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Streets of Aspiration: Exploring Street Food Entrepreneurship and Livelihood Strategies in Khulna City, Bangladesh

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Abstract: Street food vending as an entrepreneurship choice for livelihood in the urban landscape is a complex role for survival. This study explores the factors that influence entrepreneurship choices of street food vendors in Khulna City, Bangladesh. By integrating the theories of informal economy, urban ecology and entrepreneurship this research offers an understanding of street food vending as a dynamic form of urban entrepreneurship. This study employed a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews with street food vendors to capture their perceptions, choices, and socio-economic circumstances. Through these interviews, it uncovers a complex interplay of push and pull factors influencing their entrepreneurial decisions, where economic necessity and the pursuit of autonomy emerge as key motivations. The study challenges simplistic narratives of informal sector participation by highlighting vendors' complex motivations and ability to navigate infrastructural and regulatory challenges through adaptive strategies. Alternatively, cultural preferences and demographic factors emerge as powerful forces shaping the street food landscape. Many vendors notably aspired to formalize and expand their businesses, challenging perceptions of street vending as merely a subsistence activity. This study further paves the way for future research and policy interventions that can potentially transform urban informal economies into engines of sustainable growth and social inclusion.

Keywords: *Street Vending; Food, Business; Informal Economy; Entrepreneurship; Livelihood*

Introduction: Entrepreneurship is the process of finding, creating, and pursuing creative ideas to launch new products, services, or companies, frequently to fill holes in the market or satisfy unmet demands. At its core, it involves the pursuit of opportunities beyond the resources currently controlled by the entrepreneur [1]. Entrepreneurs often challenge the status quo, introducing new methods of production, goods, or services to the market [2]. Studies highlight that entrepreneurship fosters local development by promoting innovation, diversifying the economy, and empowering individuals to achieve economic independence [3]. Additionally, in the study regarding informal economy, poverty and employment it has also been argued that low-income individuals possess survival skills that enable them to work for themselves and sustain their livelihoods through determination and effort [4, 5].

Street food vending is a prevalent economic activity in urban markets worldwide, offering insights into entrepreneurship and informal economies. The informal nature of street food vending enables entrepreneurs to bypass the high entry barriers typically associated with formal food establishments [6]. They are part of the informal economy that supports a network of suppliers, including local farmers and small-scale distributors, thus promoting entrepreneurial activity [7]. Also, the informal nature of street food vending makes it a critical source of self-employment, particularly for individuals who may lack formal education or job qualifications. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), street vending represents a significant proportion of urban informal employment, with a large percentage of vendors being women or individuals from marginalized communities [4]. This vendors play an essential role in urban economies by offering affordable food options and providing flexible employment opportunities, especially to those with limited access to formal job markets [8]. They often operate with minimal capital, and their businesses can be highly adaptable, making street food vending a common choice for micro-entrepreneurs [9]. One of the notable primary challenges to this activity is socio-economic vulnerability, As most of them come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds with limited financial resources, which restricts their ability to scale operations or invest in quality resources [7]. As they operate in informal economic sectors with limited legal protections, it exposes them to harassment, eviction, or fines from authorities due to licensing and regulatory restrictions [10]. Furthermore, in many cities they struggle to obtain proper permits and face complex bureaucratic processes or fees, limiting their access to secure, designated vending areas [11]. Also Cultural perceptions of street food vendors often vary, with vendors sometimes facing social stigma or marginalization [12]. At the same time cultural attitudes towards street vending influence their business choices, from location selection to product diversification. Besides, with increasing competition from established food businesses and other street vendors, many of them struggle to secure prime locations or attract a stable customer base [13]. So, in competitive urban markets, they have limited resources to adapt quickly through marketing or innovation, making them vulnerable to fluctuating consumer preferences and market dynamics. This pressure impacts on their entrepreneurial choices, often discouraging them from investing in their

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business. Studies have increasingly recognized that the informal sector's growth is deeply interconnected with urbanization trends, social attitudes, and economic policies [14]. So, addressing these issues can provide insights into supporting this sector more effectively, enhancing vendors' contributions to urban food security and local economies.

As cities grow and populations become denser, informal entrepreneurs fill food service market gaps, benefiting economic growth and creating employment in developing nations. This trend reflects broader urbanization patterns and the bidirectional causal relationship between informal employment and economic growth [15]. In contrast, the economic significance of street food vendors cannot be underestimated, as they provide essential services in low- and middle-income countries where formal job opportunities may be limited. Studies have highlighted various challenges that street vendors face, including limited access to capital, fierce competition, and restrictive regulations [16]. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the factors influencing entrepreneurship choices of street food vendors in Khulna city as well as aims to explore key issues raised in earlier research concerning the factors that shape the entrepreneurial choices of street food vendors. Specifically, it looks to investigate: (1) how socio-economic circumstances and urban infrastructure influence the decision to engage in street food vending in Khulna City, and (2) what operational, regulatory, and competitive challenges vendors face in sustaining their businesses. Building on these questions, the study examined the factors shaping the entrepreneurial choices of street food vendors, offering insights into their role in promoting economic development, social resilience, and food security in urban contexts like Khulna City. These factors provide critical insights into how informal economies function, highlighting the specific challenges encountered by street food vendors, and guiding the design of focused support and poverty reduction initiatives.

