

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND CULTURAL IMPACT OF FOOD CART BUSINESSES IN ZAMBOANGA CITY

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ABSTRACT. *This study explores customer satisfaction with food cart businesses in Zamboanga City, Philippines, focusing on food quality, beverage adequacy, pricing, and staff performance, alongside the lived experiences of patrons. Employing a parallel mixed-methods research design, the study collected quantitative data from 150 survey respondents and qualitative insights from ten in-depth interview participants. Quantitative findings revealed high satisfaction levels across key aspects of food cart services, with an overall mean score of 3.27 for food quality. Respondents particularly valued the taste and freshness of food, while pricing satisfaction was notably high, emphasizing the affordability of food cart offerings compared to traditional dining options. Qualitative analysis identified two main themes: emotional and sensory satisfaction, and nostalgia and cultural connection. Participants described food carts as stress relievers and sources of comfort after long workdays, underscoring the psychological benefits of familiar and enjoyable food options. Additionally, the availability of local delicacies evoked nostalgia and reinforced cultural ties, highlighting the importance of variety and cultural relevance in customer satisfaction. These findings indicate that food cart businesses significantly contribute to affordable, diverse, and culturally meaningful dining experiences, fostering customer loyalty and repeat patronage. The study also emphasizes the need for enhanced quality control and policies to ensure public health and safety. Future research should consider the influence of cultural and seasonal events on food cart profitability and customer satisfaction to provide deeper insights into the sector's potential.*

Keywords: Customer satisfaction, Food cartsbusiness, Food hygiene and practices, Parallel mixed-methods, Tourism

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted various sectors, particularly the food and beverage industry. Before the pandemic, customers typically dined in at food establishments. However, the pandemic restrictions led to a surge in food deliveries, making it a popular option for many[1]. As the world transitions to the new normal post-pandemic, food cart businesses have gained traction. Unlike traditional food establishments, food carts do not require a physical store, reducing overhead costs and increasing flexibility. Social media testimonials have highlighted the potential profitability of such ventures, with many families benefiting from this business model [2], [3].

Zamboanga Peninsula, strategically located in Western Mindanao, serves as a cultural and tourist hub[4], making it a promising location for food businesses. The region's diverse culture and influx of tourists create a conducive environment for food cart businesses to thrive. These businesses not only cater to the locals' culinary preferences but also attract tourists seeking diverse food experiences. Hence, food cart businesses are emerging as significant income sources for individuals and families in the region.

Numerous studies have explored the food cart business globally and within the Philippine context. Food carts and food carts have become popular business models due to their mobility and lower startup costs[5]. In the Philippines, the food cart industry has shown substantial growth, with annual revenues exceeding P1 billion, indicating its viability and popularity [6]. Statistical data from these studies underscore the potential of food cart businesses as profitable ventures.

Despite the promising outlook, a research gap exists concerning consumers' perceptions and experiences with food cart services. While previous studies have primarily focused on the viability and economic aspects of food cart businesses, there is limited literature on customer satisfaction and experiences. Understanding these aspects is crucial for

improving service quality and ensuring long-term business success [7], [8].

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring customers' perceptions and experiences with food cart businesses in Zamboanga Peninsula. The findings will provide empirical evidence on how food cart owners can enhance their services, ultimately contributing to more profitable business ventures. The insights gained can guide future research directions and offer practical recommendations for food cart entrepreneurs.

As the food business continues to be one of the most effective industries globally, it encompasses a wide range of activities from production to distribution[9]. This includes food producers, processors, wholesalers, distributors, and retailers. The food service sector, particularly food carts, has evolved to meet modern consumer demands, offering mobility and convenience[10]. This evolution reflects broader trends in the food industry, emphasizing flexibility and customer engagement [11].

In Zamboanga City, there is a strong enthusiasm for food-related businesses, influenced by the city's rich culinary heritage from Spanish colonization. The transformation from traditional fixed-location eateries to mobile food carts has made it easier for sellers to reach consumers. This shift aligns with global trends where food trucks and carts are gaining popularity as profitable small food business formats for consumers [12].

