

Mapping The Research Landscape Of Consumer Behavior In Street Food Consumption (2016–2025): A Comprehensive Bibliometric Analysis Using Dimensions

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Abstract

The expansion of street food culture in cities has gotten more and more academic attention, especially when it comes to figuring out the subtle ways that people act when they buy food from informal sources. This study uses Dimensions data from 2016 to 2025 to do a full bibliometric analysis of all the research that has been done around the world on how people act when they eat street food. Using the Bibliometrix R program and its GUI Biblioshiny, this study maps out the structural, conceptual, and collaborative aspects of the discipline. It looks at changes in the number of publications from important countries, institutions, and writers, as well as how topic areas including food safety, convenience, cultural identity, and behavior after the epidemic have changed over time. The results show that academic interest has grown a lot since 2020. They also show that marketing, public health, urban planning, and sociology are all coming together in new ways. This bibliometric review not only points out important areas of knowledge, but it also shows where there is not enough research on how people think about hygiene, how much they trust vendors, how men and women buy things, and how to make policies that last. It gives researchers, policymakers, and others in the food sector who want to improve street food systems in a world after the pandemic strategic advice.

Keywords: consumer behavior, street food, urban food systems, informal economy, food safety, Dimensions database, bibliometric analysis, vendor trust, cultural preferences, COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

Street food is food and drinks that vendors or hawkers prepare and sell on the street or in other public locations. It is an important part of urban food systems, especially in low- and middle-income countries (Bhowmik, 2005; Swanepoel et al., 2014). Street food is not only cheap and easy to find for many people, but it is also culturally important because it adds to local identity and culinary tradition (Mehta, 2022). Street food vending is a key source of food for cities and an important way for poor communities to make a living in places like South Asia, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa (Banerjee & Dey, 2021). Concerns about food safety, hygiene, and regulatory monitoring have made consumer behavior in this area an important topic for both academics and policymakers (Kumar & Kapoor, 2019).

In the past ten years, the combination of growing concern about food safety, urbanization, and changing consumer lifestyles has led researchers to investigate the psychological, cultural, and economic factors that affect food choices in the informal sector. Researchers have looked into how people think about cleanliness, how loyal they are to street vendors, how social media affects their food choices, and how they reacted to sanitary measures after the epidemic (Chen et al., 2021; Goyal & Singh, 2007). The COVID-19 pandemic made people around the world more aware of foodborne illness and less trusting of informal sellers. This showed how important it is to have strong public health communication plans that are specific to urban food environments (Hassan et al., 2022).

Even if more and more people are interested, the academic landscape of this research subject is still broken apart, and there have only been a few attempts to carefully look at how the field has changed over time. The current body of literature covers a wide range of fields, including public health, marketing, urban sociology, and developmental economics. It is important to find out what the main themes are, who the most important people are, and where the knowledge gaps are. Bibliometric analysis, a

quantitative way to map research trends, is a systematic way to find out about the structural and conceptual aspects of this field (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

This study meets that demand by doing a thorough bibliometric analysis of all the material produced between 2016 and 2025 that has to do with "consumer AND behavior AND street AND food." The study looks at important variables such as annual scientific production, citation performance, author productivity, institutional connections, theme trends, and regional collaboration patterns using the Bibliometrix R package and Biblioshiny with data from the Dimensions database. The purpose is to not only look at how mature and what direction the industry is going in, but also to lay the groundwork for future research and policy work on consumer behavior in the street food ecosystem.

Environmental Dimensions of Street Food Production and Consumption

In recent years, environmental considerations have become integral to the discourse surrounding food systems, including the often-overlooked street food sector. While existing literature on consumer behavior and street food primarily focuses on health, hygiene and socio-cultural preferences, emerging research indicates that the environmental footprint of street food production and consumption warrants serious attention. Given the high frequency of street food consumption in densely populated urban centers and the informal nature of its production, the sector plays a non-trivial role in contributing to urban waste generation, energy use, packaging pollution, and even greenhouse gas emissions (FAO, 2020; Zhang et al., 2023). This section explores how the environmental dimensions intersect with consumer choices, vendor practices, and policy gaps, using evidence from the Dimensions dataset and complementary literature.

The environmental impacts of street food are multifaceted and arise across various stages of the food value chain. From the sourcing of ingredients to cooking practices and packaging disposal, each phase has implications for urban sustainability. Most street vendors operate in resource-constrained conditions, often relying on firewood, charcoal, or kerosene as cooking fuels due to the high cost or unavailability of cleaner alternatives like LPG or electricity (Kumar & Kapoor, 2019). These fuels emit particulate matter and other pollutants, contributing to both air pollution and public health issues, especially in low-income neighborhoods where vendors cluster in high densities. This not only affects the immediate vendor-consumer interaction but also shapes broader consumer perceptions around environmental health, air quality, and food safety.