Review of Literature: Before proceeding to discuss the findings of the study, it is imperative to reflect on the existing epistemological scenario regarding the entrepreneurship choices of street food vendors and thus rationalize the research questions of this investigation. Entrepreneurial skills were linked to social and occupational backgrounds, with those in the 21–40 age group demonstrating higher entrepreneurial orientation [17, 18]. In many cases, especially in developing countries, entrepreneurship emerged as a survival strategy in the absence of formal employment, with street vending providing a vital means of income generation [19, 20]. Then motivational factors such as the desire for self-reliance, wealth creation, and establishing a distinct identity also drove entrepreneurial activity [18]. Cultural norms, values, and traditions also influenced consumer preferences, entrepreneurial activities, and the overall character of a city [21]. For example, street markets often reflected the cultural diversity of a city, offering a mix of products and services that cater to different ethnic groups and social classes [22]. Then social networks and community ties also played a crucial role in supporting entrepreneurship and fostering economic development [23]. Furthermore, social and cultural factors could influence the perception and use of public spaces, shaping the social life of a city [24]. In urban scenario, the markets served as vital economic hubs, providing employment opportunities, facilitating trade, and contributing to the overall economic vitality of a city [25]. Alongside contributing to the local economy, street vendors help nurturing the social fabric of cities by drawing diverse groups of people into public spaces and creating a sense of belonging, thereby strengthening the social sustainability of urban areas [26]. So, in specific sector like street food vending, it played a significant role in employment, food security, and nutrition for urban populations in developing countries like Bangladesh, particularly in Dhaka city [27, 28]. Here in Bangladesh it is deeply embedded in the informal economy, shaped by both opportunity and vulnerability. Scholars note that the sector plays a crucial role in absorbing unskilled and semi-skilled labor, particularly migrants who turn to vending as one of the most accessible livelihood options in urban areas[28, 29]. Although vending provides essential goods and services in public spaces, it remains precarious due to systemic neglect, lack of formal recognition, and absence of adequate facilities, leaving vendors vulnerable to economic and physical insecurity [29, 30, 31]. Studies also suggests issues regarding the lack of access to basic infrastructure, such as clean water, sanitation facilities, and power exists in other countries [32].

Research further highlights that vendors in cities such as Dhaka and Chittagong often face harassment, eviction, and violence, while many are compelled to pay bribes or protection money to local authorities and brokers to continue their activities [33, 34, 35]. A study in Dhaka city highlights four major problem areas: business operation, business knowledge, extortion, and product and production [28]. Street food vendors were also found to be frequently operating in a fragile regulatory surroundings, fearing expulsion by authorities, unclear licensing procedures, and lack of legal protection in other cities of Bangladesh [36]. However, a study survey of 152 street vendors in different areas of Dhaka in 2018 showed that that the street vendors are playing a significant role in the economic development of the country through creating the self-employment opportunities, income generation and saving a specific portion from among their income [37]. Furthermore, another study in Bangladesh reveals that a large number of people are generating income through directly or indirectly engagement with the street vendor profession as well as suggest small entrepreneurship has a great contribution to poverty reduction and sustainable livelihood of many street vendors[38]. Despite challenges and issues, the adapted strategies by the vendors included diversifying their product offerings, adjusting their operating hours, and forming informal networks for mutual support [39]. Additionally in the face of economic downturns or crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, street vendors had shown an ability to adapt and innovate, finding new ways to reach customers and generate income [40, 41]. For example, some vendors had adopt online platforms and delivery services to continue operating during lockdowns [42]. In post-covid situation a study on recent trends and needs of street food vending reveals the industry in Bangladesh is expanding rapidly, but faces challenges such as lack of financial assistance, legal registration or government initiatives which creates barrier to business expansion, and training for the betterment of this profession [43]. Also vendors with stable or designated vending spaces have been found achieving higher income levels compared to those without such security, which underscores the importance of inclusive urban planning and policy frameworks[31].

So, it becomes quite apparent from the above discussion that the existing available literature broadly underscores socio-economic dimensions such as education, family background, and financial constraints and cultural significance of street vending across

some Bangladeshi cities, while often overlooking the factors which were specific to the distinct social and economic conditions of emerging urban centers such as Khulna city where rapid development and evolving city culture have fueled the expansion of practices such as street food vending. Also, the impact of urban infrastructure such as access to utilities, transportation, and public spaces on vendors' entrepreneurial decisions and outcomes of business was underexplored in local context.

Theoretical Framework: The study utilized some theoretical ideas which provided a comprehensive understanding of street food vending as a multifaceted entrepreneurial activity as it synthesizes key theories from entrepreneurship, informal economies, and urban systems. The approach enabled a multi-dimensional analysis of both individual entrepreneurial behaviors and broader socio-economic and urban influences.

Theory of Entrepreneurship: This framework by Schumpeter and Opie [44] highlights innovation and strategic decision-making as central to understanding entrepreneurial behavior. They emphasize innovation as the key driver of economic development. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, has pushed vendors to adopt innovative strategies such as digital marketing and e-commerce to survive and thrive, demonstrating their entrepreneurial mindset and resilience [45, 46]. Subsequently, Drucker [2] emphasized entrepreneurship as a systematic approach characterized by purposeful innovation, opportunity recognition, and strategic decision-making. By incorporating Schumpeter's and Drucker's theories, this study analyzed how street food vendors in cities like Khulna implement innovative strategies in their operations. It further focuses on identifying specific practices that reflect entrepreneurial behavior, such as menu diversification, pricing strategies, and customer engagement techniques.