Customer satisfaction is a key indicator of service quality in food-related businesses. It reflects the consumers' intellectual and emotional responses to service encounters. High levels of customer satisfaction are often linked to repeat business and positive word-of-mouth, which are critical for the success of food cart businesses. Evaluating customer satisfaction involves assessing various parameters, including food quality, dining ambiance, menu options, pricing, and staff service [13].

As a food services management educator and practitioner, the researcher has observed the prevalence and popularity of food cart businesses in the locality. However, there is a lack of information on the current state of these services and customer satisfaction levels. This study aims to address this gap by providing insights into customer experiences and identifying best practices that contribute to the success of food cart businesses.

The data obtained from this study will offer valuable insights for enhancing food service and management techniques. These insights can be incorporated into the university's food services management program, promoting better business practices among future entrepreneurs. Additionally, the findings will highlight the unique culinary practices of Zamboanguenos, contributing to the region's cultural and economic development.

This study seeks to determine customer satisfaction levels in food cart businesses in Zamboanga City. The specific research objectives are: to evaluate the level of satisfaction in terms of food quality, menu options, pricing, and staff service; and to understand the lived experiences of customers with the services provided by food cart businesses. These objectives aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing customer satisfaction and the overall success of food cart businesses in the region.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Food Cart Business Around the World

Food carts and food trucks have emerged as popular and profitable models for small food enterprises worldwide. These mobile kitchens, parked on sidewalks, cater to local pedestrians, offering a variety of foods and allowing vendors to cook and serve fresh meals on the spot [14, 15]. This format's ability to cater to a broad demographic, regardless of social status or gender, has contributed to its global appeal.

In Malaysia, the food cart industry is rapidly expanding. Rahmat et al. [16] noted that operators strive to improve customer satisfaction through competitive culinary services, particularly targeting the younger population. The lower initial investment and operating costs compared to traditional restaurants make food carts an attractive business option.

The popularity of food carts is also evident in the United States. The food truck industry in the US has seen a notable 10.9% growth, even amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic [17]. This growth is expected to continue as consumers increasingly prefer quick, affordable, and convenient meal options, particularly in urban areas and among college students. Additionally, the lower operational costs of food trucks compared to traditional restaurants make them an appealing option for new entrepreneurs, fueling further market expansion [18].

Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality

Customer satisfaction is a critical factor in the success of food cart businesses. While starting a food cart business requires minimal initial investment [19], maintaining customer satisfaction is crucial for sustaining the business. High-quality service and proper hygiene standards are essential components of customer satisfaction. Williams and Naumann [20] further elaborated that customer satisfaction significantly influences business outcomes, including repeat

patronage and positive word-of-mouth. They noted that dissatisfaction could lead to negative publicity and revenue loss, while high satisfaction levels could encourage repeat business and customer loyalty.

Pricing also plays a crucial role in customer satisfaction. Zhao, Yao, Liu, and Yang [21] highlighted that customers are more likely to return to a food establishment if they perceive the prices as fair and reasonable. This finding is particularly relevant for budget-conscious consumers, such as students, who prioritize affordable yet quality food options.

The Importance of Cleanliness in Food Services

Cleanliness is a top priority in the food services sector, significantly impacting customer perceptions and experiences. Martinez [22] noted that cleanliness is a major criterion for customers when choosing a place to eat, affecting their overall dining experience. Jones [23] emphasized that maintaining high hygiene standards is essential for attracting and retaining customers. Forty-four per cent of Americans consider cleanliness a significant factor when deciding whether to return to a food establishment [24].

In the context of food cart businesses, maintaining proper hygiene standards is crucial. The Food and Nutrition Research Institute (FNRI) of the DOST in the Philippines has warned that street food carts often do not meet the same hygiene standards as certified establishments [25]. Local governments have implemented measures to improve hygiene practices among street vendors, such as providing standardized carts and requiring food handling training [26].