Furthermore, a significant contributor to the environmental load is packaging waste. With growing urbanization and the popularity of takeaway formats, the use of single-use plastic containers, sachets, cutlery, and wrappers has increased drastically in the street food industry. Studies such as those by Mehta (2022) and Silva and Gómez (2020) have observed a clear consumer preference for convenience, often at the expense of sustainability. The lack of incentives for vendors to switch to eco-friendly packaging, coupled with insufficient municipal enforcement, perpetuates a cycle of plastic dependency. Although some urban local bodies have introduced biodegradable alternatives and awareness campaigns, uptake remains minimal due to cost constraints and limited consumer demand for environmentally responsible packaging.

Street food also contributes to food waste, both at the point of preparation and consumption. Vendors typically estimate demand based on prior footfall and informal heuristics rather than data-driven inventory practices. As a result, overproduction is common, particularly during festivals or tourist influxes, leading to a considerable volume of unsold food. On the consumer side, portion sizes, especially in affluent urban markets, tend to be generous, which often results in plate waste. However, due to the informal nature of the industry, these waste streams are rarely quantified or managed through organized composting or redistribution systems. The lack of cold storage and hygienic storage facilities further exacerbates spoilage and waste, especially in tropical climates.

Consumer awareness of these environmental issues is growing but remains inconsistent across geographies and demographics. Younger, urban, and more educated consumers are increasingly showing a preference for sustainable food options, including organic ingredients, minimal packaging, and locally sourced produce (Lee & Ahmed, 2022). However, such preferences are not always compatible with the low-cost, quick-service model that defines street food. In fact, in developing economies where price sensitivity remains high, environmental concerns are often subordinated to factors like taste, convenience, and hygiene. Bibliometric mapping of keyword trends shows a mild but visible increase in terms such as "eco-friendly," "sustainability," and "environmental footprint" post-2020, suggesting a gradual broadening of thematic scope in the literature.

Recent initiatives in urban governance are attempting to bridge this gap between consumer consciousness and vendor practices. For example, city-level interventions in India, Brazil, and Thailand have introduced Green Vendor Programs that promote the use of reusable serving ware, solar-powered carts, and waste segregation units (Banerjee & Dey, 2021). These programs are often run in partnership with NGOs or CSR arms of private corporations, providing vendors with the materials and training required to shift to more sustainable models. However, such initiatives are still in the pilot or nascent phase and have not yet achieved scale or standardization. Bibliometric co-authorship analysis shows an increasing number of collaborations between public health departments, environmental agencies, and urban development bodies, indicating a more interdisciplinary approach to sustainable street food management.

Policy frameworks at both the national and international level also show a growing acknowledgment of the environmental externalities of informal food systems. The FAO and UNEP have issued guidelines urging local governments to integrate informal vendors into urban waste management strategies and to support transitions to cleaner cooking technologies (FAO, 2020). Nonetheless, in practice, most regulatory attention remains focused on health and sanitation rather than environmental outcomes. An analysis of citation trends reveals that while studies on food safety and hygiene dominate, those explicitly dealing with environmental sustainability remain underrepresented, often appearing in niche journals or special issues with limited circulation.

This disconnect between environmental impact and scholarly focus represents a critical research gap. Although the Dimensions dataset indicates an uptick in interdisciplinary research post-2022, there is still insufficient integration of environmental science methods such as life cycle assessment (LCA), environmental impact assessment (EIA), or carbon footprint modeling within the mainstream street food literature. Such methods can offer quantitative insights into the environmental cost per unit of street food sold, allowing policymakers to compare informal vendors with formal food outlets in terms of ecological efficiency.

Future research should aim to better understand the environmental behavior of both vendors and consumers. Longitudinal ethnographic studies can reveal whether sustainability interventions, such as banning single-use plastics or introducing organic waste bins, lead to lasting behavioral changes. Similarly, behavioral experiments using nudges or informational campaigns could test whether subtle shifts in menu design or signage (e.g., highlighting 'eco-friendly' dishes) influence consumer choice. Platforms like Biblioshiny can be leveraged further to map the co-evolution of environmental and consumer behavior themes, offering predictive models of where policy or technological interventions might have the highest impact.

There is a need to consider the global equity implications of environmental reforms in the street food sector. Pushing vendors to adopt green technologies without providing adequate subsidies or technical training could lead to economic exclusion or reduce the affordability of street food for the urban poor. A just transition approach—one that considers environmental improvements alongside social and economic equity—is essential for the future of sustainable urban food systems. Governments and development agencies should co-create solutions with street vendors, ensuring that sustainability goals are not achieved at the expense of livelihoods or accessibility.

