii) taste preference evolution scale (15 items), (iii) brand loyalty scale (10 items, adapted from Oliver, 1999), (iv) consumer perception scale (12 items), (v) social media exposure frequency (single-item and multi-item), and (vi) menu adaptability perception (3 items). All scale items used a 5-point Likert format (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

**Study Area and Sampling**

Six localities in Hyderabad were selected to represent distinct socio-economic strata and food-culture typologies: Koti (student and working-class hub, Old City), Charminar (historic street food corridor), Ameerpet (coaching and college student cluster), Jubilee Hills (upper-middle class residential and dining district), Financial District (IT sector professionals), and Madhapur/DLF (late-night tech-corridor dining). Data were collected exclusively at small eateries operating during evening and night hours (6 pm–2 am), consistent with the study's focus on night-time, low-price, fast-service establishments.

Multistage sampling was employed. In Stage 1, two to four small eateries per locality were selected using systematic random sampling. In Stage 2, respondents were intercepted using quota sampling to achieve proportional representation across age and gender sub-groups. Of 620 questionnaires distributed, 583 were returned fully completed (response rate: 94.0%).

**Sample Profile: Gender × Age Cross-Tabulation**

**Table 1: Gender × Age Group Cross-Tabulation (N = 583)**

Age Group	Male (n)	Male (%)	Female (n)	Female (%)	Total (n)	Total (%)
15–18 years	111	30.7%	61	27.6%	172	29.5%
19–25 years	200	55.2%	103	46.6%	303	52.0%
26–35 years	51	14.1%	57	25.8%	108	18.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Note: Male respondents (n = 362) constitute 62.1% of the sample; female respondents (n = 221) constitute 37.9%. The 19–25 cohort is the largest age group (52.0%), consistent with the study's focus on young adult consumers.*

**Area-wise and Behavioural Profile of Respondents**

**Table 2: Area-wise Distribution of Respondents**

Study Locality	Frequency	Percentage	Socio-Economic Profile
Koti	102	17.5%	Student, working class
Charminar	118	20.2%	Heritage, street food patrons
Ameerpet	109	18.7%	Coaching students, young professionals
Jubilee Hills	79	13.6%	Upper-middle class, experiential diners
Financial District	88	15.1%	IT professionals, late-night diners
Madhapur / DLF	87	14.9%	Tech-corridor, after-midnight crowd

Total	583	100%	—
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**Table 3: Behavioural Profile of Respondents**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Primary Visit Timing	Evening (5 pm–8 pm)	167	28.6%
	Night (8 pm–11 pm)	268	46.0%
	Late Night (11 pm–2 am)	148	25.4%
Visit Frequency	Daily	98	16.8%
	4–6 times per week	142	24.4%
	2–3 times per week	198	34.0%
	Once a week	103	17.7%
	Occasionally	42	7.2%
Primary Attraction	Authentic taste	218	37.4%
	Low prices	176	30.2%
	Fast service	139	23.8%
	Night ambience / vibe	50	8.6%
Preferred Eatery Type	Small / Independent	348	59.7%
	Large chain outlet	235	40.3%

**Reliability Statistics**

**Table 4: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Statistics**

Scale Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Interpretation
Taste Preference Evolution (TPE)	15	0.847	Good
Brand Loyalty (BL)	10	0.821	Good
Consumer Perception (CP)	12	0.836	Good
Social Media Exposure (SME)	5	0.798	Acceptable
Menu Adaptability (MA)	3	0.787	Acceptable
Overall Composite	45	0.836	Good

Note: Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.70$  for all constructs confirms adequate internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). Items with corrected item-total correlation  $< 0.30$  were removed during pilot testing ( $n = 40$ ).

**Statistical Tools**

Five statistical tools were applied in the following sequence: (i) Chi-Square Test of Independence — H1; (ii) Independent-Samples t-Test — H3; (iii) One-Way ANOVA with Tukey HSD post-hoc — H4; (iv) Pearson Bivariate Correlation — H2 and H5; and (v) Multiple Linear Regression — confirmatory multivariate model. All analyses were performed at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Effect sizes were reported: Cramér's V for  $\chi^2$ , Cohen's d for t-Test,  $\eta^2$  for ANOVA, and  $r^2$  for correlation. Normality of distribution for continuous constructs was confirmed via Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (all constructs:  $p > 0.05$  for sub-group means); Levene's test for equality of variances was performed prior to t-Test.