Theory of Informal Economy: Hart [47] provides a critical analytical lens in his theory of the informal economy for understanding street food vending as a complex economic adaptation strategy within urban economic systems. The theory fundamentally challenges traditional economic perspectives by conceptualizing informal economic activities not as marginal or inefficient, but as rational, strategic responses to structural limitations in formal employment markets. It posited that the informal sector arises as a response to the inadequacies of the formal economy. It was particularly useful in understanding why street food vending is a prevalent form of entrepreneurship in Khulna City.

Push and Pull Theory of Entrepreneurship: The push and pull theory of entrepreneurship, pioneered by Amit and Muller [48] also offers a nuanced framework for understanding the motivational dynamics driving entrepreneurial choices. This approach helped in understanding the motivations and challenges faced by individuals in the informal economy sector. It distinguishes between two types of factors influencing entrepreneurial decisions: push factors, which drive individuals toward entrepreneurship out of necessity, and pull factors, which attract individuals to entrepreneurship based on opportunities. So, this study applied the push and pull framework to understand why individuals in Khulna City choose street food vending as their entrepreneurial path.

Urban Ecology Theory: Urban ecology theory, developed by Park, Burgess and McKenzie [49], provides a sophisticated analytical framework for understanding how individuals and businesses interact with and adapt to urban environments. This theoretical perspective evaluated the spatial dynamics, competitive landscapes, and infrastructural influences that shape economic activities within urban ecosystems. It also emphasized the interplay between individuals, businesses, and the urban landscape, emphasizing spatial dynamics, competition, and the role of infrastructure in shaping entrepreneurial activities. In the context of street food vending in Khulna City, urban ecology theory offered a critical lens to analyze how vendors navigate, adapt to and are influenced by the complex urban landscape.

Materials & Method: This study followed qualitative inquiry process to acquire in-depth understanding of the entrepreneurship choices of street food vendors in Khulna City by exploring the subjective experiences, perceptions and behaviors of individuals. The data was collected through in-depth interview (IDI) that helped to facilitate a thorough investigation, obtain in-depth knowledge about the factors that influences their decision to choose street food vending. It enabled participants to express their narratives comprehensively, providing significant qualitative insights. Therefore, the study employed in-depth interviews to acquire primary data for this study. A semi-structured interview guideline served as the main tool for gathering data for this study because, as it was designed to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing entrepreneurship choices of street food vendors.

The study was conducted in Khulna City. It focused basically on specific types of street vendors, who were youth to middle-aged individuals and selling processed food and beverages in the city area with mobile food cart in a set-location like marketplaces, entertainment park or leisure area, near educational institutions and commercial zones where street food vendors are commonly found. Purposive sampling was used to conduct this study, selecting vendors based on their relevance to the research objectives and certain criteria, ensuring a range of participants with different experiences. This sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which elements of the target population are selected according to their compatibility with the study's objectives and specific inclusion and exclusion criteria [50] relevant to this study including vendors' location of conducting business and years of experience in food vending.

The sample for this study comprised 12 participants, as responses began to repeat and no new themes or insights were emerging beyond the twelfth interview. Therefore, data saturation was reached at that point. Primary data for the research was collected via in-person interviews with face-to-face interaction and each of the interviews was recorded with the prior consent of the participant. Furthermore, the study utilized brief notes and a voice recording application as accessory tools during fieldwork. Here, field notes were taken during the interviews to preserve instant observations and significant points, enabling comprehensive documenting of participant responses.

After the completion of the field work, the oral responses to the in-depth interview were transcribed and translated for further analysis. The data from transcripts were coded and subsequently categorized using QDA Miner for better understanding of

thematic analysis and ease of access to the categorized data. Apart from using this software, the researcher went through line by line for analyzation. The collected data was analyzed through thematic analysis, which offers an appropriate analytical technique for understanding experiences, ideas, or behaviors across a dataset [51]. Thus, identifying recurring themes related to entrepreneurship choices, challenges, and socio-economic influences etc. within the narratives provided by the participants were prioritized. This study focused on analyzing qualitative data such as interview transcripts, short notes and others, to identify common patterns and separate the data into different groups of coding according to found similarities or themes. After analyzing the findings, the data was manually interpreted by using computer software including Microsoft Office, EdrawMind, QDA Miner. Subsequently, the key findings and discussions were analyzed as well as compared and aligned with existing literature and relevant theoretical frameworks to reflect the local context of Khulna City.