Economic Impact and Community Development

Food carts significantly contribute to the local economy and community development. Glicker [27] conducted a comprehensive analysis of Portland's street food market, highlighting the economic impact of food carts on the city's development. The study underscored the importance of food carts in supporting local economies and their popularity among residents.

In the Philippines, food carts are a crucial part of the urban landscape, contributing to regional economic growth. Tacardon, Ong and Gumasing [28] found that convenience and perceived food quality significantly influence purchase intentions, highlighting the importance of these factors in the success of street food businesses. Subong-Espina et al. [29] noted that food cart businesses in Bacolod City provide low-risk business opportunities and contribute to regional economic growth.

Moreover, food cart franchising has proven to be a cost-effective method for expanding food cart businesses. Sible et al. [30] revealed that franchising offers significant benefits in marketing, management, and financial operations, making it an effective approach for growing food cart businesses. This model allows for strategic planning and staff supervision, which are crucial for operational success.

Social Influence and Customer Loyalty

Social influence plays a significant role in customer loyalty and patronage of food carts. Alqueza, et al. [31] examined the social influences on fast-food patronage in Cebu City, highlighting the role of word-of-mouth and quality in driving customer loyalty. Positive social interactions and recommendations can significantly impact a customer's decision to patronize a food cart.

Ruiz et al. [32] discussed the impact of food value on customer loyalty, finding that basic value offers enhance satisfaction in traditional restaurants, while differential value offers do not significantly affect satisfaction in fast-food establishments. This finding suggests that providing high-value food options can enhance customer loyalty and satisfaction in food cart businesses.

Empowerment and Economic Opportunities

Food carts also play a role in empowering individuals and providing economic opportunities, particularly for women. Villanueva et al. studied the economic and social empowerment of women street food vendors in Dumaguete City, revealing that this sector generates significant daily income despite minimal capital investment. This finding highlights the potential of food cart businesses to provide livelihoods and support economic independence.

Romero, et al. [33] emphasized the role of street vending in alleviating poverty and providing job opportunities in Manila. Street vending and food carts offer accessible economic opportunities for many individuals, contributing to community development and poverty alleviation.

In conclusion, the literature highlights the significant role of food cart businesses in various contexts globally and locally. These businesses offer a viable and profitable option for entrepreneurs due to their low initial investment and operational costs. Customer satisfaction, influenced by service quality, pricing, and cleanliness, is crucial for the success of food cart businesses. Furthermore, food carts contribute to local economies, provide economic opportunities, and empower individuals, particularly women. The global and local perspectives underscore the importance of food cart businesses as vital components of the food service industry and their potential to drive economic and community development.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a parallel mixed-methods research design. In this design, both quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously or sequentially but analyzed independently. The results from each data strand are not merged or directly compared but are reported separately[34]. This design allows for a comprehensive analysis by capturing both numerical data and detailed insights from participants. A multiple-methods research approach is appropriate for this study because it enables the researcher to quantify customer satisfaction levels through surveys and gain a deeper understanding through qualitative interviews [35].

Research Locale

The study was conducted in Zamboanga City, known as Asia's Latin City due to the widespread use of the Chavacano dialect. Zamboanga City is a significant producer of canned and bottled sardines and engages in the milling of coconut oil, and processing of wood, seaweed, rubber, and fish. The city has a rich cultural heritage influenced by Spanish colonization and a historical barter trade with neighbouring Asian countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and China. Its natural resources and cultural influences have fostered a strong tradition of food innovation and preparation, making it an ideal setting for studying food cart businesses. The study

focused on areas within the city where food cart businesses are commonly found, including the city proper, schools, offices, boulevards, terminals, and barangays.

Research Sample and Sampling Technique

The study targeted individuals who patronize food cart businesses in Zamboanga City, including government employees, private workers, students, and unemployed individuals, regardless of age and sex. The sample size aimed at 150 respondents to ensure a good representation of customer types and their satisfaction levels with food cart services. A minimum of 50 participants for food and beverage evaluations to obtain reliable consumer opinions[36]. The study successfully gathered more than the prescribed number, enhancing the representation of different customer categories. For qualitative data, ten participants were selected from the 150 respondents for in-depth interviews to validate and complement the quantitative findings. The participants were purposely selected based on their willingness to take part in the study and to share their lived experiences.