**Descriptive Statistics for Key Constructs**

**Table 5: Descriptive Statistics — Composite Scale Scores**

Construct	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Taste Preference Evolution (TPE)	583	18	73	47.46	7.98	-0.24	0.31
Brand Loyalty (BL)	583	12	50	34.82	5.87	-0.18	-0.09

Consumer Perception (CP)	583	14	60	41.73	7.12	-0.31	0.22
Menu Adaptability (MA)	583	3	15	9.94	2.23	-0.17	-0.14

*Note: Skewness and kurtosis values within ±1.0 confirm approximate normality, supporting use of parametric tests (George & Mallery, 2010).*

#### IV. Statistical Analysis And Hypothesis Testing

##### Hypothesis 1: Chi-Square Test of Independence

**H1<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant association between age cohort and degree of taste preference change among youth in Hyderabad.

A Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted to examine the association between age cohort (15–18, 19–25, 26–35 years) and degree of taste preference change (High, Moderate, Low), as classified from composite TPE sub-scale scores using tertile splits. Minimum expected cell frequency was 15.93, satisfying the assumption that no cell has expected frequency < 5.

**Table 6: Cross-Tabulation — Age Cohort × Degree of Taste Preference Change**

Age Cohort	High Change	Moderate Change	Low Change	Row Total
15–18 years (n=172)	98 (56.9%)	57 (33.1%)	17 (9.9%)	172
19–25 years (n=303)	138 (45.5%)	122 (40.3%)	43 (14.2%)	303
26–35 years (n=108)	33 (30.6%)	49 (45.4%)	26 (24.1%)	108
<b>Column Total</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>583</b>

**Table 7: Chi-Square Test Results**

Statistic	Value	df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	22.029	4	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	21.774	4	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	18.442	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	583	—	—

*Note: Minimum expected cell count = 15.93. No cell has expected frequency < 5. Cramér's V = 0.137, indicating a small-to-moderate effect. Significant at p < 0.001.*

The Pearson Chi-Square value  $\chi^2(4) = 22.029$  is significant at  $p < 0.001$ , well below the 0.05 threshold. Inspection of the cross-tabulation reveals a clear generational gradient: the 15–18 cohort registers the highest proportion of High Change (56.9%), declining systematically to 30.6% in the 26–35 cohort. Conversely, the proportion of Low Change increases from 9.9% (youngest) to 24.1% (oldest), confirming age-differentiated taste evolution patterns aligned with greater cultural exposure and social media consumption among the youngest cohort.

**Decision: NULL HYPOTHESIS REJECTED** — H1<sub>0</sub> rejected. A statistically significant association exists between age cohort and degree of taste preference change [ $\chi^2(4) = 22.03, p < 0.001, V = 0.137$ ]. The 15–18 cohort demonstrates disproportionately high taste evolution. Alternate hypothesis H1<sub>1</sub> is accepted.

##### Hypothesis 3: Independent-Samples t-Test

**H3<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant difference in consumer perception scores between youth who prefer small eateries and those who prefer large chain outlets.

Respondents who predominantly visit small eateries (Group 1, n = 348) were compared with those who predominantly visit large chain outlets (Group 2, n = 235) on composite Consumer Perception scores (range 12–60). Levene's Test and the t-Test were performed. Group sizes reflect the question: "Which type of outlet do you visit most often?"

**Table 8: Group Statistics — Consumer Perception by Outlet Preference**

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Small eatery preferers	348	44.18	6.92	0.371

Large chain preferrers	235	38.73	7.34	0.479
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**Table 9: Independent-Samples t-Test — Consumer Perception**

	Levene's F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tail)	Mean Diff.	SE Diff.	95% CI
Equal variances assumed	1.628	0.202	9.00	581	0.000	5.45	0.606	[4.26, 6.64]
Equal variances not assumed	—	—	8.91	465.3	0.000	5.45	0.611	[4.25, 6.65]

Note: Levene's Test:  $F = 1.628, p = 0.202$ . Equal variances assumed. Cohen's  $d = 0.768$ , indicating a medium-large effect size.

Levene's Test confirms equal variances ( $F = 1.628, p = 0.202$ ). The independent-samples t-Test yields  $t(581) = 9.00, p < 0.001$ . Small-eatery preferrers ( $M = 44.18, SD = 6.92$ ) score significantly higher on consumer perception than chain-outlet preferrers ( $M = 38.73, SD = 7.34$ ). The mean difference of 5.45 points (95% CI: 4.26 to 6.64) does not include zero, and Cohen's  $d = 0.768$  represents a practically meaningful effect. Youth who gravitate toward small eateries perceive these outlets as more authentic, better value, and more aligned with their food identity than those who prefer standardised chains.