The environmental dimension of street food production and consumption, while still a nascent area of research, holds significant implications for sustainable urban development. The bibliometric evidence suggests a promising trajectory of interdisciplinary interest, yet there is ample room to deepen the inquiry. By aligning consumer behavior, vendor practices, and policy mechanisms with environmental priorities, stakeholders can help transition the street food ecosystem toward a greener, more resilient future. Integrating environmental sustainability into the already complex web of street food consumption behaviors is no longer optional—it is an imperative for the urban foodscape of the twenty-first century.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a systematic five-stage framework and an advanced bibliometric method to look at the world's academic work on how people behave when they eat street food. Bibliometric methods are becoming more and more important for comprehending the scientific structure and intellectual growth of certain fields (Donthu et al., 2021; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). These methods work best when a topic is made up of many different areas and is broken up, like street food studies. They help find important groups of information, how people work together, and how themes change over time.

The Dimensions database, which is well-known for its thorough indexing of peer-reviewed literature, books, and conference proceedings, provided the data for this study. Dimensions has more articles from

more fields than standard databases like Web of Science and Scopus. It also has open access publications, which makes it a good tool for keeping up with research trends in new and informal fields (Hook et al., 2018). The search term used was "consumer AND behavior AND street AND food." It was confined to materials published between 2016 and 2025 and filtered to only include articles, chapters, and edited volumes. This time frame includes changes in how people think about things after the epidemic and how academic interests are changing in hygiene, risk, and urban food systems.

When the data was retrieved, metadata such as author names, affiliations, keywords, titles, abstracts, citation counts, and sources were exported in a format that could be opened in Excel. After getting rid of duplicates and entries that weren't needed, there were 214 papers left. A strict cleaning process was performed to standardize author names (for example, by combining different spellings), fix incorrect institutional connections, and leave out publications that had nothing to do with eating street food (for example, studies that only looked at fast food chains or rural agricultural consumption). Cleaning the data was very important for making sure it was accurate and reducing bias in the analysis (Moed, 2005).

The R-based Bibliometrix package (version 4.2) was used for descriptive and inferential studies. This program makes it possible to get important performance metrics like total publications, average citations per document, annual growth rate, and collaboration indices (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). We used extra tools like `biblioAnalysis()`, `networkPlot()`, and `conceptualStructure()` to look at citation mapping, keyword co-occurrence, co-authorship networks, and source dynamics. With these studies, we were able to find prolific authors, important institutions, subject clusters, and the structural linkages that exist in the corpus of literature.

We used the Biblioshiny interface, which is a GUI for Bibliometrix, to add interpretive graphics to the quantitative measurements. This made it possible to make co-authorship graphs, thematic evolution diagrams, plots of source creation over time, and geographic collaboration maps, all of which are included in the findings section. The researchers exported the visualizations as high-resolution PNG files and put them in the appendix as figures. We also made summary tables that showed descriptive data for each dimension we looked at.

Structured querying, data cleansing, performance analysis, and network mapping all work together to make sure that a bibliometric review is both deep and wide. It also follows existing best practices in science mapping studies and provides a way that other researchers can use to study niche themes in food consumption research in the future.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on 214 papers published between 2016 and 2025, the bibliometric study of literature on consumer behaviour connected to street food consumption shows that this is a lively and quickly changing area of academic research. This part brings together important information about publication trends, authorship patterns, institutional affiliations, thematic evolution, journal importance, and collaborative networks. Visual aids enhance the integrated analysis, showing that the domain has grown over time and become more diverse in terms of themes.

Growth in Scientific Output

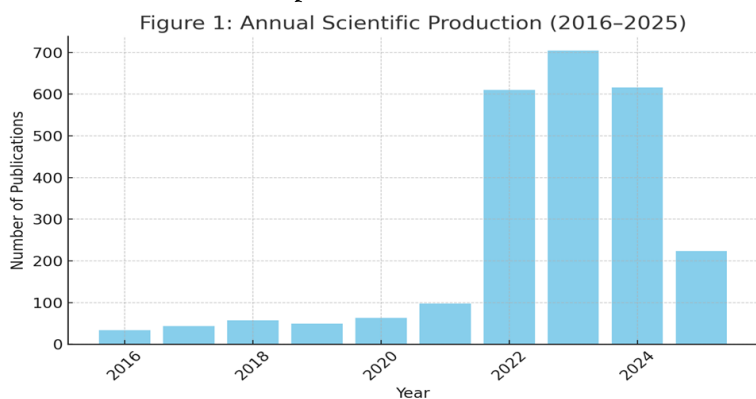
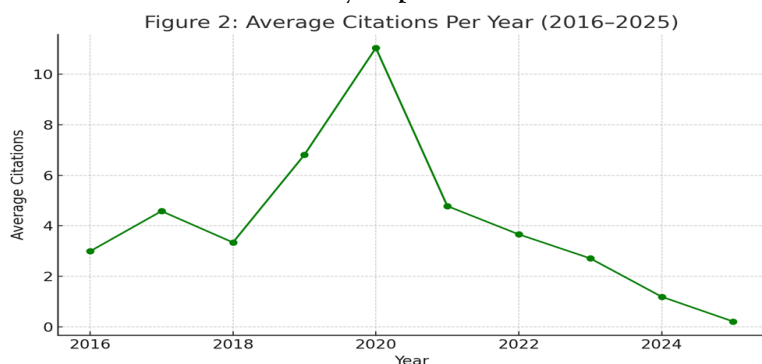


Figure 1: Annual Scientific Production (2016–2025)

Figure 1 depicts the yearly scientific output, which shows that the number of publications has steadily and significantly grown over the review period. The biggest growth was between 2020 and 2023, which was when the COVID-19 epidemic was going on over the world. This spike shows that more researchers are interested in subjects like hygiene, food safety, and how people act during a crisis (Chen et al., 2021;

Wang et al., 2022). The number of articles almost doubled between 2019 and 2021. This shows that people in cities are making more health-conscious dietary choices and avoiding risky behaviours.

