



## Assessing the Challenges and Opportunities of Street Food Experiences in Sri Lanka: Insights from Tourism Stakeholders

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### ABSTRACT

In the contemporary world, Street food is emerging as one of the most vital areas for the tourism industry. Thus, the street food industry can create a great impact on a tourist destination. However, this industry encounters challenges and opportunities in sustaining the quality of street food experiences for tourists. Hence, this research aimed to explore the Challenges and Opportunities for Street Food Experiences in Sri Lanka. Thus, utilizing the purposive sampling method, 27 structured interviews were conducted, and data was analyzed via content analysis. Hygiene issues, food quality Issues, regulatory issues, collaboration issues, Inadequate infrastructure facilities, and lack of food choices were identified as the challenges. Increasing popularity, availability of ingredients, unique food culture, availability of events, and social media support were identified as opportunities for street food experiences. Conducting regular training and inspections and enhancing collaborations among stakeholders contribute to enhancing street food experiences. Moreover, Future researchers



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should conduct more studies in developing nations on economic impacts, cultural exchanges, and tourist behaviors related to street foods.

**Keywords:** *Challenges, Experiences, Food, Opportunities, Stakeholders, Street, Tourism*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Generally, food consumption is acknowledged as a set of situational and changing social practices, where food is no longer just a source of nourishment. It is also a means of social, cultural, economic, and political interaction. In this light, food is an important consideration for tourists when selecting a holiday destination. It is not regarded as a basic requirement of tourists, however rather as a major draw to some locations. According to Park, Kim, and Yeoman (2019) it is the third largest factor in deciding on a vacation destination. Tsai and Wang (2017) stated that Tourists generally spend about 40% of their cash on meals while on vacation. In addition, Kivela and Crofts (2006) mentioned that tourists who are interested in culinary activities and food hunting are solely interested in the cuisines and food culture of a place while choosing a vacation spot. Thus, food has been a strong transmitter of history, practice, culture, social behavior, and pleasure; it is more than the sum of food components.

Cruwys, Bevelander, and Hermans (2015) state that every person's social identity is influenced by their diet. Accordingly, religion or race, social and economic variables, motivation, past eating experience, food-related personality characteristics, and other psychological aspects all impact how people choose food. Thus, Cohen and Avieli (2004) mentioned that when people travel overseas, they are taken out of their daily routine. Consequently, they are unable to obtain their usual food and are compelled to engage in the local foods. Especially, Kim, Eves, and Scarles (2009) cited that the consumption of food by tourists is influenced by their gender. Hence, ladies are more willing to try local food and becoming enthused about it on their vacations. Furthermore, Cohen and Avieli (2004) have proven that foods are experienced



differently by individuals from diverse places. Because of immigration, people in Western nations have been exposed to foods from various areas of the world, whereas Asian foods have not been influenced to the very same extent. Mak, Lumbers, and Eves (2012) suggest that prior exposure to some food may generate excellent memories and therefore enhance the consumer's attitude toward it.

Moreover, Tsai and Wang (2017) mentioned that different experiences in the tourism industry is one of the essential clues for encouraging tourists to visit a destination. Hence street food has been identified as a vital indication for motivating travelers to a destination. Further, Lee, Park, and Ahn (2020) suggested that owners and vendors of the street food sector must be aware of the critical factors that are directly connected to tourists' experiential value hints and other crucial aspects. Specifically, a delightful experience between a service provider and its customers will lead to the formation of a favorable image along with behavioral intents. However, Hyun (2010) mentioned that although, enhancing visitors' experiences is significant, it is difficult to establish an effective method of assessing them. Since attending a location and enjoying the environment or street foods is really no longer unique to contemporary travelers. Tourists need much more than simply meals and services while traveling, hence they seek out unique and unforgettable experiences which including native customs and street foods

In this sense, Chavarria and Phakdee-Auksorn (2017) mention that Street food is a method to engage with the host society. Since it helps to learn about the native lifestyle, as well as a deeper and more varied culinary experience. In addition, it is much more comfortable to dine on the street rather than going to a restaurant. Since food is typically less expensive and of higher quality than more structured food options. It aids in the attainment of deeper, more significant, and genuine holidays and experiences. Furthermore, street food is available 24 hours of the day and comes in a broad variety of flavors. Toh and Birchenough (2000) state that in certain parts of the globe, street food is seen as socially and economically significant. In many nations, Street food is an important industry that provides significant revenue to



people who would be unable to survive without it. Additionally, Kururatchaikul (2014) mentioned that street foods are often prepared with fresh ingredients acquired from local shops, and the ingredients differ from vendor to vendor. These distinctions may therefore serve as a motivator for travelers who are familiar with street foods to return to a place and enjoy food from other areas, as well as shortening the gap between producers and ultimate consumers. Hence, Privitera and Nesci (2015) suggest that Street food is a substitute to globalization as a tool for socializing, a commercial platform, and a way to interact with youngsters.

