



Street Food Vending As A Livelihood Strategy And Its Hygienic Practices: A Case Study Of Dimapur Promising City

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ABSTRACT

Street food vending is an informal sector that operates in many cities and towns around the world, providing affordable and convenient food options to consumers. Street food vendors are often low-income individuals, including immigrants and refugees, who rely on this sector for their livelihoods. Despite its importance, street food vending faces several challenges, including food safety concerns, legal and regulatory issues, and competition with established restaurants. To address these challenges, study have conducted to explore the opportunities and challenges of street food vending, identify strategies that can support the growth and sustainability of this sector, and to understand its social and economic impacts. This research has highlighted the importance of supporting street food vendors through policies that promote food safety, and suggesting improvements to the Vendors for their overall growth. It has also underscored the potential of street food vending to generate employment, enhance local food systems, and contribute to growth of the economy.

Introduction:

Street food vending is a ubiquitous and an integral part of the food culture in India. In recent years, the practice has gained much attention from scholars, policymakers, and the public alike due to its social, economic, and cultural significance. Street food vending provides affordable and accessible food to urban populations, offers employment opportunities for informal workers, and contributes to the vibrancy of the city's culinary landscape. However, street food vending also raises concerns about food safety, hygiene, and regulatory compliance. The studies highlight the socio-economic benefits derived from street food vending, including income generation, poverty alleviation, and social mobility (Gupta & Kapoor, 2022). It emphasizes the role of street food as an entrepreneurial opportunity that empowers individuals and communities as this sector of an economy is very strategic for marginalized communities in urban Indian cities (Reddy & Mishra, 2020). The income generated by vendors, employment opportunities created, and the ripple effect on related industries such as agriculture, transportation, and packaging, thus stimulating local economic activity, providing livelihoods, and contributing to the growth of the informal sector (Sharma & Singh 2018; Gupta & Kapoor, 2022).

It is also seen that there are obstacles encountered by this informal sector, including issues related to licensing, infrastructure, and harassment from authorities besides infrastructural bottlenecks that hinders to harness the economic potential of street food vending (Sodhi & Singh 2017). Sharma et al. (2023) investigates the experiences of street food vendors who have transitioned from informal vendors to formal culinary entrepreneurs. It highlights the importance of nurturing culinary entrepreneurship through skill development programs, mentorship, and access to markets, thereby fostering a culture of innovation and sustainability in the street food sector. The research shows that vendors utilize platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to showcase their food, interact with customers, and promote special offers or events (Patel and Shah, 2022). Also, in the similar study, Gupta and Das (2020) have seen the influence of social norms, cultural traditions, and peer recommendations on consumer choices. The role of social networks, word-of-mouth recommendations, and cultural events helps in shaping consumer behaviour in street food markets. In one such relevant study, Singh et.al (2021) have advocated that the food safety practices and regulatory compliance among street food vendors in major Indian cities are negligible and mostly left alone to the vendors. However, the study concludes that if vendors adhering to standard food safety measures and awareness training

programmes are effectively combined with infrastructural support, it will effectively enhance the economy of this sector. It will also particularly improve food safety practices so as to ensure consumer health and trust. On the other hand, the sustainability practices and environmental implications of street food vendors in India is another concern as this sector lacks proper mechanism in its management. The waste management strategies, packaging materials, and energy consumption patterns need utmost attention. This will promote sustainable practices, such as the use of eco-friendly materials and efficient waste management systems, to reduce the environmental footprint of street food vending are monitored (Roy & Saha, 2021).

Area of study: In the light of the above context, this paper presents a case study of street food vendors in Dimapur, the commercial city of the State of Nagaland, India. Dimapur is one of the promising cities in the North-eastern region of India. Nagaland shares 115 kms of International boundary with Myanmar where Dimapur city is a gate way to connect not only the Indians States but even to the neighbouring South East Asian countries via Myanmar.

Objectives of the study: The objectives of the study are to identify the popular types of food in the market, assess the economic profitability, and hygienic practices of the vendors. The paper attempts to highlight the opportunities, challenges and to put forth the policy recommendation for improvement of this sector of the economy.

Sample size: The data used in study is primary data collected through interviews, observation, and quantitative surveys. A total of 42 vendors have been selected using simple random sampling. The samples drawn are from the busiest market area in Dimapur city where the street food vending is most common such as New Market, N L Road, Hongkong Market, City Tower and Dhobinala. The age group of the respondents varies from below 18 years to 55 years.