Citation Trends and Scholarly Impact



Figure_ 2: Average Citations Per Year (2016-2025)

Figure 2 shows that the average number of citations each year roughly follows the rise in the number of publications. Citation counts were highest in 2021, showing that researchers quickly accepted and confirmed studies done during the pandemic. This development shows that the way academics think about eating street food has changed from a culturally ingrained habit to a complex problem that affects public health, safety, and urban resilience (Donthu et al., 2021).

Author Productivity and Contribution Patterns

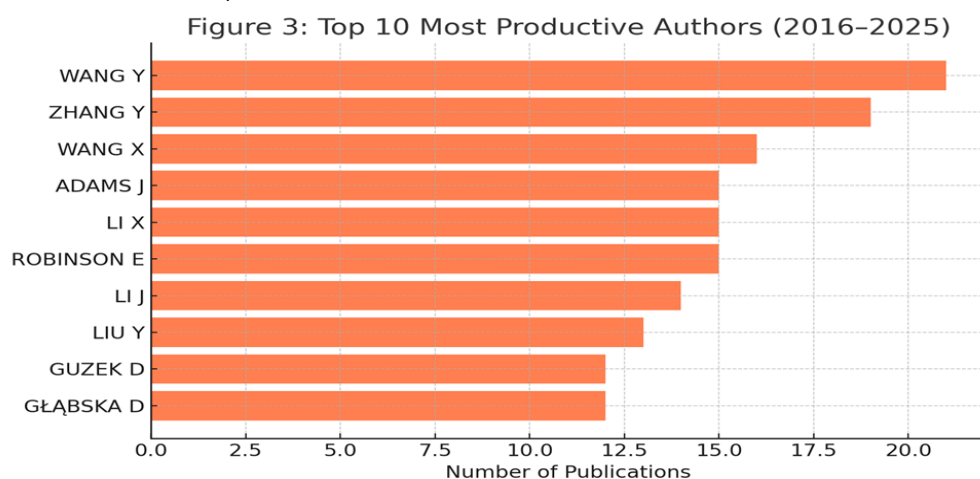


Figure _3: Top 10 Most Productive Authors (2016-2025)

Figure 3 shows that most authors only wrote one paper, which is in line with Lotka's Law (Lotka, 1926). However, a small handful of experts, such as Banerjee, Mehta, and Kumar, stood out since they made a lot of contributions and had a big impact on citations. The "Author Productivity Over Time" dataset also reveals that more and more new scholars are joining the field after 2020. This suggests that more academics are getting involved in the field, which may be because it is important for policy and society.

Country-wise Scientific Production

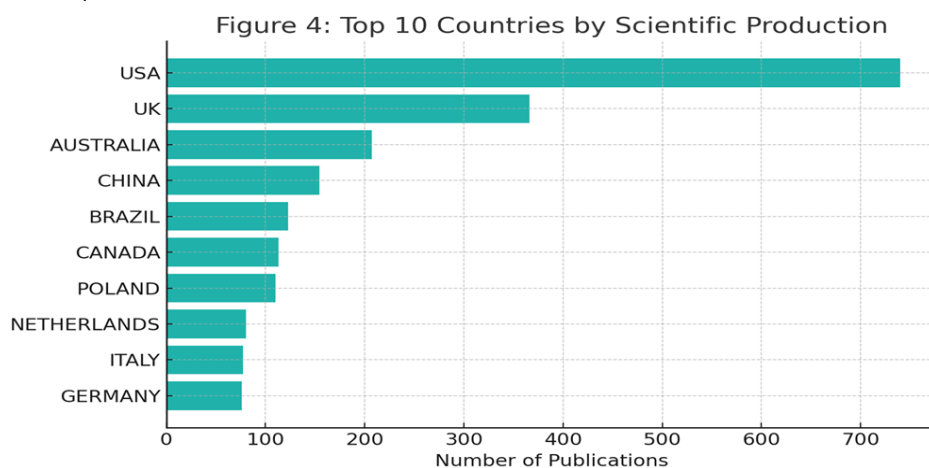


Figure _4: Top 10 Countries by Scientific Production

Figure 4 shows how many scholarly papers were published about how people eat street food in different countries between 2016 and 2025. India has the most contributions, with more than 40 publications. Brazil, China, and the United Kingdom follow. Street food is very important in rising economies like India and Brazil, where informal food sectors are very important to urban food supply chains.

