KILLGATE | EVIDENCE-FIRST PUBLIC RESEARCH

$6.99/month | Selfie-derived mood -> dinner recommendation -> nearby restaurant/grocery suggestion

VERDICT — More public evidence is needed

Confidence: 0.90

The problem is real, but the locked selfie-to-mood differentiation does not clear the research gate.

More public evidence is needed does not mean KILL. It means the unchanged hypothesis has not earned direct buyer validation/build investment yet.

Executive conclusion

The underlying problem is real, but the locked $6.99/month selfie -> mood -> dinner recommendation hypothesis does not clear the public research gate. The blocker is not lack of dinner-decision pain; it is that the selfie-derived mood mechanism is load-bearing, scientifically uncertain, and competing products already solve most of the job through much cheaper inputs such as tapping or speaking a mood.

The idea you tested / Contract ID

Contract: KG-MOODDINNER-US-699-20260827-v1

Provisional target customer: U.S. urban/suburban adults roughly 22-40 who regularly decide dinner for themselves, make at least ~3 such decisions weekly, and already use delivery apps, restaurant search, grocery shopping, recipes, or meal-planning tools.

Problem: At the end of the day, the buyer experiences recurring dinner decision fatigue - scrolling, debating, repeating meals, or defaulting to convenience because choosing what to eat requires unwanted cognitive effort.

Locked offer: User takes a selfie -> AI infers current mood -> combines it with preferences/location -> recommends dinner -> provides a nearby restaurant or grocery option.

Locked price: $6.99/month.

Current alternatives: DoorDash/other delivery search, Google/restaurant search, recipe/meal-planning apps, weekly meal planning, food rotations, saved recipes, asking oneself/partner what sounds good, and newer mood-based food apps.

Commercially critical proposition: The selfie-derived emotional signal must improve the dinner-selection experience enough to justify both the extra camera/privacy friction and a recurring $6.99 payment.

No post-research change to that proposition was made.

What was checked

Gate Result Evidence

Rules fixed before evidence PASS Locked above

>=3 useful DIRECT public sources PASS Well above minimum

Reddit, App Store/Google Play, independent vendors, DoorDash, academic/regulatory sources

>=2 source groups/domains PASS

Multiple independent users describe recurring dinner/meal-selection fatigue

Direct public evidence of pain PASS

Meal rotations, weekly planning, saved lists, randomizers, meal planners, delivery search

Workarounds/alternatives PASS

Relevant products charge approximately $4.99-$14.99/month; several cluster around $4.99-$6.99

Pricing/spend proxy PASS

Gate Result Evidence

>=2 supporting claims PASS Problem exists; people already use tools/processes to reduce it

Alternatives, price resistance, technical validity, privacy/legal constraints searched

Adversarial search performed PASS

Strong incumbent bundling + facial-mood inference problem + cheap direct competitors

>=2 disconfirming/constraint findings PASS

Selfie -> mood mechanism remains unproven and carries the differentiation

No unresolved load-bearing technical constraint FAIL - Test a critical capability in parallel

8 qualified buyer conversations NOT YET TESTED 0/8

>=30% direct strong pain NOT YET TESTED 0 direct buyers

>=4 price-positive at exactly $6.99 NOT YET TESTED 0

>=2 verified payments/deposits NOT YET TESTED 0

The Boolean failure on the load-bearing mechanism prevents Public evidence supports buyer testing.

Mechanism scoreboard

Mechanism Role Status Assessment

Reduce dinner-choice cognitive effort Central to why someone would pay Backed by public evidence Public users repeatedly describe the job

Infer meaningful current mood from one selfie Required part of the offer Needs a real-world test Technically unresolved and scientifically challenged

Mood information improves the actual food choice Central to why someone would pay Needs a real-world test Plausible, but public evidence does not establish incremental value

Selfie input is better than simply tapping/saying mood Central to why someone would pay Needs a real-world test Critical unanswered differentiation question

Generate recipe/meal suggestion Helpful extra Already common Many existing AI products already do it

Mechanism Role Status Assessment

Find nearby restaurant/grocery option Later operational piece Already included elsewhere DoorDash and competitors increasingly do this directly

Camera/facial-data trust/privacy A limit on the offer Needs a real-world test Material adoption/compliance friction

$6.99 recurring monetization ECONOMIC ASSUMPTION Needs a real-world test Plausible category price, but no evidence yet that this specific value is worth recurring payment

Important distinction: restaurant search being commoditized does not kill the concept. The dangerous mechanism is the selfie inference, because that is what is supposed to differentiate this product from an ordinary mood picker.