**Decision: NULL HYPOTHESIS REJECTED** —  $H_{30}$  rejected. A statistically significant difference in consumer perception exists between small-eatery preferrers and chain-outlet preferrers [ $t(581) = 9.00, p < 0.001, d = 0.768$ ]. Alternate hypothesis  $H_{31}$  is accepted.

**Hypothesis 4: One-Way ANOVA**

**H<sub>40</sub>**: Social media exposure does not significantly influence the degree of taste preference evolution among youth.

Respondents were assigned to four groups based on self-reported daily social media consumption related to food content: Group 1 (< 1 hour,  $n = 68$ ), Group 2 (1–3 hours,  $n = 172$ ), Group 3 (3–5 hours,  $n = 214$ ), and Group 4 (> 5 hours,  $n = 129$ ). The dependent variable is the composite TPE score (range 15–75).

**Table 10: Descriptive Statistics — TPE Score by Social Media Exposure Group**

Group	N	Mean	SD	SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Min	Max
< 1 hour/day	68	37.84	5.21	0.632	36.58	39.10	24	52
1–3 hours/day	172	44.29	6.08	0.464	43.37	45.21	28	61
3–5 hours/day	214	49.17	6.43	0.440	48.30	50.04	30	69
> 5 hours/day	129	53.92	6.87	0.605	52.72	55.12	35	73
<b>Total</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>47.46</b>	<b>7.98</b>	<b>0.330</b>	<b>46.81</b>	<b>48.11</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>73</b>

**Table 11: One-Way ANOVA Summary — Taste Preference Evolution**

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups (Regression)	14,030.56	3	4,676.85	117.80	0.000
Within Groups (Residual)	22,987.58	579	39.70	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>37,018.14</b>	<b>582</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>—</b>

Note:  $F(3, 579) = 117.80, p < 0.001. \eta^2 = 0.379$ , indicating that 37.9% of variance in taste preference evolution is attributable to social media exposure group.

**Table 12: Post-Hoc Analysis — Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons**

Group (I)	Group (J)	Mean Diff (I–J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Effect
< 1 hr/day	1–3 hrs/day	–6.45	0.888	0.000	Significant
< 1 hr/day	3–5 hrs/day	–11.33	0.868	0.000	Significant
< 1 hr/day	> 5 hrs/day	–16.08	0.952	0.000	Significant

1–3 hrs/day	3–5 hrs/day	–4.88	0.636	0.000	Significant
1–3 hrs/day	> 5 hrs/day	–9.63	0.763	0.000	Significant
3–5 hrs/day	> 5 hrs/day	–4.75	0.738	0.000	Significant

*Note: All six pairwise comparisons are significant at  $p < 0.001$ . TPE scores increase monotonically with daily social media exposure to food content, confirming a dose-response relationship.*

The ANOVA yields  $F(3, 579) = 117.80, p < 0.001$ , with a large effect size  $\eta^2 = 0.379$ . This means that 37.9% of the variance in taste preference evolution scores is explained by social media exposure group membership alone. Tukey HSD post-hoc analysis confirms that every pair of groups differs significantly (all  $p < 0.001$ ), with TPE scores rising monotonically from the low-exposure group ( $M = 37.84$ ) to the high-exposure group ( $M = 53.92$ ). The 16.08-point gap between the two extreme groups is particularly striking, representing more than two standard deviations of the overall TPE scale.

**Decision: NULL HYPOTHESIS REJECTED** —  $H_{0\alpha}$  rejected. Social media exposure significantly and substantially influences taste preference evolution [ $F(3,579) = 117.80, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.379$ ]. All pairwise group differences are significant. Alternate hypothesis  $H_{41}$  is accepted.

**Hypothesis 2 and 5: Pearson Correlation Analysis**

**H2<sub>0</sub>:** Changing taste preferences do not significantly influence brand loyalty toward small food eatery outlets.

**H5<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between menu adaptability and youth brand loyalty.

Pearson bivariate correlations were computed among the five key constructs. Two-tailed significance was tested at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The full correlation matrix is presented in Table 13.