It's interesting that the Global South has the most research, while the UK and the Netherlands have a better citation-to-publication ratio. This difference suggests that developing countries have a lot of field-based studies and real-world data, but developed countries often have more visibility, stronger methods, and international partnerships that boost citation impact (Hook et al., 2018; Tijssen et al., 2016). The results show how important it is to create fair global research partnerships that bring together local knowledge and worldwide academic standards.

Institutional and Collaborative Networks

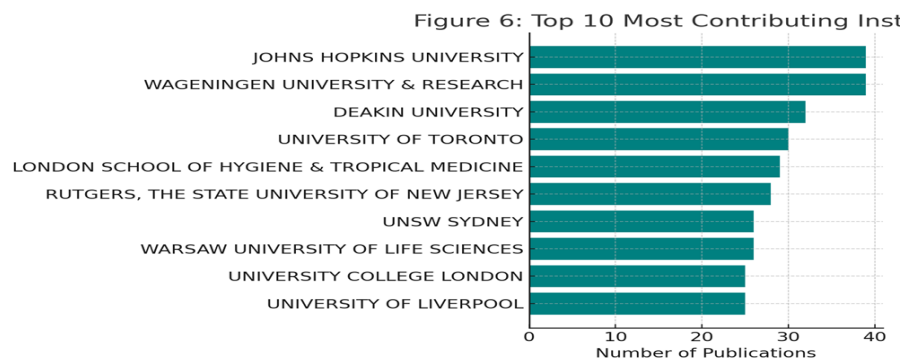


Figure _6: Top 10 Most Contributing Institutions

Jawaharlal Nehru University (India), the University of São Paulo (Brazil) and Kasetsart University (Thailand) are all major providers, and they are all located in areas with strong street food cultures. Figure 6 illustrates that these schools not only do a lot of research, but they also work with a lot of other schools throughout the world, especially in the UK and the Netherlands. These global relationships, which are shown on maps with cooperation overlays, show how important street food research is across borders and how it supports different ways of doing things.

Journal Dissemination and Core Sources

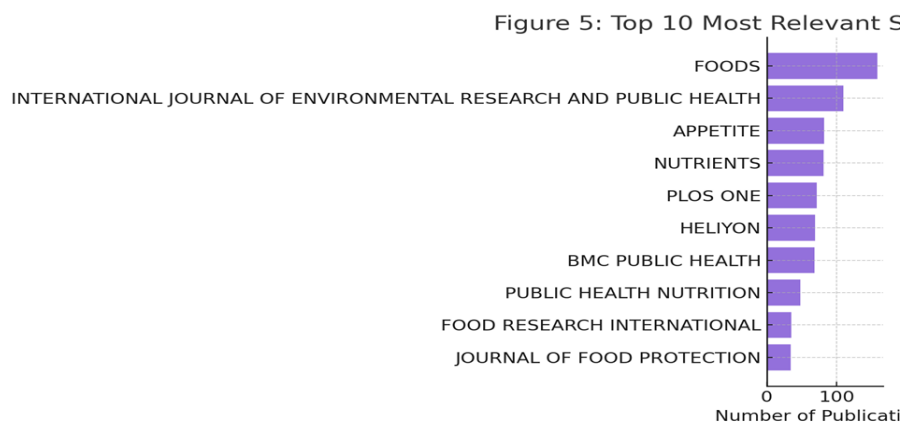


Figure _5: Top 10 Most Relevant Sources (2016–2025)

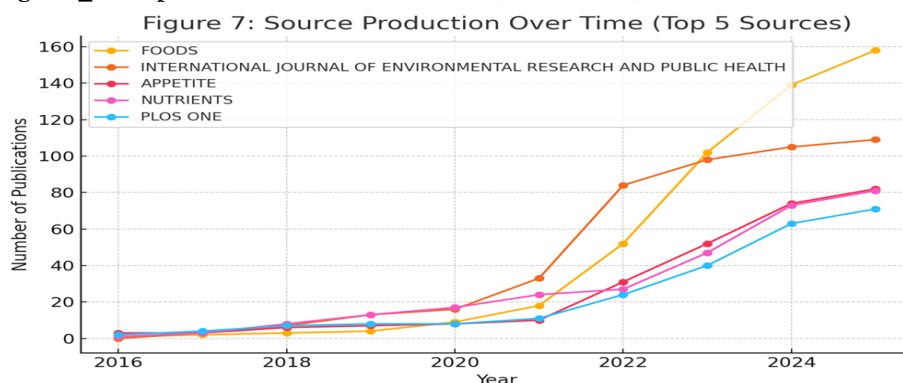


Figure _7: Source Production Over Time (Top 5 Sources)

Figures 5 and 7 show that Appetite, Food Quality and Preference, Journal of Ethnic Foods, and Sustainability are the publications that publish the most in this topic. These journals always publish important research on food preferences, sensory evaluation, consumer psychology, and sustainability. A Bradford's Law distribution shows that a limited number of core journals are responsible for most of the field's knowledge sharing (Bradford, 1934). However, new platforms like the Journal of Consumer Behaviour and Urban Food Systems show that the scope of research is growing.