Strongest evidence FOR 1. Dinner decision fatigue is genuine

A May 2026 r/mealprep user described wasting 20-30 minutes every evening deciding what they wanted; responses described reducing options and rotating foods depending on mood. Another 2026 MealPrepSunday discussion describes meal planning itself as more mentally draining than cooking.

Reddit: deciding what to eat than actually cooking

The signal is not isolated. A highly engaged r/Cooking thread describes loving cooking while finding the decision of what to cook unusually difficult; another user specifically asks for an app that will simply decide based on fridge contents and preferences.

Reddit: cooking decision difficulty

An AskWomenOver30 thread from November 2025 similarly describes exhaustion from having to think continually about food.

Reddit: food decision exhaustion

Inference: there is a legitimate decision-compression job here.

2. Consumers already use software for this adjacent job

Eat This Much currently charges $14.99 month-to-month, or effectively $5/month annually, for automated meal plans, grocery lists and grocery-delivery integration. SideChef charges $4.99/month for personalized meal planning and related cooking features.

Eat This Much pricing

That establishes a credible public spend proxy, although it does not establish that consumers will pay specifically for mood-based dinner decisions.

3. Mood-based recommendations appear usable to at least some consumers

Forki explicitly matches mood to recipes and nearby restaurant recommendations. Its U.S. App Store listing has 12 ratings and several reviewers describe the mood picker as reducing indecision; Google Play reports 10K+ downloads. This is Level-2/public observed evidence, not direct buyer evidence and not proof of paid conversion.

Forki on the App Store

Strongest evidence AGAINST

1. The proposed differentiated experience already exists in pieces - and nearly in full

Forki already offers mood-based recipes and nearby restaurant recommendations. Its premium tier is exactly $6.99/month, while some restaurant recommendations and unlimited recipes are available free.

Forki website

HunchEat also positions itself specifically as a mood-based answer to "what should I eat?" and lists a $6.99 Premium in-app purchase. MoodChef does mood-based AI meal suggestions for $4.99/month.

HunchEat on the App Store

More damaging to the selfie novelty, FeelBites AI explicitly advertises selfie-based mood detection -> AI meal matching, plus voice and text inputs, for $4.99 for three months, not $6.99 every month.

FeelBites AI

Hangry Detector goes even closer to the interaction mechanic: selfie -> "hangry" analysis -> food roulette, and is free.

Hangry Detector on the App Store

Conclusion: "AI + mood + food," and even "selfie + mood + food," is not a novel product mechanism in 2026.

2. DoorDash is absorbing the high-value downstream job

DoorDash launched Ask DoorDash in June 2026. Users can describe what they are "in the mood to eat," obtain personalized nearby restaurant results, build grocery carts, use dietary preferences/budgets/past orders, and proceed directly to checkout.

DoorDash: Ask DoorDash

DoorDash also integrated grocery shopping into ChatGPT, turning meal inspiration into an actual grocery cart.

DoorDash and OpenAI

That substantially weakens the argument that restaurant/grocery discovery is itself a $6.99/month differentiator. It is downstream infrastructure increasingly bundled into platforms that already possess location, inventory, transaction history, menu data and checkout.

3. The selfie -> internal-mood assumption is scientifically weak

A major systematic review in Psychological Science in the Public Interest examined whether emotional states can reliably be inferred from facial movements. It found significant problems with reliability, specificity and generalizability: the same facial movements can occur across different emotional states and contexts, and stereotyped expressions are not sufficiently diagnostic of internal emotion.

Psychological Science review

This does not prove that a statistical model cannot extract any useful signal from a selfie. It does mean the contract cannot assume that a face reliably reveals the user's current mood.

The product needs more than above-chance classification. It needs an inferred mood that produces a better dinner decision than a user simply tapping "stressed," "tired," "cozy," or "adventurous." That remains unproven.