Accordingly, Chavarria and Phakdee-Auksorn (2017) state that street foods are popular in countries such as the United States, Mexico, Morocco, Brazil, Italy, Turkey, India, Singapore, Thailand, China and Japan. In addition, these nations receive a large volume of tourist traffic in the culinary tourism industry. However, Privitera and Nesci (2015) described that street food plays an essential role in satisfying the dietary needs of city inhabitants in many emerging economies' urban centers. Especially for thousands of middle and lower income people who live in cities on a daily basis, street food is an important component of their diet. Since, street foods could be the cheapest and most affordable way to get a healthily complete meal outside of their house.

Mudunkotuwa and Arachchi (2020) stated that Sri Lanka was a one of the most renowned travel destinations in the world due to its wide range of features that are different from other countries. Especially, Embuldeniya and Embuldeniya (2018) mentioned that traditional cuisines, seasonality foods, and notably the diverse range of food cultures that are associated with many areas and ethnicities in Sri Lanka have attracted tourists from different parts of the world. Hence, (Mudunkotuwa & Arachchi, 2020) suggested that Sri Lanka has significant gastronomic tourist potential that is underutilized and street foods would be a critical component in promoting Sri Lanka as a tourist destination. Since the street food trade may be done throughout the year. Further, the WHO (2012) mentioned that in general, street food consumption patterns is uncommon in Sri Lankan context and the market offers a narrow selection



of prepared food items. However, Bhowmik (2005) stated that Sri Lankan Street foods trade seem to be marginally better off than neighboring countries such as Bangladesh and India.

The street foods of most European, East Asian and South Asian nations are well-known. Food-vending trucks, vans, street food contests, and eat festivals and events are examples of their unique food culture and native foods (Perera, Nawarathne, & Kulatunga, 2018). However, Mudunkotuwa and Arachchi (2020) stated that Sri Lanka does indeed have a small street food sector in comparison to other South Asian countries. However, Bhowmik (2005) mentioned that street vending is not completely banned, and vendors who make a daily payment to the local council can do business on the sidewalks in most urban areas of Sri Lanka. Moreover, Embuldeniya and Embuldeniya (2018) Sri Lanka has a unique food culture similar to other countries where street food is popular among tourists.

In addition, the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority's (SLTDA) Growth Scenarios for Tourism to Sri Lanka report (2022) mentioned that when compared to 2021, the number of global tourist arrivals more than increased (+130%) in 2022. In this light, the tourist arrival percentage difference observed until April 2022 in comparison to arrivals in April 2021 was 365.4 %. In addition, Survey of Departing Foreign Tourists of SLTDA (2019) emphasizes that approximately 63.2% of tourists who visited Sri Lanka, were willing to engage with food-based activities. Moreover, when considering the expenditure patterns of tourists, they spend approximately 28% of total expenditures on eating out activities during the time in Sri Lanka. Further, Embuldeniya and Embuldeniya (2018) also stated that even if tourists' primary reason for visiting Sri Lanka was not to experience cuisines, they rather like to enjoy the country's distinctive foods.

Thus, researchers such as Choudhury, Mahanta, Goswami, Mazumder, and Pegoo (2011); Jung, Ineson, Kim, and Yap (2015); Lau and Li (2019) McKercher, Okumus, and Okumus (2008) have already made a variety of efforts to understand the street food intake of tourists including different areas. However, studies that evaluate



challenges and opportunities for street food experiences are still insufficient. Furthermore, relatively little study has been performed in the Sri Lankan context on the perspectives of challenges. Hence new studies on street food in Sri Lanka are required to fill the empirical gap. Accordingly, researchers aim to investigate the challenges and opportunities for street food experiences in Sri Lanka.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Food Tourism**