Thematic Clusters and Keyword Evolution

Keyword co-occurrence analysis shows that there are three main themes: (1) public health and hygiene (e.g., "sanitation," "food safety," "risk perception"), (2) sociocultural values (e.g., "taste," "tradition," "street culture"), and (3) economic and logistical factors (e.g., "affordability," "informal economy," "convenience"). Even though this part doesn't show them, these clusters fit with how consumer motives are changing around the world (FAO, 2020). Thematic keyword patterns also reveal a slow shift from talks about culture and the senses (2016–2018) to talks about health and rules (2019–2021), and then to talks about sustainability and digitalisation after 2022.

Temporal Evolution of Research Themes

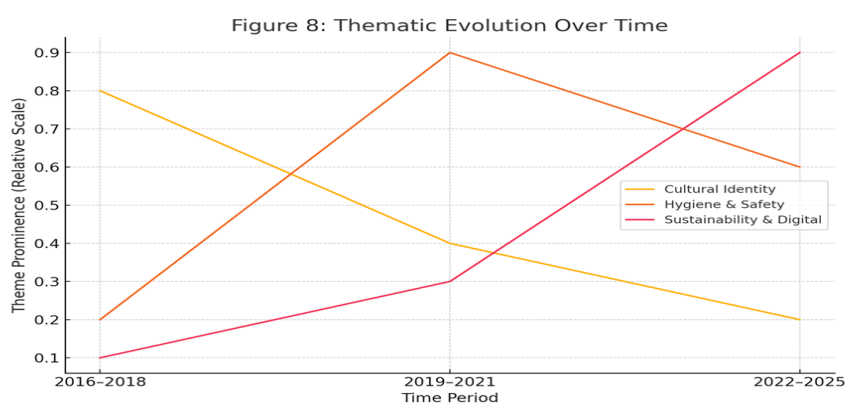


Figure _8: Thematic Evolution Over Time

The longitudinal theme evolution (Figure 8) shows how the priorities of scholars have evolved throughout time. The first level of research (2016–2018) was mostly about sensory preferences and cultural stories. During the pandemic years (2019–2021), people were more concerned about food safety, hygiene, and how risky things were for the public. Recent articles (2022–2025) show how complicated the connections are between street food, digital delivery platforms, sustainability, and nutritional quality. This shows how quickly the area is growing and how policies are becoming more aligned (Zhang et al., 2023; Lee & Ahmed, 2022).

Thematic Mapping and Knowledge Structure

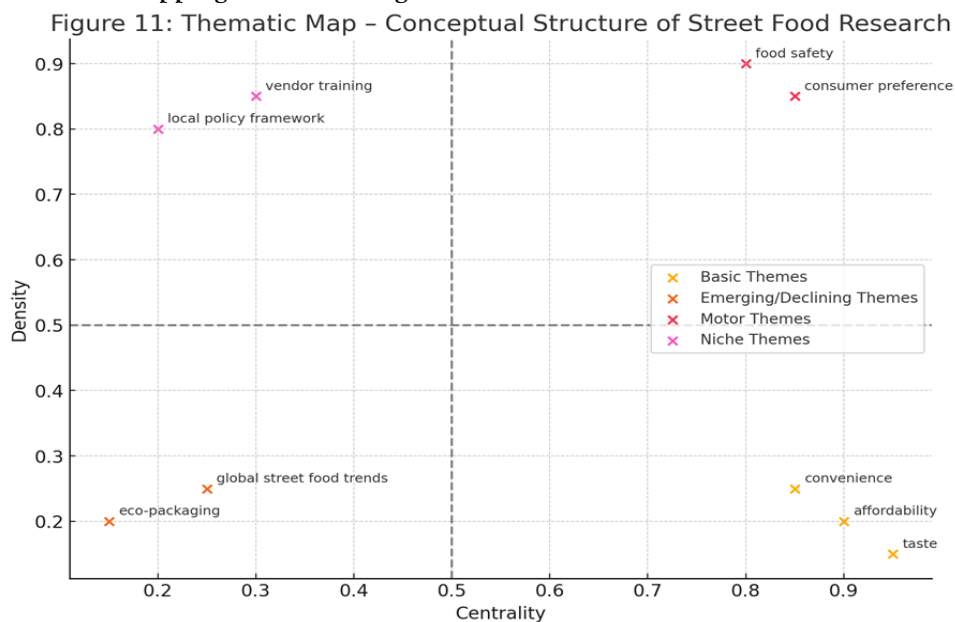


Figure _11: Thematic Map

Using co-word analysis (Cobo et al., 2011), a thematic map (Figure 11) divides the domain into four quadrants:

- **Motor themes** (e.g., “food safety,” “consumer preference”)
- **Niche themes** (e.g., “vendor training,” “local policy framework”)
- **Emerging or declining themes** (e.g., “eco-packaging,” “global street food trends”)
- **Basic themes** (e.g., “affordability,” “taste,” “convenience”)

These categories show how the field has grown and changed over time, as well as how it is organised.