The interviews focused on overall satisfaction and experiences with food cart services. Purposive sampling was employed, as it allowed the researcher to select respondents who fit the study's criteria of being food cart customers. This method ensures that the sample is relevant to the research objectives [37].

Research Instrument

A modified survey questionnaire was utilized, adapted from instruments as cited in Smith, White-McNeil, and Ali[38]. The instrument was originally designed to assess student satisfaction with food carts and canteens and was pilot-tested with hospitality management students for clarity and relevance. The survey included demographic and behavioural data (gender, age group, classification, nationality, meal plan type, and visit frequency) and statements regarding food quality, dining ambience, value for money, food and beverage options, and service quality.

The modified instrument for this study consisted of three parts:

1. Part I: Demographic profile of respondents (optional name, age, sex, and customer type).
2. Part II: Statements on satisfaction levels in food cart businesses, covering food quality, food and beverage options, prices, and staff service. Each category had five statements rated on a four-point Likert scale (4- highly satisfied, 3- satisfied, 2- moderately satisfied, 1- not satisfied).
3. Part III: Qualitative interview questions addressing overall satisfaction and experiences with food cart services.

Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument

The survey questionnaire was reviewed by the research adviser and internal validators (panel members) for grammar, appropriateness, and consistency. External validators with expertise in food preparation and business, including food cart operators and faculty members in food services, assessed the relevance and suitability of the content. After revisions, the instrument was validated by the panel and external experts.

For reliability, the survey was administered to 20 non-respondents with similar characteristics to the final sample. Cronbach's Alpha in SPSS was used to determine reliability,

yielding the following results: quality of foods ($r=.841$), dining ambiance ($r=.975$), food and beverage options ($r=.750$), price of goods ($r=.720$), and quality of staff service ($r=.938$), with an overall reliability of .949, indicating high reliability.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the university president, dean, and program chair. The researcher personally distributed and collected the survey questionnaires to ensure data reliability and confidentiality. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and ethical considerations, including their right to decline participation. Survey questionnaires were immediately retrieved, and data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Quantitative data were collected through survey responses on satisfaction levels. Alternately, qualitative data were gathered through personal interviews with ten selected participants. Interview data were transcribed for thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to assess respondent perceptions. Thematic analysis was employed for qualitative data to identify key themes and insights.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to stringent ethical guidelines to protect the rights, privacy, and well-being of all participants throughout the research process. Participation was entirely voluntary, with individuals fully briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and potential benefits, allowing them to make informed decisions. Signed informed consent forms outlined their rights, including the freedom to decline specific questions or withdraw at any time without repercussions, ensuring transparency and trust. Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained by not collecting identifiable information and coding responses to prevent tracing data back to individuals. All data were securely stored in encrypted digital files or locked physical cabinets, accessible only to authorized personnel. During analysis and reporting, only aggregated data were presented to further protect participants' identities. These measures were implemented in line with ethical research standards and institutional policies, ensuring the integrity of the study while prioritizing participant rights and confidentiality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of Satisfaction of Food Cart Business in Terms of Quality of Foods

The data presented in Table 1 illustrates the respondents' level of satisfaction with the quality of food provided by food cart businesses in Zamboanga City. The overall mean satisfaction score of 3.27 indicates that respondents are generally highly satisfied with the quality of food. This is supported by the high satisfaction ratings for specific attributes such as taste ($M = 3.47$), freshness ($M = 3.28$), and the appropriate temperature of hot food ($M = 3.31$). These findings are consistent with previous studies which emphasize that food quality is a critical determinant of customer satisfaction in the food service industry [39], [40]. The high ratings for taste and freshness suggest that food cart operators in Zamboanga City are effectively meeting consumer expectations in these areas,

which is essential for maintaining a loyal customer base and ensuring repeat business [41].