Food and tourism are inseparably linked. Since it is critical for survival. However, Mak, Lumbers, Eves, and Chang (2012) describe that food is no more merely a source of existence when it comes under the scope of tourism. Instead of that, food intake during a vacation is divided into two categories obligatory and symbolic. (Park et al., 2019) explain that the obligatory aspect of food indicates its critical significance in human survival. On the other hand, the symbolic aspect surpasses the necessity of food intake and it incorporates the complexities and dynamics of encountering various cultures. Thus, Henderson (2019) stated that food can be a primary motivator for some tourists whereas it becomes a secondary motivator for other tourists, However ultimately it may play a major role in destination selection and satisfaction. Hence, Okumus (2021) describes tourism motivated by food or linked to food as food tourism, gastronomic tourism, gourmet tourism, and culinary tourism. Moreover, Hall and Sharples (2008) define food tourism as “visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivating factor for travel”. In addition, Berno et al (2019) mention that, culture and food have a strong relationship. Culture may be reflected in food, and food can be a representation of personal and communal cultural identity.

Berno, Laurin, and Maltezakakis (2014) suggest that Food is a form of intangible cultural property since it is infused with both social and cultural wealth. According to Fusté-Forné and Berno (2016), tourism that includes foods helps tourists to learn



about the culture and traditions of a destination in a more genuine, meaningful, and interactive way. Further, Jolliffe (2019) mention that food is a driving force behind tourism, and travelers get food experiences as a result of their interactions with local food culture. Since, in many situations, tourists will consume meals cooked by people in local contexts, while in other cases, tourists may cook for themselves. It enables locals to offer their culinary expertise in tourist-friendly environments.

Erfurt-Cooper and Cooper (2009) suggest that food tourism in some Asian countries may also be regarded as a major component of health tourism. Since healthy food intake obtained from local sources is an important component of health tourism.

## **2.2. Street Food Vending**

Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (2009) defines Street food as “ready-to-eat foods and beverages that are prepared and/or sold by itinerant or stationary vendors, especially on streets and in other public places”. In this sense, Kowalczyk (2014) suggest that many street foods are categorized as “fast food” or “finger food”, and they are often less expensive than dishes from restaurants and other food service establishments. Nevertheless, Privitera and Nesci (2015) describe street foods as “vertical foods”. Since almost all street meals are eaten while standing. Traditionally, street food was sold by merchants traveling around a city. However, at the present street foods are sold on movable food carts which are redesigned using automobiles, bicycles and motorcycles. Especially, redesigned automobiles known as “food truck, they are becoming increasingly popular in street food sector. Henderson (2019) notes that street food as an outstanding food service style that may fulfill visitor needs for nourishment at a reasonable price. In addition, street food is an attraction for tourists. Since the sight of vendors at work may enhance the attractiveness of places. Hence Henderson (2019) mention that each day, an average 2.5 billion people eat street foods. Furthermore, street food accounts for about one-quarter of all worldwide food service establishment’s sales. According to Kowalczyk (2014) nowadays, street food is most common in African, Asian, and Latin American countries, as well as North American and European towns as a popular option for acquiring a warm meal.



Especially for the daily meal intake of thousands of middle- and lower income urbanites. Nevertheless, Privitera and Nesci (2015) mention that some street food dishes have become popular in many regions of the world and have begun to be viewed as a tourist destination for certain dishes. For Instance, hot dogs of New York, the kebab of Istanbul, panelle of Palermo, sauerkraut of Germany and samosa of India. Further Liyanarachchi and Weerakkody (2003) emphasize that street food industry frequently enlists the help of whole family in the acquisition of raw ingredients, processing and preparation, and food sales. This street food sector is also distinguished by its minimal capital investment. In addition, Women have an important part in the street food industry, either directly or indirectly, based on social values in different nations. Moreover, Kowalczyk (2014) note that although technically street food could be served on any city street, in reality it is generally served in areas that are frequented by both locals and visitors. For example, in important streets, main parks, near rail and bus terminals or harbors, and in urban areas with highly established commercial operations.