4. The selfie creates privacy friction for an unusually low-stakes job

Apple requires camera permission and, where AR face tracking is used, explicitly treats the resulting facial information as personal information requiring privacy disclosure.

Apple Developer documentation

The FTC has separately warned that biometric technologies raise privacy, security, bias and accuracy concerns and that unsupported accuracy/efficacy claims can themselves create consumer-protection problems.

FTC biometric information warning

Illinois law illustrates the implementation boundary: a photograph itself is excluded from BIPA's definition of a biometric identifier, but a scan of face geometry is included. The exact compliance exposure therefore depends materially on what facial data the implementation derives and stores.

Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act

This is not a finding that the app would be illegal. It is a meaningful trust/compliance constraint added to a job that competing products can perform with one tap.

Evidence audit

Known facts

■ Consumers publicly complain about repeated meal/dinner decision fatigue. ■ They already mitigate it using weekly planning, food rotations, recipe lists and decision apps. ■ Relevant meal-planning subscriptions exist around the proposed price. ■ Multiple mood-based meal apps already exist. ■ Forki already combines mood, recipes and nearby restaurants at $6.99/month. ■ At least one current product already markets selfie-based mood detection for meal recommendations. ■ DoorDash is bundling AI restaurant/grocery decision assistance into the purchase workflow. ■ Strong scientific evidence cautions against treating a facial configuration as a reliable diagnostic of a person's internal emotional state.

Inferences

■ Decision reduction, not emotion detection itself, is probably the actual customer job. ■ A selfie may be a novelty mechanic rather than a superior information source. ■ $6.99 is not categorically absurd, but the proposed product needs stronger recurring utility because adequate alternatives are free or bundled. ■ Incumbents have structural advantages in restaurant/menu availability, transaction history, personalization and checkout.

Unknowns

■ Whether target users actually want automatic mood inference instead of choosing their mood. ■ Whether taking a selfie at dinnertime feels delightful or annoying after the novelty wears off. ■ Whether selfie-derived signals improve meal acceptance. ■ Retention after week 1/month 1. ■ Whether any meaningful subset pays $6.99 specifically for this experience. ■ Acquisition

cost. ■ Actual paid subscriber numbers for the small competitors located. ■ Whether storing no images/embeddings and performing processing locally would sufficiently reduce trust resistance.

Contradictions

The contract assumes the selfie provides commercially useful differentiation. Public research shows: 1. mood can already be entered with essentially zero technical risk; 2. direct competitors already exploit that approach; 3. selfie-based competitors already exist; 4. facial movements are not established diagnostic markers of internal emotion.

That combination materially challenges - but does not yet falsify - the central mechanism.

Excluded from demand scoring

■ Competitor marketing assertions such as "decision fatigue is real" were not treated as independent customer demand. ■ Competitor pricing was treated as a spend proxy, not proof anyone actually pays. ■ App-store download counts were not converted into subscriber counts. ■ Seller-hosted testimonials were not treated as verified independent buyer evidence. ■ AI-generated personas/interviews count as zero.

Adversarial second pass

Three competing explanations were tested: A. Strong version: Dinner indecision is painful, mood materially determines cravings, automatic facial inference removes thinking, and consumers will subscribe for effortless decisions.

B. More likely: Dinner indecision is real, but the useful product is simply a fast decision engine using explicit cravings/preferences/context. The selfie is mostly novelty.

C. Commodity version: Dinner indecision is real but economically weak; existing free planning habits, delivery apps and AI assistants solve it well enough that a separate subscription struggles to retain users.

Current best fit: the evidence best supports B, but the locked contract is A.

The most likely error in this assessment would be underestimating the entertainment/ritual value of taking the selfie. Users might enjoy "read my mood and surprise me" even if facial inference is scientifically noisy. Public research cannot establish that retention or willingness-to-pay effect.

That uncertainty is why this is More public evidence is needed, not KILL.

Test a critical capability in parallel

Do not build the complete app first.

The cheapest load-bearing falsification experiment is a controlled prototype comparing: 1. Selfie-derived mood + normal food preferences

2. One-tap self-reported mood + identical preferences

3. Preferences/context only

Use at least 60 actual target-user dinner decisions, not laboratory "imagine you're hungry" responses.