Results and Discussion:

Socio-demographic profile of the Respondent Street Food Vendor

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participants

ID No.	Age	Vending Area	Food vending Category	Year of Schooling	Marital Status and Family Composition		Average Income (Daily) (in BDT)	Duration
1	26	Khulna University Campus	'*Fuchka*' and '*Chotpati*'	12	Married	Joint	800	2 years
2	24	Gollamari	Sugarcane Juice	N/A	Married	Joint	400 (Winter) 2500 (Summer)	2 years
3	30	Nirala	'*Halim*'	3	Married	Nuclear	800	6 Years
4	22	Moulavi Para	Fast food (inc. Burger, Pizza, Chicken fry etc.)	14	Unmarried	Nuclear	1000	2 months
5	45	Ahsan Ahmed Road	Popcorn	N/A	Married	Joint	400	20 years
6	48	Hazi Mohsin Road	Steamed Rice Cake (*Bhapa Pitha*)	N/A	Married	Joint	500 (Winter)	30 Years
7	25	Dak Bangla	Noodles, Steamed Chickpea Curry (*Cholabhuna*) and Lemon Juice.	12	Unmarried	Joint	300	3 years
8	14	Shibbari Circle	Dry Sweets & Candy (*Desi Khaja*)	4	Unmarried	Nuclear	300	4 months
9	46	Sonadanga	Fast food (Wonton, French fry, Soup, Kabab, *'Pakora'*)	10	Married	Nuclear	1000	4 years
10	30	New Market, Khulna	Chinese and Fast Food	12	Married	Nuclear	1000	2 years
11	27	New Market, Khulna	Ice cream	12	Married	Joint	1600 (Summer) 500 (Winter)	3 Years
12	35	Moylapota	Fried Snacks (*Samocha, Piyaju, Keema Chop*)	6	Married	Nuclear	500	6 Years

***(Field Study; 2024)**

Thematic Network

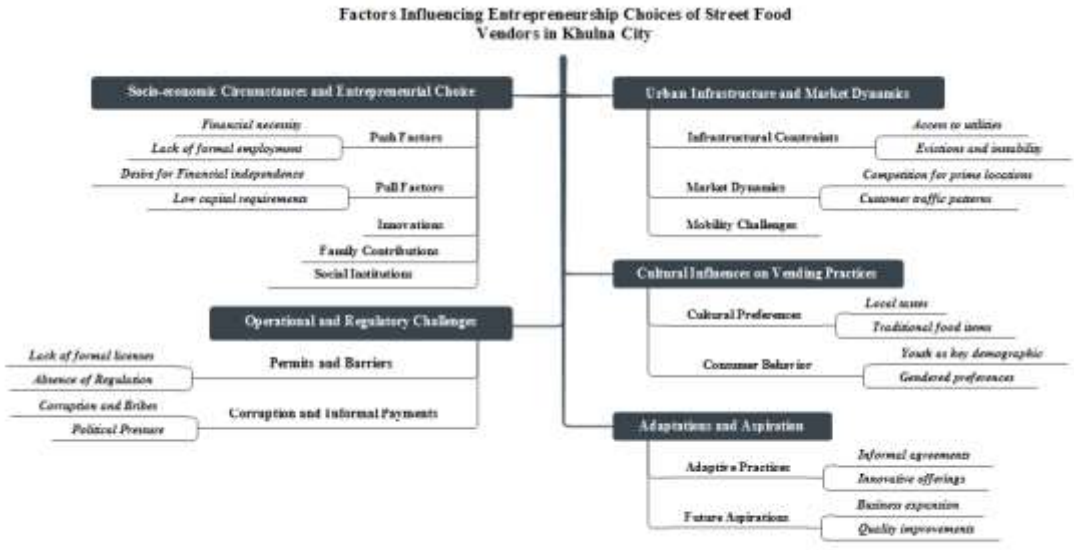

Fig. 1: Concept Map of the Themes.

(Source: Author's compilation

The socio-demographic information of the 12 street food vendors mentions in Table 1 that highlights a diverse and dynamic group of entrepreneurs in Khulna City. The participants' ages vary from youth to middle-aged groups, representing a broad spectrum of life experiences and generational perspectives within the street food vending sector. Their vending locations are spread across various areas of Khulna City, including university campuses, urban markets, and residential neighborhoods, highlighting the wide-ranging nature of street food in the urban landscape. The table also shows a variety of food categories offered by these vendors, ranging from traditional items such as 'Fuchka' and 'Halim' to more contemporary options such as fast food and Chinese cuisine, reflecting both cultural continuity and adaptation to changing consumer preferences. Educational backgrounds among the vendors vary significantly, from those with no formal schooling to individuals with up to 14 years of education, underscoring the accessibility of street food vending as an entrepreneurial option across different educational levels. The marital status and family compositions of the vendors add another layer of diversity, with both married and unmarried individuals represented, and family structures described as either joint or nuclear. Furthermore, daily incomes show considerable variation, ranging from 300 to 1000 Taka, with some vendors experiencing notable seasonal fluctuations in their earnings, reaching up to 2500 Taka, particularly through the sale of items such as sugarcane juice or ice cream. Perhaps most strikingly, the duration of involvement in street food vending ranges from just a few months to three decades, indicating a mix of newcomers and highly experienced vendors within the sample. This diversity in backgrounds, earnings, and experiences provides important insights into the resilience and adaptability of the street food economy in Khulna.

The thematic map above (Fig. 1) serves as a comprehensive visual synthesis of the study's findings, integrating the complex factors that influence street food vendors' entrepreneurship choices in Khulna City. At its core, it captured the central focus of the research, branching out into five main themes that emerged from the data analysis: Socio-Economic Factors, Urban Infrastructure and Market Dynamics, Operational and Regulatory Challenges, Cultural Influences on Vending Practices, and Adaptation and Aspiration.

Socio-economic Circumstances and Entrepreneurial Choice: Street vending in Khulna City is not merely an economic activity, rather an entrepreneurial response shaped by a complex interplay of socio-economic circumstances. These circumstances can broadly be categorized into push and pull factors, each offering insight into why individuals gravitate toward this informal but vibrant form of self-employment.