### **2.3. Challenges on Street Food Vending**

Aforesaid unique qualities of street food have a wide range of beneficial effects on tourism. Nevertheless, there are several hurdles that must be solved in order for the street food business to thrive in the future. According to Carol and Ongori (2013), in developing nations, city planners establish regulations to regulate the functioning of the informal sector, especially street vending. However, most of these rules are unfavourable to street vendors. For example, they conduct frequent inspections and demolitions, confiscate items, and occasionally relocate street vendors from locations where they exist. Hence this restrictive bureaucratic regulation has been some of major challenges that affect street food sector. In addition, Food and Agricultural Organization (2009) describe that thousands of people in emerging economies earn a consistent living by preparing and vending street food. However, their experience and knowledge in food safety are sometimes insufficient, so they frequently participate in street food just to get away from poverty. Hence, in many places of the globe, street



food poses a danger of food caused illness, especially due to pathogenic organisms. Further, Haleegoah et al. (2020) describe that some vendors have been vending street food for many years, However they are unaware of food, personal hygiene and how to do it properly. Khairuzzaman, Chowdhury, Zaman, Al Mamun, and Bari (2014) identify that poor waste disposal systems as a challenge for street food sector. Since it results in the buildup of garbage at street food vending locations. Thus, insect population grew and food contamination risk has increased at the food vending areas. Apart from that, Carol and Ongori (2013) mention that unpredictability of poor weather conditions as a difficulty for street food entrepreneurs. As during in the monsoon season, they temporarily close their doors and reopen when the weather gets better. Henderson (2019) state that strong rivalry among street food vendors as a barrier to the street food industry. Since almost all street food vendors prefer to supply the same goods. Then as a counter-competition tactic, vendors may be forced to close some operations or reduce prices. Moreover, Khairuzzaman et al. (2014) suggest that poor transportation and storage of food materials as a constrain in street food industry. Since some street food vendors acquire their veggies, grains, and other ingredients from retail outlets. Unfortunately, the majority of the merchants do not have permanent storing spaces where they may store their raw food materials on-site. They often keep their items at home overnight before transporting them the next day. As a result, the food gets vulnerable to contamination during transportation.

#### **2.4. Opportunities For Tourism Street Food Experiences**

Several opportunities have been identified for the street food sector. Accordingly, Moussavi, Liguori, and Mehta (2016) stated that persons with minimal education or expertise can earn a living due to the low entrance barriers in street food vending. In addition, Fellows and Hilmi (2020) stated that street food vendors might become their own bosses. Since They are businessmen who set their personal working hours, retain their earnings, and have the authority to make ultimate business administration choices. Further, Haleegoah et al. (2020) emphasized that street vending is becoming a profitable business in many parts of the world. Since both males and female



employment are socially acceptable in street food sector. Especially, (Moussavi et al., 2016) noted that women account for more than two-thirds of all street food vendors in most urban areas.

In addition, Fellows and Hilmi. (2020) suggested that if small scale farmers involve in launching a street food business, are able to add value to their agricultural products. Since the farmer transitions from food production to retail by adding value by developing and marketing agricultural products via their own trade names. Furthermore, Fellows and Hilmi (2020) mention that there may be chances to manufacture a sort of cuisine that is unfamiliar in a region, making it much more attractive in terms of customer choice based on people's food tastes.

Furthermore, World Health Organization (WHO, 2012). mentioned that food vendors have the opportunity to provide the consumer with better, cleaner, more nutritional, and more safe foods. This might be accomplished by periodically educating food vendors on food safety and cleanliness concerns. In addition, , Haleegoah et al. (2020) emphasized that there is indeed a potential to enhance street food vending by enforcing rules and adhering to standards. If problems are to be converted into opportunities, local governments have the potential to provide regulatory officials with all of the administrative and logistical assistance required to ensure that vendors offer safe foods to the consumer.

Moreover, Hilmi (2020); WHO (2012) suggested that sustaining the socioeconomic importance of street meals, developing cooperation among street food vendors and stakeholders, Getting the best possible use of given resources and the desire of local and international partners to enhance street meals in developing nations create opportunities in street food sector. On the other hand, (Haleegoah et al., 2020) recognized that continuous customer engagement, worldwide awareness of various regional foods, improved packaging and marketing of regional meals and the creation of organizations or partnerships to obtain resources including loans as opportunities in street food sector.



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## 2.5. Street Food Vending in Sri Lanka

Liyanarachchi and Weerakkody (2003) mention that the formal segment of the Sri Lankan economy does not include street food vendors. They are all from the informal sector. Because their commercial operations are unpredictable, irregular, and of small economic importance. As a result, there is no formal record of the population of street food vendors, their business activities, or the profitability of their endeavors. Nevertheless, Studies suggest the presence of a big proportion of street food vendors urban areas in Sri Lanka. Thus, in the current socioeconomic situation, street food vendors are increasing importance. Mudunkotuwa and Arachchi (2020) state that Sri Lanka has significant food tourism potential that is underutilized, when considering Sri Lanka's food diversity. Hence street food can play a vital role in delighting customers. Furthermore, street food can be deployed as a destination marketing tool. since street food can be operated throughout the year. In this light, Bhowmik (2005) mentioned that street foods Sri Lanka are reasonably priced and easily available and they are occasionally carried to the clients' doorsteps and purchased on credit basis. Further, Liyanarachchi and Weerakkody (2003) notes that Sri Lanka as a place to eat inexpensive street cuisine with spicy spices and creamy curries such as Koththu, Hoppers, String Hoppers, Dhal Vadai, Ulundu Vadai, Pickles, Fried Chickpeas, Pancakes, Samosa, Thosai. Thus, Rasanga and Edirisinghe (2014) mention that general population has a favourable opinion on street vendors.