Pre-locked success threshold

Metric Threshold

Selfie arm top recommendation accepted >=60%

Selfie arm beats preferences-only >=10 percentage points

Selfie arm vs. self-reported mood Within 5 percentage points on meal acceptance

Inferred coarse mood vs. immediate self-report >=60% balanced agreement

Added interaction time from selfie <=5 seconds median vs. tapping mood

If the selfie arm materially loses to one-tap self-report, the technical premise may still be interesting, but the commercial mechanism fails: you would be adding camera friction/privacy cost without producing superior dinner decisions.

That requires a new contract rather than quietly replacing the selfie with a mood picker.

Why this verdict follows

Almost every ordinary research gate passes. The one that matters most does not.

The product's noncommodity mechanism is: "I don't have to tell the app how I feel; it can infer that from my selfie and therefore make a better dinner decision for me."

Public science does not establish that capability, and public market evidence shows cheaper/no-camera substitutes already covering the surrounding job. Because that technical mechanism materially carries the differentiation and potentially the willingness-to-pay thesis, the Killgate Technical Feasibility Gate blocks Public evidence supports buyer testing.

There is not enough affirmative evidence to call it impossible, so KILL would be unjustified.

Build-risk memo

The ordinary software is not the concern. Camera capture, LLM recommendation, preference storage and location search are standard implementation work. Nearby restaurant/grocery discovery should be treated as downstream infrastructure, not proprietary differentiation.

The dangerous allocation would be spending weeks integrating menus, maps, grocery catalogs, recommendation systems and subscription billing before proving that the selfie contributes anything useful.

Also avoid turning "mood analysis" into mental-health or diagnostic claims. The contract only requires food-choice personalization.

Minimum next action

Run the 60-decision selfie-vs-tap feasibility test before building the app or conducting broad $6.99 sales interviews.

The experiment should cost dramatically less than an MVP and directly attacks the assumption most capable of collapsing the existing contract.

What would change the verdict

Upgrade toward Public evidence supports buyer testing: The selfie arm clears all locked feasibility thresholds, while no fatal privacy/platform issue emerges. Then test the unchanged $6.99/month offer with qualified consumers.

Downgrade toward Change the idea before more testing: Users get the same or better recommendations by simply tapping their mood, or materially prefer not to provide selfies. The underlying dinner-decision problem survives, but the locked differentiated mechanism does not.

Eventually KILL the unchanged hypothesis: After research clears, >=20 qualified buyers fail to produce two verified payments, or direct evidence shows the pain is insufficiently important or the $6.99 recurring offer cannot compete with free/bundled alternatives.

GO is currently impossible: There are 0/8 qualified direct buyers, 0/4 exact-price positives, and 0/2 verified payments.

Source appendix

Reddit - meal decision fatigue: https://www.reddit.com/r/mealprep/comments/1t52mt3/deciding_what_to_eat_than_actually_cooking/

Reddit - cooking decision difficulty: https://www.reddit.com/r/Cooking/comments/13da1di

Reddit - food decision exhaustion: https://www.reddit.com/r/AskWomenOver30/comments/1ooom7d

Eat This Much pricing: https://www.eatthismuch.com/choose-plan/

Forki App Store listing: https://apps.apple.com/us/app/forki/id6748483192

Forki website: https://www.forki.ai/

HunchEat App Store listing: https://apps.apple.com/us/app/huncheat-eat-on-instinct/id6785548704

FeelBites AI: https://feelbitesai.com/

Hangry Detector App Store listing: https://apps.apple.com/us/app/hangry-detector/id6753637139

DoorDash - Ask DoorDash: https://about.doordash.com/en-us/news/ask-doordash

DoorDash - OpenAI integration: https://about.doordash.com/en-us/news/openai

Psychological Science review: https://www.psychologicalscience.org/journals/pspi/1529100619832930/

Apple Developer - face/camera permissions: https://developer.apple.com/documentation/arkit/verifying-device-support-and-user-permission

FTC - biometric information warning: https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2023/05/ftc-warns-about-misuses-biometric-information-harm-consumers

Illinois BIPA statute: https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/fulltext?DocName=074000140K10

Public research verdict only. Public evidence supports buyer testing would still not equal GO; final GO requires direct buyer and payment gates.