Despite the overall high satisfaction, the slightly lower mean scores for the healthiness of the food ($M = 3.06$) and the temperature of cold food ($M = 3.23$) indicate areas for potential improvement. These aspects, while still rated positively, highlight the importance of continuous quality control and enhancement to meet all dimensions of customer expectations fully. The emphasis on the healthiness of food aligns with the increasing consumer awareness and demand for healthier food options, as noted by [42]. Addressing these areas could further enhance customer satisfaction and competitiveness of food cart businesses in Zamboanga City. The findings corroborate the significance of maintaining high standards of food quality and safety, which are crucial for the success and sustainability of food cart enterprises [43].

Table 1 Respondents' Level of Satisfaction on the Food Cart Businesses in terms of Quality of Foods

Question Items	Mean	Description
1. The food tastes delicious.	3.47	Highly Satisfied
2. The food is fresh.	3.28	Highly Satisfied
3.	3.06	Satisfied
4. Hot food is served at the right temperature.	3.31	Highly Satisfied
5. Cold food is served at the right temperature.	3.23	Satisfied
Overall Mean for Quality of Foods	3.27	Highly Satisfied

Level of Satisfaction of Food Cart Business in Terms of Food and Beverage Adequacy

Table 3 presents the respondents' level of satisfaction regarding the adequacy of food and beverage options at food cart businesses in Zamboanga City. The overall grand mean of 3.23 indicates a general satisfaction among respondents, reflecting positively on the variety provided by these establishments. Specifically, the variety of beverages received the highest satisfaction rating ($M = 3.38$), followed closely by snack items ($M = 3.27$) and breakfast items ($M = 3.06$). These high ratings suggest that food cart operators successfully cater to a diverse range of preferences, especially for beverages and snacks, which are crucial for maintaining customer interest and loyalty [44]. The adequacy of breakfast items, despite being rated highly satisfied, still points to an area where operators might focus on further diversifying options to enhance customer experience.

The ratings for lunch ($M = 3.21$) and dinner items ($M = 3.23$) also indicate general satisfaction but highlight the potential for improvement. Ensuring a diverse and adequate variety of main meal options is essential, as it directly impacts customer decisions on where to dine during more significant meal times [45]. The overall satisfaction with food and beverage adequacy underscores the importance of variety in food service, aligning with the findings of Sari and Sunarti [46] who emphasized the need for competitive culinary services to attract and retain customers. By expanding the range of lunch and dinner options, food cart businesses can potentially increase customer satisfaction and attract a broader customer

base, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in the local market.

Table 2 Respondents' Level of Satisfaction on the Food Cart Businesses in terms of Food and Beverage Adequacy

Question Items	Mean	Description
1. here is an adequate variety of breakfast items.	3.06	Highly Satisfied
2. here is an adequate variety of lunch items.	3.21	Satisfied
3. here is an adequate variety of dinner items.	3.23	Satisfied
4. here is an adequate variety of beverages.	3.38	Highly Satisfied
5. here is an adequate variety of snack items.	3.27	Highly Satisfied
Overall Mean for Food and Beverage Adequacy	3.23	Satisfied

Level of Satisfaction of Food Cart Business in Terms of Food Prices

Table 3 illustrates the respondents' level of satisfaction with food prices at food cart businesses in Zamboanga City. The grand mean of 3.45 indicates that overall, respondents are highly satisfied with the pricing of food items offered by food carts. Specifically, items being cheaper compared to fast food chains received the highest satisfaction rating ($M = 3.53$), followed by items being cheaper compared to restaurants ($M = 3.46$). This suggests that one of the primary attractions of food carts is their affordability, which resonates with budget-conscious consumers seeking value for money. Emphasized that reasonable pricing is a critical factor in customer satisfaction and repeat patronage in the food service industry. The high satisfaction ratings for the comparative affordability of food cart items highlight their competitive edge over more traditional dining establishments.