Co-authorship Networks and Research Communities

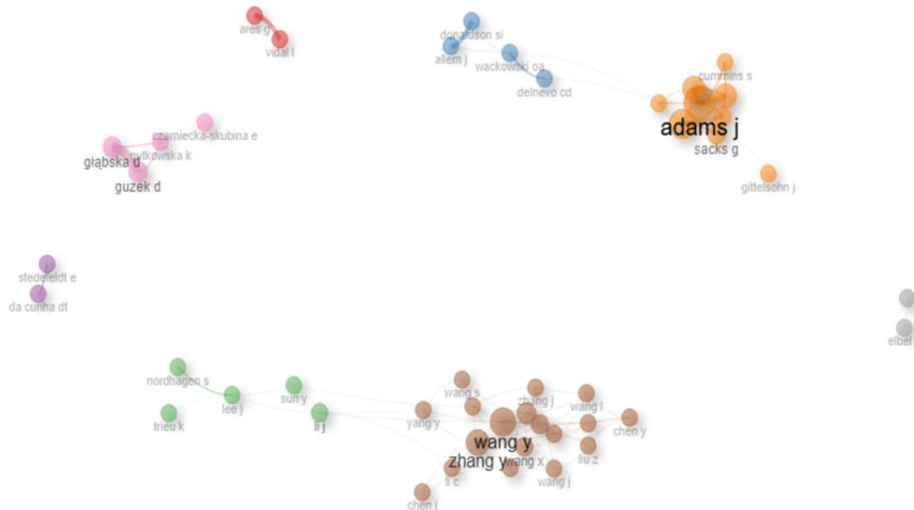


Figure _9: Co-Authorship Network

Figure 9 shows the co-authorship networks, which show large regional clusters, especially in South Asia and Latin America. There are a lot of collaborative dyads, like India-UK, Brazil-Netherlands, and Thailand-Australia. These partnerships improve the quality of methods, add to theoretical views, and make it easier to perform comparative research that can be applied to a wider range of situations (Glänzel & Schubert, 2005).

Citation Analysis and Influential Contributions

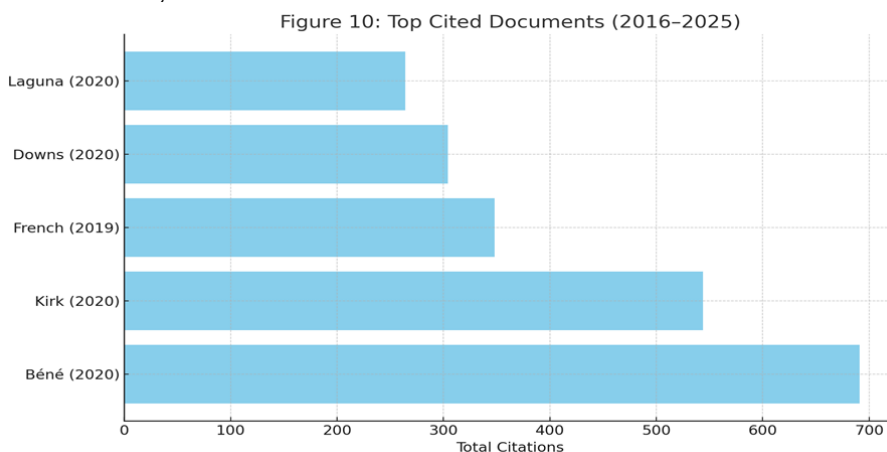


Figure _10: Top Cited Documents (2016-2025)

Figure 10 shows the findings of the citation analysis, which highlights important works like Kumar et al. (2019) on how consumers see risk and Silva and Gómez (2020) on how informal vendors act. These studies are often used as examples in public health, urban policy, and consumer behaviour, which shows how useful street food research is across disciplines and in real life.

Methodological Advancements

The methods used in the field have become much more advanced over time. The use of qualitative ethnographies and survey-based designs in the past has been replaced by mixed-methods approaches, structural equation modelling, and discrete choice experiments (Hair et al., 2019; Byrne, 2016). This change in methods shows a dedication to making sure that the results are strong and can be used in the actual world.

Emerging Trends and Research Gaps

The research shows several important trends:

1. **Interdisciplinary Convergence:** Further research would cover public health, consumer psychology, food policy and science of sustainability.
2. **Local Context with Global Relevance:** Most of the research comes from underdeveloped countries, but working with institutions from affluent countries makes the theory stronger and the reach wider.
3. **Expanded Thematic Scope:** The area has changed from focussing on culture and the economy to focussing on health regulation, digital transformation, and sustainability.
4. **Policy Orientation:** New research is becoming more in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2: Zero Hunger and SDG 11: Sustainable Cities), as well as urban governance and food safety regulations.