Push Factors: *Navigating Instability and Limited Options*

For many street vendors, the decision to enter this trade stems not from aspiration alone but necessity. The instability and inconsistency of income in other informal sectors have pushed many individuals toward vending as a relatively more secure alternative. Respondents frequently cited the unpredictability of day labor and other casual work, which failed to provide sufficient earnings for basic survival. One vendor shared candidly:

> *"I was a day laborer, but I was not hired regularly. That's why I couldn't afford the rent for my house. But this business is running well now."* -(Participant 2)

Beyond income irregularity, the scarcity of formal employment opportunities, particularly for individuals with limited education, serves as a critical push factor. Even those with secondary education find themselves excluded from meaningful employment, either due to low starting salaries or an oversaturated job market. As one respondent put it:

> *"I tend to keep myself independent. And considering the average salary that is typically received by someone having a higher secondary education, a well-paid job is unlikely to be found in Khulna city. Even if I get a job, maybe I'll get a salary of 8–10 thousand taka, which would make it difficult to maintain my family expenses. Also, because I'm married and have other family members to support, I thought of business as my occupation."* -(Participant 1)

Pull Factors: *Autonomy, Accessibility, and Self-Driven Opportunity*

In contrast to the push of economic hardship, several pull factors drew individuals into the street vending space. The autonomy associated with self-employment emerged as a key attraction. The freedom to determine working hours, make independent decisions, and escape the rigid hierarchies of traditional employment was especially appealing. As one vendor explained:

> *"Job sectors don't have much freedom, and I had to maintain strict schedules. I wanted to work independently."* -(Participant 9)

This desire for independence was complemented by the low barrier to entry. Street vending often requires only a small initial investment, making it a feasible option for those with limited capital. The flexibility in scale and startup costs allowed individuals to begin modestly and grow over time. One vendor recounted:

> *"Most of the other businesses needed more capital investment that I couldn't afford. I chose to sell popcorn with little investment."* -(Participant 5)

Innovation*:* *Embracing Flexibility through Innovation and Seasonal Adaptation*

Street vendors in Khulna display a remarkable ability to innovate within their limited means. Seasonal shifts in consumer demand are met with agility and creativity. During the winter months, vendors commonly sell traditional items like '*Bhapa Pitha'* (steamed rice cake), dry sweets, and warm drinks -products that are deeply rooted in local culinary culture. One vendor elaborated:

"As this pie is a winter special food and most customers crave warmth in winter, they prefer this in the first two months of the winter season." -(Participant 6)

When summer arrives, the offerings shift. Cool, refreshing items such as lemon juice and ice cream dominate the menu to suit changing weather and customer needs. This seasonal adaptability not only sustains business but reflects an intuitive understanding of market dynamics. Another respondent said,

"I sell lemon juice in summer because there is huge demand for cold items for refreshment due to excessive heat." -(Participant 7)

Family Contributions: *The Backbone of Informal Enterprise*

Family support—both emotional and material—emerged as a critical component in the entrepreneurial journeys of many vendors. In numerous cases, spouses or parents provided cooking assistance, start-up funds, or help with day-to-day operations. One vendor noted:

"My wife is a housekeeper, and she knows how to cook well. So, I thought of selling street food as she can prepare the ingredients for me." -(Participant 12)

Young entrepreneurs, too, often stepped into vending to alleviate financial burdens on their families. Others relied on monetary assistance from family members during their startup phase. One such participant reflected:

"My mother helped me with her deposited money during the startup of my business." -(Participant 1)

These examples illustrate how street vending, though often individually managed, is deeply embedded within familial structures of mutual support.

Social Institutions: *Micro-entrepreneurship through Institutional Support*

While personal initiative and family support were primary drivers, the role of social institutions- particularly NGOs and local government bodies was also notable. NGOs frequently provide access to micro-finance, offering a crucial lifeline for aspiring vendors without personal capital. One respondent shared:

"I didn't have any capital, so I borrowed money from an NGO to start the business. My family or relatives didn't help me during the startup." -(Participant 2)

Government institutions, though less frequently mentioned, also played a role in some cases. One vendor recalled a tangible contribution from local authorities:

"This food cart was gifted by the City Corporation to my father." -(Participant 7)

These examples suggest that while institutional support is not the norm, its presence can significantly accelerate entrepreneurial ventures in the informal economy.

Urban Infrastructure and Market Dynamics: Street vending in Khulna unfolds within a dynamic yet often hostile urban landscape. From infrastructural constraints to fierce competition for prime locations, vendors must constantly adapt to the shifting terrain of city life. This section explores the challenges and strategies vendors employ to navigate issues of space, regulation, and mobility in the urban economy.

Infrastructural Constraints: For many street vendors, basic urban infrastructure remains largely out of reach. With no formal access to utilities, vendors often rely on informal arrangements to meet daily needs. Water, for instance, is typically sourced from nearby establishments through personal negotiation. As one vendor noted:

"I am on my own, but I take water from the nearest building" -(Participant 12)

However, the challenge extends beyond utilities. The fear of eviction and the unpredictability of vending spots introduce daily uncertainty. Vendors are routinely displaced by city authorities or pressured by informal gatekeepers. One vendor described the situation bluntly:

"The authority (KCC) doesn't let me stay on the roadside for long. I have to pay bribes to local authorities like the police and the market committee. If any issues come up, I must move. But if I keep paying the fee, they don't interfere with my daily business" -(Participant 6)

Such experiences reflect a broader absence of institutional protection, leaving vendors vulnerable to arbitrary rules and informal rent-seeking.