Table 3 Respondents' Level of Satisfaction with the Food Cart Businesses in terms of Food Prices

Question Items	Mean	Description
1. the prices of the items follow the suggested retail price.	3.42	Highly Satisfied
2. food and beverages are reasonably priced.	3.40	Highly Satisfied
3. items are cheaper compared to fast food chains.	3.53	Highly Satisfied
4. items are cheaper compared to restaurants.	3.46	Highly Satisfied
5. items are cheaper compared to eateries/canteens.	3.43	Highly Satisfied
Overall Mean for Food Prices	3.45	Highly Satisfied

Moreover, the satisfaction with prices following the suggested retail price ($M = 3.42$) and the overall reasonableness of prices ($M = 3.40$) further underscore the effectiveness of food cart businesses in meeting consumer expectations regarding affordability. This is particularly significant as it aligns with the broader trend [21], where the cost-effectiveness of food carts attracts a wide customer base, including students and low-income earners. The data suggest that food cart operators in Zamboanga City are successfully leveraging their pricing strategies to attract and retain

customers, thereby enhancing their market competitiveness. By maintaining lower prices compared to fast food chains, restaurants, and eateries, food carts not only provide economic benefits to consumers but also reinforce their role as vital components of the local food service ecosystem [47], [48].

Level of Satisfaction of Food Cart Business in Terms of Staff Quality

Table 4 presents the respondents' level of satisfaction with the staff quality at food cart businesses in Zamboanga City. The grand mean of 3.45 indicates that respondents are highly satisfied with the overall quality of staff at these establishments. The highest satisfaction rating was for the politeness and friendliness of the staff ($M = 3.53$), which underscores the importance of interpersonal interactions in the food service industry. According to Ali and Ryu (2015), positive staff behaviour significantly enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty, suggesting that friendly and polite service is a crucial determinant of repeat patronage. The high satisfaction ratings for staff competence in handling orders ($M = 3.46$) and their promptness in service ($M = 3.43$) further highlight the effective operational practices of food cart businesses.

Table 4 Respondents' Level of Satisfaction on the Food Cart Businesses in terms of Staff Quality

Question Items	Mean	Description
1. the prices of the items follow the suggested retail price.	3.42	Highly Satisfied
2. food and beverages are reasonably priced.	3.40	Highly Satisfied
3. items are cheaper compared to fast food chains.	3.53	Highly Satisfied
4. items are cheaper compared to restaurants.	3.46	Highly Satisfied
5. items are cheaper compared to eateries/canteens.	3.43	Highly Satisfied
Overall Mean for Staff Quality	3.45	Highly Satisfied

Moreover, the data suggest that the staff's knowledge about the menu and ability to answer customer queries ($M = 3.42$) play a vital role in creating a positive dining experience. This finding aligns with the research by Smyth [49], which emphasizes that well-informed staff contribute to higher customer satisfaction by providing accurate and helpful information. The consistency in high satisfaction scores across various aspects of staff quality indicates that food cart businesses in Zamboanga City prioritize training and customer service, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in the local market. Effective staff performance not only improves customer satisfaction but also supports the overall reputation and success of the food cart business [47].

Experiences of Food Consumers on Food Carts

Two themes emerged to answer the second research objective, The two themes are: (b) Nostalgia and Cultural Connection

Theme 1: Emotional and Sensory Satisfaction

Many customers expressed how food cart businesses provide them with significant emotional and sensory satisfaction,

acting as a stress reliever and offering a comforting variety of favorite foods and drinks.

“Based on my experience as a fan of food cart businesses, actually the foods and drinks I used to consume from these businesses were my stress reliever after a long day of work. I can say that I’m satisfied with the choices that they offer in terms of the food and beverages. Most of their servings are my favorite and it all tastes good. I also like the way they scope their servings is too big, you could say that the amount you spent is worthy it. Anyway, I have a great experience in every food cart or toro-toro that I’ve bought or dined at because their goods are so mouth-watering, with various options and the most important is affordable.”

This statement highlights the significant role that food cart businesses play in providing emotional and sensory satisfaction to their customers. The respondent points out the affordability, variety, and portion size as key factors contributing to their satisfaction. This aligns with the quantitative findings that show high levels of satisfaction with the quality and pricing of food from food carts ($M = 3.27$ and 3.45 , respectively). The comfort and relief derived from these experiences also underscore the psychological benefits of engaging with familiar and enjoyable food options, which is consistent with the literature emphasizing the role of food in emotional well-being [50].