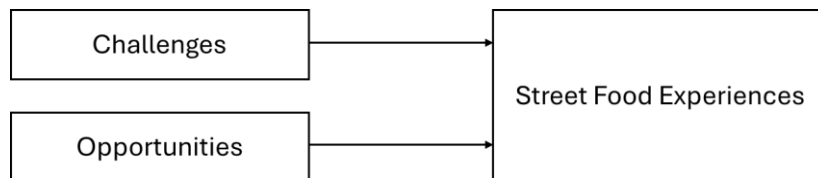
However, WHO (2012) mentioned that according to reports received from doctors and other authorities, numerous street food vendors served hazardous meals, resulting in negative health occurrences. In addition, Bhowmik (2005) stated that the employment of Sri Lankan Street vendors has been endangered by some urban planners' efforts to clear the urban streets. Since, these planners hold an outmoded Western notion that sidewalks must be nice and clear for walkers, when some Western and many Eastern capitals planners have recognized the benefits of allocating space for sidewalk merchants retaining a vibrant inner urban lifestyle. Moreover, Embuldeniya and Embuldeniya (2018) emphasized that the shortage of

initiatives involving of relevant parties and effective participation from them, the scarcity of studies to help decision-making in the field of street food tourism, the lack of uniformity in street food tourism marketing strategies and processes and the lack of a solid structure for street food tourism were the hurdles for promoting street foods in Sri Lanka.

## 2.6. Concept Indicator Model

The concept indicator model demonstrates the research methodology in visual and textual formats to help the reader understand the research strategy. Thus, the concept indicator model of this study is illustrated as follows.

*Figure 1: Conceptual Indicator Model*



*Source: Developed by the researchers (2024)*

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This research study focuses on the primary data collected through structured interviews with foreign tourists, street food vendors, and government officials. Moreover, researchers employed the purposive sampling method for this study as it aids in selecting participants who could offer rich and diverse perspectives relevant to the research questions Guarte and Barrios (2006). Further, it ensures that the sample represented a wide range of viewpoints and experiences related to street food consumption. Specifically, participants were selected based on their direct involvement in or knowledge of street food experiences. Thus, 27 individuals from the above-mentioned categories were interviewed as the sample size. The selection of this sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation, whereby data collection continued until no new information emerged from the interviews, indicating that theoretical saturation had been reached.



Respondents to the interviews were contacted via Online Zoom Meetings and in person. Especially, government officials were contacted via online Zoom meetings. In addition, street food vendors and foreign tourists were interviewed at the street food vending locations. The length of each interview ranged from 20-30 minutes. After each interview, it was documented and re-examined by the researcher. Each transcript was submitted to the relevant respondent to validate the data collected. In addition, the researcher shared the interview transcripts, methodology and final report with the impartial peers to enhance the reliability and ensure the validity. Thus, revised transcripts were analysed via content analysis.

#### **4. RESULTS AND THE DISCUSSION**

Street food vending is an emerging and vital area in tourism industry. However, behind the importance, there are significant challenges in maintaining the quality and safety of street food experiences, particularly for tourists. Hence, this analysis comprises challenges encountered within the street food vending industry. Thus, according to the findings, researchers identified five challenges; hygiene issues, regulatory issues, collaboration issues, Inadequate infrastructure facilities, and lack of food choices.