Amongst the respondents, maximum of the vendors are in the age-group between 18-25 years with 33.33 percent, while 28.59 percent (n=12) were 25-35 years, 19.04 percent (n=8) were 35-45 years and both the age below 18 years and between 45-55 years comprises of 9.52 percent each. Amongst the respondents, 80.96 percent (n=34) were male, while 19.04 percent (n=8) were female. Also, 4.78 percent (n=2) just started their venture with experience in the market less than 6 months, while 14.29 percent (n=6) were in the market for 6-12 months, 23.80 percent (n=10) ranged from 1-2 years, 33.33 percent (n=14) ranged from 2-3 years, and 23.80 (n=10) were selling from more than 3 years. Further, 28.58 percent (n=12) of the vendors were illiterate, while 52.38 percent (n=22) had primary level education, and 19.04 percent (n=4) had secondary level of education.

Major items sold and bought: In the study, it is found that the items most available in street vending markets are chow mein, pakora, alu chop, egg roll, samosa and some few others such as chana mix, sweet corn, pani puri, momo, fried rice, etc. The study showed that of all the enticing street foods items, chow mein was the most sold and bought item as it is available in maximum food stalls (42.86 percent) and as depicted in the table 1, followed by pakora, alu chop, egg roll, samosa, and others as reflected in the table 1.

Table-1: Food items available in street food vendors.

Food Items	Items found in the street (No. of Vendors)
Chow Mein	18 (42.86)
Pakora	8 (19.04)
Alu Chop	6 (14.29)
Egg Roll	4 (9.52)
Samosa	2 (4.77)
Others	4 (9.52)
Total	42 (100)

Source: Field survey, 2023. Figure in parenthesis indicates percentage.

Expenditure, revenue and profit analysis of the street food vendors: The study has found that 52.38 percent of the vendors (n=22) invested more than ₹20,000 as a start ups in their business, 33.33 percent (n=14) invested capital ranging from ₹10,000-₹20000, 9.52 percent (n=4) invested capital ranging from ₹5000-₹10000, and 4.74% (n=2) invested capital below ₹5000.

The daily expenditure of street food vendors include the costs incurred on encompassing various aspects such as ingredients, equipment maintenance, utensils, and labour. It was found that, maximum (42.85 percent) of the vendors spent between ₹1500-₹2000, while no vendor spent less than ₹500 in a day as shown in the table 2. On the other hand, it is observed that maximum of the vendors as much as 85.71 percent earned more than

₹2000 in a day, while no vendor earns below ₹1000 on daily basis. Also, the daily profits of the vendors are positively associated with the amount of expenditure they spent as depicted in col. 2 & 4 of the table 2. Looking at this daily profits range by the vendors, it is a very profitable economic activity and has much potential to grow. However, it is observed that there is no proper mechanism for monitoring prices and its management by an appropriate body.

Table-2: Expenditure, revenue and profit per day

Daily expenditure, revenue & profit	Daily Expenditure (no. of vendors)	Daily Revenue (no. of vendors)	Daily Profit (no. of vendors)
1	2	3	4
Less than ₹500	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
₹500-₹1000	4 (9.52)	0 (0)	4 (9.52)
₹1000-₹1500	8 (19.04)	2 (4.76)	8 (19.04)
₹1500-₹2000	18 (42.86)	4 (9.52)	18 (42.86)
More than ₹2000	12 (28.58)	36 (85.72)	12 (28.58)
Total	42 (100)	42 (100)	42 (100)

Source: Field survey, 2023. Figure in parenthesis indicates percentage.

Vendors' years of selling and their level of income: The data in table-3 presents information about the years of operation in the market and their level of income. It is interestingly found that the longer they operate in the market, the higher is the level of income. It is observed that all the vendors who have been selling for more than 3 years have a daily profit margin of more than ₹2000. While 85.71 percent of the vendors who have been selling for 2-3 years have a profit margin ranging between ₹1500-₹2000 and 14.29 percent have a profit margin of more than ₹2000. About 40 percent of the vendors who have been selling for 1-2 years have a profit margin ranging ₹1000-₹1500 and 60 percent of them having a profit margin ranging between ₹1500-₹2000. While on the other hand, the vendors who have been selling for 1 (one) year or less have a lower profit margin ranging from either ₹500-₹1000 or ₹1000-₹1500.

Thus, it is observed that the years of selling and daily profit are positively associated. This could be due to factors such as vendors are able to build a loyal customer base, establish a strong reputation for their offerings, and refine their operational processes, leading to increased efficiency and profitability. Other factors that influence the daily profits are the number of days in a week they work, number of hours they work per day, presentations of their items, special occasion such as festival, etc. Study reveals that about 85.72 percent of the vendors operate 5-6 days in a week and about 14.30 percent of the vendors operate every day, and almost everyone sell for more than 8 hours in a day. The study also reveals that there is significant increase in the earnings of the vendors on special occasions such as festivals, new year days, social gatherings, etc.