Theme 2: Nostalgia and Cultural Connection

Several participants appreciated the cultural and nostalgic value provided by food cart businesses, which serve local delicacies that remind them of their hometowns and childhood memories.

“My experience with the quality of services provided by the food cart businesses, regarding their food and beverage options, has been exceptional primarily due to the wide variety of food and beverages food carts sell and serve. Mostly, they serve local delicacies and beverages which I used to consume when I was young in my hometown. Some food carts specialize in selling multiple types of food, while others offer a variety of different food options. A food cart may sell fish balls, kikiam, and squid balls while another can sell taho, biko, suman, and puto. It is the same for beverages as well; a food cart may sell coconut juice and coconut pandan while another sells halo-halo and calamansi. Food carts are very convenient, and each one provides different varieties of food and beverage options.”

This statement underscores the nostalgic and cultural connections that food cart businesses foster among their customers. The wide variety of local delicacies serves as a bridge to memories and cultural heritage, enhancing the overall dining experience. The quantitative data supports this sentiment, with high satisfaction ratings for the variety of food and beverages ($M = 3.23$). This aligns with the findings of Maraña, Mena and Niegas[51], which highlight the importance of cultural relevance and variety in food service satisfaction. By offering traditional and diverse options, food cart businesses not only cater to taste preferences but also fulfill a deeper emotional and cultural need, thereby strengthening customer loyalty and satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that food cart businesses in Zamboanga City significantly contribute to customer

satisfaction through various factors such as food quality, pricing, and emotional and cultural connections. The high satisfaction ratings in terms of food variety and pricing suggest that these businesses effectively meet consumer expectations for affordable and diverse food options. The qualitative data further supports these findings, highlighting that customers view food cart offerings as both a source of comfort and a nostalgic connection to their cultural heritage. These elements are crucial in enhancing the overall dining experience, leading to repeat patronage and customer loyalty. Additionally, the study reveals areas for improvement, particularly in ensuring proper food handling and hygiene. While customers generally trust the cleanliness and safety of the food, concerns about food hygiene suggest a need for stricter adherence to sanitation standards to maintain and enhance customer trust. The overall positive feedback on the emotional and sensory satisfaction provided by food carts underscores their role in the local food industry, not only as convenient and affordable dining options but also as cultural touchpoints that reinforce community ties and personal memories. By addressing these areas and continuing to innovate, food cart businesses in Zamboanga City can further solidify their position as essential components of the local culinary landscape.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the limitations and findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Future research may explore the impact of seasonal and cultural festivals on the profitability and customer satisfaction of food cart businesses in Zamboanga City. Such studies could use longitudinal data to examine how these events influence consumer behavior and sales trends over time. Additionally, incorporating a comparative analysis of food cart businesses in different regions could provide a broader understanding of the factors contributing to their success and the unique challenges they face. This approach will offer a more comprehensive view of the food cart industry's dynamics and inform strategies for sustainable growth and development.

To ensure public health and safety, it is recommended that local government authorities implement stricter policies and regular inspections for street food vendors. These policies should include mandatory training on food hygiene and safety for all vendors, periodic health checks for food handlers, and the provision of standardized, sanitary food preparation and storage facilities. Furthermore, establishing designated vending zones with access to clean water and waste disposal systems can help maintain hygiene standards. These measures will not only protect public health but also enhance consumer trust and satisfaction with street food options.

Educational institutions are also encouraged to integrate the concept of food cart businesses into entrepreneurship courses to provide students with practical insights and hands-on experience in this growing sector. This integration can include case studies, field visits, and guest lectures from successful food cart entrepreneurs. Additionally, offering modules on business planning, marketing, and food safety specific to food carts can equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to start and manage their food cart

businesses effectively. By fostering an entrepreneurial mindset focused on innovation and adaptability, educational programs can prepare students to contribute to the local economy and the broader food service industry.

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