Market Dynamics: *Competing for Prime Spots in a Crowded Urban Economy*

The location of a vending spot can make or break a vendor's livelihood. High-footfall areas are essential for attracting consistent customers, yet these spots are fiercely contested. In Khulna, key junctions like Nirala Mor, Shibbari Mor, and Dakbangla are especially coveted due to their pedestrian traffic and commercial activity. One vendor explained:

"This is a high-traffic, congested area, and lots of people come here and buy snacks" -(Participant 12)

Vendors often compete not just to secure these spots, but to maintain them amidst shifting enforcement and local power dynamics. At well-known areas like New Market, high customer volumes come hand in hand with intense competition. A vendor operating in that location observed:

> *"There are around 50 to 100 vendors here selling different kinds of food. But I still have a good number of customers"* - (Participant 11)

This balance between competition and opportunity characterizes much of the market dynamics in Khulna's Street vending economy.

Mobility Challenges: *Navigating Evictions and Everyday Movement*

The ability to remain mobile and adapt to sudden disruptions is a critical survival strategy. Vendors frequently face forced relocation due to city operations or lack of customer traffic in certain areas. Those with lightweight or easily movable carts are better equipped to handle such interruptions. One vendor reflected on this advantage:

> *"As my cart is light and easy to move, I didn't face much trouble during eviction operations by the city corporation"* - (Participant 12)

This mobility not only reduces operational downtime but also underscores the vendor's need to remain flexible in a volatile urban setting.

Operational and Regulatory Challenges: Street vendors in Khulna operate within an uncertain and often exploitative regulatory environment. From the absence of formal permits to entrenched practices of bribery, the regulatory structure poses significant barriers for those trying to earn a living through vending.

Permits and Barriers: *Structural Barriers of Operation in Legal Grey Area*

Most vendors lacked legal permits or formal recognition for their businesses. Instead, they relied on informal negotiations or the goodwill of nearby shop owners to claim space and conduct daily operations. One vendor explained the arrangement simply:

> *"There's no legal authority involved here. I got permission from the shopkeeper behind me to sit and sell my snacks"* - (Participant 12)

This absence of institutional legitimacy forces vendors to operate in a precarious zone where their right to vend can be challenged at any moment. Without legal recognition, they remain vulnerable to both harassment and sudden eviction.

Corruption and Informal Payments: *Unauthorized Payments as a Price for Survival*

To secure vending spots or avoid eviction, vendors frequently had to make unofficial payments to political middlemen, local authorities, or individuals posing as city officials. In several cases, these transactions were described not only as burdensome but also as coercive. One vendor recalled the pressure he faced:

> *"I was threatened by a local political leader who demanded 2,000 taka to let me keep this spot. Before the July-August revolution, workers from the ruling party used to eat for free without paying. After the revolution, they stopped coming around"* -(Participant 3)

He further described how his belongings were confiscated during an eviction drive:

> *"During the eviction process, the ward councilor seized my chair and cooking equipment. I had to apply to the city corporation and get a slip from an officer to get my things back"* -(Participant 3)

Another vendor operating near New Market area reflected on a common experience:

> *"I had to pay 100 taka to people who claimed to be city corporation employees. They didn't give any receipt or slip"* - (Participant 11)

Such payments, often made under pressure and without accountability, were widely reported by participants. In another case, a vendor described the routine collection of money by unidentified local groups:

> *"I had to pay 200 taka every Thursday to people in this area. I don't even know who they were. They collected money from us, from hawkers and even beggars near Dakbangla and Shonkho Market. But after the July-August revolution, they all disappeared. By the grace of Allah, things are better now"* -(Participant 6)

These accounts point to a deeper problem. The absence of a transparent licensing system doesn't just complicate legal recognition for vendors - it invites informal gatekeeping, exploitation, and a culture of fear. For most participants, this broken regulatory structure was not only a barrier to stability but also a constant reminder of how insecure their livelihoods really are.

Cultural Influence on Street Food Choices: Food vending practices in Khulna are shaped by local culture, customer preferences, and age-based trends. Vendors respond not only to economic conditions but also to what people in their communities expect and enjoy. The foods they choose to sell reflect a balance between tradition, popularity, and what is practical to prepare and sell.

Cultural Preferences: *Appreciating Local Taste and Tradition*

Cultural familiarity plays a major role in determining what food vendors offer. Items such as '*fuchka'*, '*chotpoti'*, and fried snacks remain top choices because they are culturally rooted and widely liked. These items are affordable and tasty, making them reliable sellers. One vendor proudly shared his specialty:

> *"Among all the food stalls here, many people prefer and recommend my 'Halim because I cook it with beef"* -(Participant 3)

Some foods become more popular in certain seasons. A sugarcane juice seller explained that demand increases during hot weather:

> *"People usually drink sugarcane juice when they feel thirsty or dehydrated, especially in summer"* -(Participant 2)

These examples show how vendors match their products with both cultural tastes and seasonal needs.