Table-3: Vendors' years of selling and daily profit

Years of selling	Profit per day (Number of vendors)					
	Less than ₹500	₹500-₹1000	₹1000-₹1500	₹1500-₹2000	More than ₹2000	Total
Below 6 Months	-	2	-	-	-	2
6-12 months	-	2	4	-	-	6
1-2 years	-	-	4	6	-	10
2-3 years	-	-	-	10	4	14
More than 3 years	-	-	-	-	10	10

Source: Field survey, 2023

Hygienic practices by the Street Food Vendors: To examine the hygienic practices adopted by the street food vendors, information such as whether they wash their hands regularly, sanitise their cooking area or stalls, fresh purchase of the raw materials, use of left over items, and disposing system of the waste are taken into consideration. It is found that about 23.80 percent (n=10) of the vendors wash their hands after every preparation of the foods, while 28.58 percent (n=12) of them wash their hands sometimes, 9.52 percent (n=4) of them wash their hands rarely, and about 38.10 percent (n=16) wash their hands in regular intervals. Also, it is observed that as much as 57.16 percent (n=24) of the vendors sanitize and clean their utensils and food cart only once a day, while 33.33 percent (n=14) of the vendors sanitize and clean their utensils and food cart regularly, and about 9.52 percent (n=4) of the vendors sanitize and clean their food cart only whenever needed.

The study found that about 52.38 percent (n=22) of the vendors purchase their raw materials or the ingredients needed for preparation of the food items on daily basis, while 19.04 percent of the vendor purchase their raw materials or the ingredients on weekly basis, and about 28.58 percent of the vendors purchase their raw materials or the ingredients need for preparation of the food items whenever needed and no vendor stock their materials for months.

Further, the study shows that 33.33 percent (n=14) of the vendors refrigerate the left over foods for reusing it, while 19.04 percent (n=8) of them throw the left over foods, and 9.52 percent (n=4) of them give it to the needy people nearby, and about 38.09 percent (n=16) of them used it for self-consumption. Another important aspect found in the study was that 38.10 percent (n=16) do not bother to maintain proper system for disposing waste and cleaning their surroundings. Hence, it is observed that hygienic practices such as washing hands after or before every preparation, cleaning surroundings and using dustbin are poorly seen. Therefore, proper policy regulation towards the improvement and management of hygienic practices is required by the legitimate body.

Educational qualifications and hygienic practices by the street food vendors: The study also examines the potential relationship between the educational qualifications of the vendors and their hygienic practices. It is found that amongst the respondents, 19.04 percent (n=8) who had secondary level of education practice better health and hygiene while operating their food stall. They washed their hands regularly before handling the food preparations, used fresh raw material and ingredients, sanitize and clean their utensils and cart regularly, and also maintained waste bins near their stall and also had a clean surrounding.

On the other hand, 52.38 percent of the respondents (n=22), who had Primary level of educational qualification, the health and hygiene practice by them in operation of their food stall as quite moderate. Some washed their hands after every preparation and most of them only sometimes. It is also found that most of them clean their stall only once or twice in a week. Also only few of them had maintain proper waste bins and clean their surrounding only when necessary.

Furthermore, 28.58 percent of the respondents (n=12), who had no educational qualification or were illiterate, the hygienic practices in the operation of their food stall were quite poor. Most of them either washed their hands sometimes or rarely while handling the preparation of the food items. Their food stall also appeared to be quite messy, there was lack of proper storage facilities for the raw material and ingredients, the water they used for the preparation of the foods were also quite unclean, also there was no proper waste bins at their stall and their surroundings were accumulate with lots of garbage.

Therefore, it is observed that education play an important role in hygienic practices by the street food vendors. This implies that, higher level of education may indicate a greater exposure to academic knowledge and information about the importance of food safety and hygiene, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the importance of proper sanitation, effective hand washing technique, and appropriate food storage and handling practices. They are also likely to possess a comprehensive understanding of the potential health risks associated with improper hygiene practices, as well necessary skills and knowledge to ensure the cleanliness and safety of their food establishment. On the other hand, street food vendors with limited or no formal education might rely on informal training or personal experiences, which may not encompass the same level of detail or understanding of food safety protocols. Thus, it is observed that trainings and awareness programmes on how to handle food safety measures and hygienic practices while serving food to the consumers need to be prioritized to raise not only the standard of the business but also to serve safe food.

Opportunities and Challenges: Street food vendors have seized upon this growing trend, finding numerous opportunities to establish successful businesses and offer unique culinary experiences. With its low entry barrier, flexibility, and increasing popularity, street food presents a range of opportunities for aspiring entrepreneurs. At the same time, the challenges faced in this informal sector need a policy intervention.