**Table 13: Pearson Correlation Matrix — Key Constructs (N = 583)**

Construct	1. TPE	2. BL	3. CP	4. MA	Mean	SD
1. Taste Preference Evol. (TPE)	1.000	0.623**	0.589**	0.478**	47.46	7.98
2. Brand Loyalty (BL)	0.623**	1.000	0.641**	0.512**	34.82	5.87
3. Consumer Perception (CP)	0.589**	0.641**	1.000	0.431**	41.73	7.12
4. Menu Adaptability (MA)	0.478**	0.512**	0.431**	1.000	9.94	2.23

*Note: \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N = 583. BL = Brand Loyalty; TPE = Taste Preference Evolution; CP = Consumer Perception; MA = Menu Adaptability.*

For H2: The Pearson correlation between TPE and Brand Loyalty is  $r = 0.623 (p < 0.001), t(581) = 19.198$ . The coefficient of determination  $r^2 = 0.388$  indicates that approximately 38.8% of the variance in brand loyalty is shared with taste preference evolution. This moderately strong positive association confirms that youth whose tastes have evolved most extensively are more loyal to small eateries that accommodate their evolving preferences — particularly those offering authentic flavours, novel items, and health-oriented options.

For H5: The Pearson correlation between Menu Adaptability and Brand Loyalty is  $r = 0.512 (p < 0.001), t(581) = 14.367$ . The coefficient of determination  $r^2 = 0.262$  indicates that menu adaptability alone accounts for 26.2% of the variance in brand loyalty. This finding has direct operational significance: small eateries in Hyderabad's night-time food corridor that update menus seasonally and introduce trend-responsive items retain meaningfully stronger youth loyalty.

**Decision: NULL HYPOTHESIS REJECTED** —  $H_{2\alpha}$  rejected. TPE is significantly and positively correlated with brand loyalty [ $r = 0.623, p < 0.001, r^2 = 0.388$ ]. Alternate  $H_{21}$  accepted.

**Decision: NULL HYPOTHESIS REJECTED** —  $H_{5\alpha}$  rejected. Menu adaptability is significantly and positively correlated with brand loyalty [ $r = 0.512, p < 0.001, r^2 = 0.262$ ]. Alternate  $H_{51}$  accepted.

**V. Multiple Linear Regression — Predictors Of Brand Loyalty**

To determine the combined predictive power of all four independent constructs on Brand Loyalty, a multiple linear regression was performed. Assumptions of linearity, normality of residuals, homoscedasticity (Breusch-Pagan test:  $\chi^2 = 6.43, p = 0.170$ ), and absence of multicollinearity (all VIF  $< 2.0$ ) were verified.

**Table 14: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error of Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.758	0.574	0.571	3.843	1.937

*Note: Predictors: (Constant), TPE, CP, SME, MA. Dependent Variable: Brand Loyalty. Durbin-Watson = 1.937 confirms absence of autocorrelation.*

**Table 15: ANOVA — Regression Model Significance**

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	11,505.30	4	2,876.33	194.70	0.000
Residual	8,538.78	578	14.77	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,044.08</b>	<b>582</b>	—	—	—

**Table 16: Regression Coefficients**

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.	VIF
(Constant)	1.847	1.712	—	1.079	0.281	—
Taste Pref. Evolution (TPE)	0.248	0.039	0.337	6.359	0.000	1.693
Consumer Perception (CP)	0.299	0.045	0.363	6.644	0.000	1.762
Social Media Exposure (SME)	0.207	0.048	0.201	4.313	0.000	1.498
Menu Adaptability (MA)	0.482	0.092	0.183	5.239	0.000	1.267

*Note: VIF values range from 1.267 to 1.762, all well below the critical threshold of 5, confirming absence of multicollinearity. Tolerance values range from 0.568 to 0.789.*

The regression model is highly significant [ $F(4,578) = 194.70, p < 0.001$ ] and explains 57.4% of the variance in Brand Loyalty ( $R^2 = 0.574, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.571$ ). Consumer Perception is the strongest predictor ( $\beta = 0.363, p < 0.001$ ), followed by Taste Preference Evolution ( $\beta = 0.337, p < 0.001$ ), Social Media Exposure ( $\beta = 0.201, p < 0.001$ ), and Menu Adaptability ( $\beta = 0.183, p < 0.001$ ). All four predictors make independent, significant contributions.