Consumer Behavior: *Youth as Key Demographic*

Most vendors said that young people make up the majority of their customers. Urban youth, in particular, like fast foods that fit their taste and routine. This affects both what is sold and how it is served. One vendor said:

> *"Since I sell fast food like burgers, pizza, chicken fry, French fries, meatballs, samosas, and wontons, most of my customers are from the younger generation"* -(Participant 4)

Another vendor near a residential area explained:

> *"Most of my customers are polite since this area is close to a housing complex. They appreciate my food, especially the young people who come in the evening to enjoy fried snacks"* -(Participant 9)

These details show how age and timing influence customer habits and vendor planning.

Gender and Food Choices: *Influencing Vending Strategies*

Vendors also observed gender-based preferences. Certain items are more popular with women, while others have more general appeal. This helps vendors plan what to sell. Two of the vendors shared:

> *"Young people are the main customers here, and among them, about 80 percent of the girls prefer 'fuchka' and 'chotpoti'. They're very drawn to those items"* -(Participant 1)

> *"Most people Love sweet food. Most of the customer are female who are attracted to these dry sweets"* -(Participant 8)

Adaptation and Aspiration: Street vendors in Khulna operate in a setting shaped by uncertainty, flexibility, and ambition. Without formal licenses or infrastructure, they adapt through informal arrangements and seasonal strategies. While day-to-day survival is a constant concern, many also carry hopes of building something more permanent in the future.

Adaptive Practices: *Navigating Space and Season*

Most vendors secure their vending spots through personal relationships or informal deals. Without legal permission, they often depend on nearby shopkeepers or a mutual understanding within the community. As one vendor put it:

> *"There's no legal authority here. I just took permission from the shopkeeper behind me to sit and sell snacks"* -(Participant 12)

Another vendor shared a similar experience:

> *"I don't face major issues because I have a good relationship with the shopkeeper I'm sitting in front of"* -(Participant 9)

Adaptation also involves responding to seasonal changes in customer behavior and income. Many vendors noted that their earnings vary significantly between summer and winter. A sugarcane juice seller reported:

> *"I earn 2,500 in summer, but only about 400 in winter"* -(Participant 2)

Whereas, an ice-cream seller shared:

> *"In summer, my income is around 1,600, but during winter it drops to 500"* -(Participant 11)

These fluctuations show how deeply street vending is tied to seasonal rhythms and weather patterns.

Future Aspirations: *Hope Beyond the Pavement*

Despite their struggles, many vendors hope to transition to more formal and stable businesses. For most, the dream is to open a small restaurant or shop. However, limited access to capital or loans often stands in the way. As one vendor expressed:

> *"If I could get a small space, I'd set up a small restaurant. I think NGOs or policymakers should think about us and help us open an official store"* -(Participant 3)

Another echoed a similar thought:

> *"Making a change would require investment. If someone helps me, then I'll consider it"* -(Participant 6)

Even with the obstacles, the vendors remain hopeful. They see their current work as a foundation for something better. One said:

> *"I want to open a legal food shop or restaurant someday so I can work with more ease"* -(Participant 10)

Across the findings, it is evident that street vendors in Khulna operate within a complex intersection of survival, strategy, and aspiration. Their choices are shaped by socioeconomic pressures, urban infrastructure, market dynamics, and cultural expectations. They innovate, adapt, and lean on family and community networks while navigating a largely informal and unstable system. Despite facing structural barriers, corruption, and seasonal hardship, many look ahead with determination, seeing their current efforts not as an end but as a pathway toward future possibilities.

Discussion: The analysis reveals several critical insights (mention in Table 2) that influence the entrepreneurial choices and operations of the vendors.

Table 2. Key Findings

Key Points	Insights
Economic Necessity is a Primary Driver	Financial struggles and lack of formal employment opportunities were the main push factors for entering street food vending.
Desire for Financial Independence	The pull of autonomy and self-employment was a significant motivator.
Low Entry Barriers	The minimal capital requirement for starting a street food vending business made it an accessible entrepreneurial option.
Role of Family Support	Family contributions, both financial and operational, were vital in establishing and sustaining street food vending businesses.
Importance of Social Institutions	Family and local institutions played a significant role in supporting vendors, particularly in providing initial capital or resources.
Location is a Critical Success Factor	The importance of securing prime vending spots in high-traffic areas was crucial for business success.
Infrastructural Challenges	Limited access to basic utilities like water and spatial management posed significant operational challenges for vendors.
Regulatory Uncertainty and Corruption	The lack of formal permits and experiences with corruption created a precarious operating environment for vendors.
Adaptive Strategies	Vendors often adopted practices, securing informal agreements for vending spots and creating innovative, seasonal food offerings.
Cultural Embeddedness	Local tastes and cultural preferences significantly influenced food offerings, with traditional items being particularly popular.
Youth as Key Demographic	Young people formed a significant portion of the customer.
Gendered Food Preferences	Vendors noted distinct preferences in food choices between male and female customers, influencing their product offerings.
Aspirations for Formalization	Vendors aspired to expand their businesses into formal establishments like restaurants, indicating entrepreneurial ambitions beyond street vending.
Seasonal Variations	Vendors experienced significant fluctuations in income based on seasonal changes, necessitating adaptive strategies.