Opportunities: Street food has gained significant popularity in recent years due to its affordability, convenience, and diverse culinary experiences. This growing trend presents a great opportunity for street food vendors into a larger customer base market. Start-up a street food business typically requires less capital compared to opening a traditional restaurant. The low entry barrier allows aspiring entrepreneurs to enter the food industry with relative ease, making it an attractive opportunity for individuals with limited resources. Street food vendors have the freedom to experiment with unique flavours, fusions, and presentation styles. This creative aspect of street food can help vendors stand out and attract a loyal customer base seeking novel and exciting food experiences. Street food vendors can cater to specific dietary preferences or cultural niches. By specializing in a particular cuisine or offering vegan, gluten-free, or organic options, vendors can target specific customer segments and build a loyal following. Street food vendors often participate in events, festivals, and local markets. These occasions provide a platform for exposure, networking, and collaboration with other vendors and businesses. Additionally, such events attract a large crowd, allowing vendors to reach a broader customer base in a short period.

Challenges: Dimapur is a vibrant city with a diverse food scene. Street food vendors face stiff competition from established vendors and restaurants offering a wide range of cuisines is a significant challenge for new vendors. Availability of proper infrastructure and facilities, such as designated vending areas, clean water

supply, and waste disposal systems are limited in many parts of Dimapur. These limitations have impacted their ability to provide quality food and attract customers. Dimapur experiences fluctuations in tourist arrivals and local population throughout the year. Seasonal variations in market demand poses challenges for street food vendors, as they may need to adapt their offerings or find alternative income sources during low seasons. Maintaining high standards of hygiene and food safety is crucial for street food vendors. However, ensuring proper food handling practices, adequate storage facilities, and regular inspections can be challenging for vendors operating in Dimapur, where they may not be familiar with health and safety regulations. Street food vendors often face negative perceptions and stereotypes related to cleanliness, food quality, and authenticity. It takes time for new vendors to build a loyal customer base and generate sufficient revenue to cover their expenses and make a profit. Managing finances and ensuring long-term sustainability is a significant challenge, especially in the early stages of entering into the market.

Recommendations:

Basing on the above discussion, following recommendations are suggested for the improvement of this sector of the economy;

- 1. Prioritize Food Quality and Hygiene:** Maintain high standards of food quality, hygiene, and cleanliness to build trust and ensure customer satisfaction. Adhering to health and safety regulations, handle ingredients properly, and invest in clean and well-maintained cooking equipment and regularly train staff on food safety practices to maintain consistent quality should be ensured.
- 2. Offer Diverse Menu Options:** Provide a diverse range of menu options to cater to different tastes and dietary preferences in Dimapur. Regularly update and innovate menu to keep customers intrigued and engaged.
- 3. Emphasize Authenticity:** Authenticity and cultural significance of food offerings has a rich culinary heritage, hence showcasing the traditional recipes, cooking techniques, and locally sourced ingredients will help create an authentic and memorable experience for customers.
- 4. Collaborate with Local Suppliers:** Build partnerships with local farmers, producers, and suppliers to source fresh and seasonal ingredients. Not only does this support the local economy, but it also ensures the quality and sustainability of the market.
- 5. Utilize Social Media and Online Platforms:** Leverage the power of social media platforms to promote your street food business in Dimapur. Regularly sharing enticing food photos, engage with followers, and provide updates on specials or events can help reaching out to customers in a more convenient ways.
- 6. Seek Feedback and Adapt:** Actively seeking feedback from customers can make necessary improvements or adjustments to enhance the overall customer experience.
- 7. Participate in Local Events and Collaborations:** Engage with the local community by participating in food festivals, cultural events, or charity initiatives. Networking and building relationships within the local community can help increase visibility and attract new customers.

Conclusion:

It is evident that street food holds immense popularity and appealing especially amongst the youth. The affordability, convenience, and unique flavours offered by street food vendors have contributed to a thriving culinary culture in the city. However, street food vendors also face various challenges, including infrastructure limitations, regulatory hurdles, and intense competition. These challenges underscore the need for collaborative efforts between vendors, local authorities, and other stakeholders to create an enabling environment for their success. The study has identified several opportunities for street food vendors to enhance their operations. By prioritizing food quality and hygiene, developing a strong brand identity, offering diverse menu, emphasizing on authenticity, collaborating with local suppliers, etc are some of the means that can help in building the street food vending market. The presence of street food vendors also adds to the overall vibrancy and attractiveness of the city, making it a sought-after destination for food enthusiasts. Street food vendors in Dimapur play a significant role in the city's culinary scene, contributing to its economic growth and cultural identity. Collaboration among vendors, local authorities, and other stakeholders will be instrumental in creating a supportive ecosystem for the street food industry in Dimapur, ensuring its long-term sustainability and success. It is also pertinent to suggest that proper regulation and strict monitoring on hygienic practices should be enforced by the concerned authority as most of the vendors are less educated and it is found that education play significant role in maintaining proper hygienic practices while serving food to the consumers.

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