The regression equation is:

$$\text{Brand Loyalty} = 1.847 + 0.248(\text{TPE}) + 0.299(\text{CP}) + 0.207(\text{SME}) + 0.482(\text{MA})$$

This equation implies that for every one-point increase in Menu Adaptability perception (scale: 3–15), brand loyalty increases by 0.482 points, holding other variables constant—underscoring the high practical leverage of this operationally manageable variable for small eatery owners.

## VI. Consolidated Hypothesis Testing Summary

**Table 17: Summary of All Hypothesis Tests (N = 583)**

Hyp.	Null Hypothesis	Statistical Tool	Test Statistic	p-value	Effect Size	Decision
H1 <sub>0</sub>	Age cohort ↔ Taste change	Chi-Square	$\chi^2(4) = 22.03$	< 0.001	$V = 0.137$	Rejected ✓
H2 <sub>0</sub>	TPE → Brand Loyalty	Pearson r	$r = 0.623$	< 0.001	$r^2 = 0.388$	Rejected ✓
H3 <sub>0</sub>	Perception: Small vs Chain	Ind. t-Test	$t(581) = 9.00$	< 0.001	$d = 0.768$	Rejected ✓
H4 <sub>0</sub>	Social Media → TPE	One-Way ANOVA	$F(3,579) = 117.80$	< 0.001	$\eta^2 = 0.379$	Rejected ✓
H5 <sub>0</sub>	Menu Adapt. → Brand Loyalty	Pearson r	$r = 0.512$	< 0.001	$r^2 = 0.262$	Rejected ✓

*Note: All five null hypotheses rejected at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . All five alternate hypotheses accepted. Effect sizes range from small-to-moderate ( $V = 0.137$ ) to large ( $\eta^2 = 0.379$ ), confirming both statistical and practical significance.*

The convergence of five independent statistical tests—spanning association, difference, variance, and relationship analyses—provides robust, multi-faceted evidence for the core proposition of this study: that evolving taste preferences among Hyderabad youth, driven by generational cohort dynamics and social media exposure, exert a significant and practically meaningful influence on brand loyalty and consumer perception of night-time small food eateries. The magnitude of the ANOVA effect ( $\eta^2 = 0.379$ ) is particularly noteworthy, suggesting that social media exposure to food content alone accounts for nearly 38% of variation in how much a young consumer's tastes have changed—a finding with direct implications for eatery marketing strategy.

## VII. Discussion

The chi-square finding (H1) confirms that generational cohort is a meaningful predictor of taste change velocity. The youngest respondents (15–18 years), who represent the core of Hyderabad's school-leaver and junior college population, exhibit the most pronounced taste evolution (56.9% in the High Change category). This finding aligns with Frez-Muñoz et al. (2021), who demonstrated cross-nationally that food identity is most fluid and experimentally oriented in younger cohorts. Importantly, in Hyderabad's specific context, this cohort also constitutes a large share of night-time eatery patronage—particularly in areas such as Koti and Ameerpet where coaching centres and junior colleges concentrate. The implication is that small eateries operating in these zones face the fastest-evolving customer base and therefore the greatest imperative for menu responsiveness.

The t-Test result (H3) is among the most practically salient findings of this study. Small-eatery preferers score 5.45 points higher on the 60-point consumer perception scale than chain-outlet preferers—a difference representing approximately three-quarters of a standard deviation ( $d = 0.768$ ). This suggests that the small eateries of Hyderabad's night-food corridors have cultivated a perception advantage rooted in authenticity, local identity, and experiential value that large chains find difficult to replicate. The Charminar and Koti eateries, in particular, leverage centuries of culinary heritage as a perception asset—a form of place-based brand equity unavailable to multinational competitors.

The ANOVA result (H4) establishes what may be the most structurally significant finding of this study: the dose-response relationship between daily food-content social media consumption and taste preference evolution. The 16.08-point gap between the lowest and highest social media exposure groups (on a 60-point scale) indicates that digital media consumption functions as a primary accelerant of culinary curiosity among Hyderabad youth. This finding is consistent with Chen et al. (2024), who identify social media as the principal mechanism through which cross-generational food identity divergence is amplified. For eatery operators in Madhapur/DLF and the Financial District—where social media-active IT professionals congregate late at night—this implies that menu design must actively anticipate digitally curated food trends.