Socio-economic Forces Shaping Entrepreneurial Choice: The predominance of economic necessity as a primary driver for entering street food vending stated by the participants aligns strongly with Theory of Informal Economy [47]. This theory posits that informal economic activities arise as strategic responses to limitations in formal employment markets. The findings not only support this view but also provide a nuanced understanding of how it manifests in Khulna City's context. And the push factors identified in the study, such as financial struggles and lack of formal employment opportunities, echo the findings of Uddin, Bose and Ferdausi [52]. While economic necessity is a significant push factor, the findings also reveal important pull factors that align with classical entrepreneurship theories. The desire for independence and autonomy, expressed by the participants resonates with emphasis on entrepreneurship as a purposeful innovation and opportunity recognition process [2]. Additionally, this finding challenges the notion that informal sector participation is solely driven by necessity and supports the observations of Lokhande [18] on the motivational factors driving entrepreneurship, including the desire for self-reliance and establishing a distinct identity. The study extends this understanding by highlighting how vendors leverage this low-barrier entry point to exercise innovation and adaptability, particularly in response to seasonal changes and evolving customer preferences. This finding further supports Schumpeter's theory of entrepreneurship, which emphasizes innovation as a key driver of economic development [44]. Moreover, the crucial role of family support and social institutions (like NGOs) in enabling and sustaining street food businesses extends the understanding of the social networks that underpin informal entrepreneurship.

Navigating Urban Infrastructure and Market Dynamics: The recurring acknowledgment of the importance of location for vending by all participants aligns closely with Urban Ecology Theory discussed by Park, Burgess and McKenzie [49], demonstrating how these entrepreneurs adapt to and interact with their urban environment. The findings reveal how vendors' strategies for securing prime spots in high-traffic areas demonstrate their definitive understanding of urban spatial dynamics. The study also provides insights into the innovative ways vendors in Khulna City navigate these challenges, such as relying on nearby buildings for water and toilet access. This adaptability demonstrates the resilience emphasized in recent studies on street vendor responses to crises [45, 46]. In addition to that, the importance of mobility emphasized by most participants offered a new perspective on how vendors navigate the urban environment to dodge potential threats. This finding extends Urban Ecology

Theory by demonstrating how vendors' ability to relocate quickly in response to threats or opportunities is a crucial adaptation to the dynamic urban landscape of Khulna City.

Regulatory Barriers and Informal Governance: The findings reveal a nuanced picture of how vendors in Khulna City navigate structural challenges through adaptive strategies and informal networks. This resilience and creativity in overcoming bureaucratic hurdles aligned with Drucker's emphasis on opportunity recognition and risk-taking in entrepreneurship [2] . Moreover, the experiences of corruption and informal payments reported by vendors add to the study on regulatory barriers faced by street food vendors [53]. This study provided specific insights into how these practices manifest in Khulna City, offering a localized perspective that is often missing in broader studies on informal economies.

Cultural Influences on Vending Practices: The strong influence of local tastes and cultural preferences on vendors' offerings supports the assertion about the role of cultural norms in shaping entrepreneurial activities [21]. The findings extend this understanding by providing specific examples of how cultural preferences in Khulna City, such as the popularity of traditional items like '*Fuchka'* and '*Chotpati'*, shape the street food landscape. Besides, the identification of youth as a key demographic and the recognition of gendered food preferences demonstrates vendors nuanced understanding of their potential market. This finding aligns with the study of Rajagopal on consumer behavior in informal markets [22] and extends the understanding of how social factors influence entrepreneurial strategies in street food vending.

Resilience and Aspirations: The adaptive strategies employed by vendors, such as securing informal agreements for vending spots and constantly making innovative, seasonal food offerings demonstrate their entrepreneurial spirit as emphasized in the theories of Drucker [2], Schumpeter and Opie [44]. Furthermore, the aspirations of many vendors to expand their businesses into formal establishments highlight an entrepreneurial vision that extends beyond mere survival.

Conclusion: The objective of the study was to explore the factors influencing entrepreneurship choices of street food vendors in Khulna City, primarily focusing on socio-economic circumstances and their influences, urban dynamics, and operational challenges. It explored the nuanced interplay of push factors- such as financial hardship and lack of formal employment and pull factors including autonomy and low start-up costs. It found family support networks and contributions from NGOs and/or local bodies to be pivotal in providing initial capital and additional operational assistance. Accordingly urban market dynamics emerged as a critical influence, where vendors distinctively stressed the importance of securing high-traffic locations. Their resourcefulness reflected through adaptive tactics and forging informal agreements to legitimize their operations. Additionally, vendors were found to be working within an uncertain regulatory environment typical to informal economy, thus facing widespread demands for informal payments and highlighting the need for more transparent regulations facilitating their livelihood ventures. Despite these obstacles, they consistently displayed remarkable ingenuity in navigating bureaucratic hurdles. Cultural embeddedness also played a key role like traditional offerings tailored to youth-dominated customer base. Many vendors expressed aspirations to formalize and expand their enterprises, challenging the notion of street vending as merely subsistence activity. Overall, the findings illuminate street food vending as a resilient, innovative form of informal entrepreneurship, driven by necessity and opportunity while contributing to Khulna's economic vitality and thus warrants targeted policy support. Therefore, it is imperative to reform the regulatory framework to develop clear and assistive guidelines for street food vending. Financial inclusion initiatives should be implemented to facilitate vendors' access to financial services and microcredit programs, potentially through forging partnerships with NGOs and microfinance institutions. It is thus incumbent upon policy makers to integrate street food vending into urban development plans by recognizing its role in the city's economy and culture.

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