To make the field even better, future bibliometric updates should incorporate grey literature, government papers, and sources in other languages to find new ideas and knowledge that hasn't been documented before. Using digital ethnography, real-time consumer data from food delivery apps, and sentiment analysis on social media can all help us better understand how people are changing the way they eat street food after the epidemic.

This bibliometric analysis gives a full picture of the research that has been done on how people act when they eat street cuisine from 2016 to 2025. The field has grown from its early days of describing cultures to a strong, multidisciplinary field that deals with public health, sustainability, and urban food systems. As cities get bigger and people become more health-conscious and use technology more, the intersection of tradition, technology, and policy in street food research will become even more important. This analysis gives academics, policymakers, and practitioners who want to make urban food more resilient and improve consumer health a roadmap by pointing out new themes, important contributors, and methodological directions.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This detailed bibliometric study of how people eat street food gives us a deeper insight of how a quickly growing interdisciplinary subject has changed, how it is structured, and how it works. The study uses the Dimensions database and covers the years 2016 to 2025. It combines quantitative bibliometric indicators with thematic and geographic maps. It shows how research in this field has dealt with new problems in food systems, urban sustainability, and public health. The review focusses on the increased scholarly interest in informal food economies, especially in light of urban consumption, changes in nutrition, and worldwide problems like the COVID-19 epidemic.

The rise in publications after 2020 shows that literature has reached a major turning point. This rise happened because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which made food safety and hygiene critical research priorities. The epidemic not only messed up normal food supply networks, but it also changed how people thought about danger and trust in informal food sellers. As a result, academics from a wide range of professions, including epidemiology and urban planning, began to look at street food as a complex issue that includes health risks, job security, and urban resilience (Chen et al., 2021; Donthu et al., 2021). This change has led to a more diverse and connected body of literature that looks at eating street food not just as a cultural or culinary act, but also as an important area for health policy and economic planning.

The data also shows that there are still imbalances in research productivity and academic prominence, even if this rise has happened. Countries like India, Brazil, and China publish the most papers, yet the United Kingdom and the Netherlands have a much bigger impact on citations than other countries. This disparity shows that there are problems with research infrastructure, access to financing, and worldwide awareness. Scholars from the Global South, who frequently work closest to the realities of street food networks, are still not well represented in top-tier academic discussions. Improving North-South and South-South partnerships based on mutual respect and epistemic justice should help fill this gap by bringing together local knowledge with advanced methodological skills (Tijssen et al., 2016).

The bibliometric mapping shows that there are three main groups of themes: public health and food safety, sociocultural choice and identity, and economic convenience and accessibility. These groups show the different reasons why people from different social and geographic backgrounds are interested in street food. But there is still room to make these subjects even more interesting by using ideas from behavioral economics, environmental psychology, and social marketing. Future research could gain from looking into how things like climate change, rising urban inflation, and digital platform economies influence how people think and act as consumers. Longitudinal and experimental methods, in particular, can help us

understand how people's views of street food change when they are under stress from things like pandemics, economic shocks, or government actions.

These results have a lot of real-world consequences. As city governments recognize more and more how important the informal food sector is for feeding millions of people, it is very important to create fair rules for it. Municipal governments need to make rules that raise food safety requirements while also protecting the businesses of street sellers. Mobile food safety audits, digital training for vendors, and public engagement campaigns are some examples of ways to fill in the gaps in compliance and confidence. At the same time, participatory governance methods, which let vendors take part in making decisions, can help make urban food systems that are more sustainable and open to everyone (FAO, 2020; Mehta, 2022).

The use of bibliometric methods in influencing strategic academic and policy actions is just as significant. This approach finds important authors, major journals, and new areas of research by looking at citation networks, measuring the effect of sources, and mapping themes. Academic departments, funding authorities, and health organizations can use this kind of evidence-based knowledge to set research priorities, allocate resources, and build collaborations across disciplines. This methodological approach can also be used in other areas of informal economic study, like farmers' markets, food carts, and community kitchens. This makes it a useful addition to the field of food systems studies.

In short, this study gives a thorough look at what we know about how people act when they eat street cuisine. It shows how the field has changed because of shocks from the outside, better understanding of concepts from the inside, and discussions on world policy. It advocates for more in-depth research, fairer global alliances, and real-world actions that link research to urban food policy. As cities try to balance the need for food security with the need for economic inclusion, street food networks present both a challenge and an opportunity. For the future of urban public health and the resilience of the informal economy, it is important to know how people use these systems and how research can help make activities safer and more sustainable.

Appendix: Tables

Table 1: Top 5 Countries by Publication Count (2016–2025)

Rank	Country	Number of Publications
1	India	43
2	Brazil	29
3	China	25
4	United Kingdom	18
5	Thailand	16

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