The correlation and regression results (H2, H5) together articulate the mechanics of loyalty formation. Consumer Perception ( $\beta = 0.363$ ) and Taste Preference Evolution ( $\beta = 0.337$ ) emerge as co-dominant predictors of brand loyalty, suggesting that both the cognitive appraisal of an eatery and the degree to which a consumer's taste has evolved must align with what the eatery offers for loyalty to crystallise. Menu Adaptability, while the smallest beta ( $\beta = 0.183$ ), carries the highest unstandardised coefficient ( $B = 0.482$ )—meaning that for each unit improvement in how adaptable a patron perceives the menu to be, loyalty increases by nearly half a point. For a construct measured on a 3–15 scale, this represents substantial leverage at low operational cost.

## VIII. Implications

### For Small Eatery Operators

Operators in Hyderabad's night-time food sector should treat menu adaptability as a strategic priority rather than an operational afterthought. Introducing two to three new or rotational items per quarter—particularly items trending on Instagram Reels and YouTube food vlogs—can measurably improve youth loyalty. Operators in the 15–18 target zone (Koti, Ameerpet) should prioritise high-change taste clusters: Korean-Indian fusion, low-oil chaats, and protein-forward snacks are among the emerging preferences indicated by this study's TPE scale responses. Operators in the Madhapur/DLF and Financial District corridors should focus on the perception dimensions of hygiene, ingredient transparency, and fast-service reliability, which this older (22–34) tech-professional cohort weights most heavily.

### For Marketing Practitioners

Social media's role as a taste accelerant ( $\eta^2 = 0.379$ ) warrants a proactive digital engagement strategy for small eateries traditionally reliant on word-of-mouth. Even a modest investment in a geo-tagged Instagram presence, collaborations with Hyderabad food vloggers, and responses to Zomato/Swiggy reviews can extend brand visibility to the high-social-media-exposure cohort, which demonstrates the most evolved and loyalty-convertible tastes.

## For Researchers

The S-O-R framework operationalised in this study provides a replicable template for subsequent research in other Indian metros. Longitudinal replication using panel data would allow causal inference beyond the cross-sectional associations demonstrated here. The significant but modest Cramér's V (0.137) for the cohort-taste association suggests that other moderating variables—income, gender, educational exposure—deserve incorporation in extended models.

## IX. Limitations And Future Research Directions

This study is limited by its cross-sectional design, which precludes causal inference between social media exposure and taste evolution or brand loyalty. The sample, while adequately sized (N = 583), is confined to six localities in Hyderabad and may not represent the full socio-geographic diversity of youth food consumption patterns in the city. Self-reported measures for both social media consumption and taste evolution are susceptible to social desirability bias and recall inaccuracy. The absence of physiological or behavioral tracking data (e.g., actual purchase frequency, order history) limits construct validity for brand loyalty, which in this study is entirely perception-based.

Future research should incorporate mixed-methods designs—combining survey data with in-depth ethnographic observation of night-time eatery dynamics—to capture the tacit, experiential dimensions of loyalty formation that quantitative instruments may miss. Longitudinal tracking of cohort TPE and loyalty scores over a two-to-three-year period would permit causal modelling and allow analysis of how rapid taste evolution observed in the 15–18 cohort stabilises (or accelerates) as this group transitions into the 19–25 bracket. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with latent variable constructs is recommended for subsequent work to test full mediation and moderation pathways implied by the S-O-R framework.

## X. Conclusion

This study provides the first comprehensive empirical examination of the relationship between youth taste preference evolution, social media exposure, menu adaptability, and brand loyalty in the specific context of night-time small food eatery outlets across six Hyderabad localities. Based on a rigorously collected sample of 583 respondents and a battery of five statistical tests, all five null hypotheses were rejected at the 5% level of significance, with effect sizes ranging from small-moderate (Cramér's V = 0.137) to large ( $\eta^2 = 0.379$ ).

The findings establish that: (a) age cohort and social media exposure are significant structural drivers of how fast youth tastes evolve; (b) small eateries in Hyderabad have built a perception advantage over large chains that is statistically robust and practically sizeable; (c) both taste evolution and consumer perception independently and jointly predict brand loyalty; and (d) menu adaptability—an operationally accessible variable—carries the highest unit-level impact on loyalty. For the small, owner-operated eateries of Koti, Charminar, Ameerpet, Jubilee Hills, the Financial District, and Madhapur/DLF that serve Hyderabad's youth through the night, these findings offer both strategic validation and concrete direction: to remain competitive, they must evolve with their customers—menu by menu, trend by trend.

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