Hygiene emerges as a critical concern within the street food vending industry. Especially, Habib (2016) mentioned that making and vending street foods has been a stable career for millions of individuals in developing countries. Regularly, they are vending street food in order to escape from poverty. However, their expertise and knowledge of food safety are not always sufficient. Thus, street food has a risk of foodborne illness, particularly due to microorganisms. Accordingly, Interviews with respondents revealed that many street food vendors are operating without adhering to basic hygiene practices, This lack of hygiene practices of street food vendors causes food safety and increases the likelihood of foodborne illnesses among consumers. Furthermore, the respondents mentioned that the environment in which street food vendors operate is often unsanitary



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Especially, the vending environment is filled with many insects and mammals such as dogs and cats. Further, street food vending establishments are located near wastewater channels. Thus, the absence of clean and hygienic surroundings degrades the quality of street foods and discourages tourists from visiting the street food stalls

*"Unfortunately, many insects in the food stalls ruined my experience. Even when eating a meal, I've noticed unpleasant insects flying over my food"*

*(Respondent 05: Personal Communication, 2024)*

Khairuzzaman et al. (2014); Kirchner, Goulter, Chapman, Clayton, and Jaykus (2021) mentioned that street foods may include non-food grade chemical substances such as colorants and preservatives, as well as contaminants such as pesticide residue and textile dyes. Accordingly, this study identified that food quality-related issues are frequent in street food vending. Based on the responses, vendors use low-quality ingredients for making food items. In addition, adulteration of food products is common in street food vending. Thus, it severely affects the taste and quality of the food items. Moreover, poor preparation methods are common in street food vendors. Accordingly, vendors use food additives such as MSG in excessive amounts and reuse oils for frying purposes. It affects noncommunicable diseases long-term among consumers.

*"it is commonly known that street food vendors cook food products in previously used oils, which causes substantial health dangers. Prolonged eating of foods cooked with reused oil may raise the risk of cancer over time"*

*(Respondent 11: Personal Communication, 2024)*

In addition, Carol and Ongori (2013) mentioned that most of the rules and regulations in urban areas are unfavorable to street vendors, particularly in developing nations. In this light, the regulatory framework around street food vending causes issues for vendors to offer quality experiences for both tourists and other consumers. Accordingly, in Sri Lanka, street food sellers sometimes operate without proper

registration or formalization of their enterprises. This lack of legal recognition restricts attempts to enforce regulatory standards and assure compliance with health and safety rules. Furthermore, street food vendors regard regulatory compliance as a burden. Especially with methods such as registration and adherence to by-laws, inspections done by Public Health Inspectors, and changes in the decisions of local government authorities are viewed as barriers to offering better street food experiences.

*“We encourage street food vendors to register with us. Via the by-laws we need to ensure that they are providing safety and fair services to the tourists. However, street food vendors perceive it as a trouble for them”.*

*(Respondent 03: Personal Communication, 2024)*

*“Street food vendors fear that local politicians may alter their vending locations from time to time as their authority shifts”.*

*(Respondent 08: Personal Communication, 2024)*

Walsh (2010) mentioned that organizations such as the World Bank and global non-government organizations prefer to collaborate with private sector organizations that are directly associated with street food vendors, and other small-business owners rather than with governmental entities. However, in Sri Lanka there is the lack of collaboration among stakeholders of street food vending. Hence, street food vendors encounter many difficulties in offering quality experiences for tourists. Particularly, in obtaining financial support. Government officials mentioned that not possessing proper registration from relevant authorities causes difficulties and low financial literacy of vendors effects as a barrier in obtaining financial support for Street food vendors,

*“We know that banks assist small and medium-sized businesses in different methods. However, there seems to be a lack of knowledge among them about possible methods.*



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*Furthermore, banks frequently need registration documents when they ask for a loan”.*

*(Respondent 03: Personal Communication, 2024)*

Furthermore, Parasecoli (2021) stated that establishing permanent street food vending outlets with facilities with the cooperation of local government officials ensures food safety and traffic management. In this light, the inadequate infrastructure facilities make vital challenges for both street food vendors and authorities in offering quality street food experiences for tourists. Accordingly, many street food vending areas in Sri Lanka are lack of at least basic infrastructure facilities. Particularly, portable water, waste management systems, sanitary facilities, designated areas for street food vending and parking facilities. Thus, the absence of abovementioned amenities restricts street food vendors' ability to maintain hygiene standards and causes overcrowding and sanitary problems in popular tourist destinations. Without regulated vending zones and adequate facilities, street food vendors struggle to operate efficiently and deliver high-quality culinary experiences to tourists and other consumers.

*“This year, we plan to allocate funds to improve street food vending places. However, we do not yet have any facilities specifically designated for street food vending. They now operate in common spaces where people gather regularly”.*

*(Respondent 03: Personal Communication, 2024)*

Apart from hygiene issues, regulatory issues, collaboration issues, and inadequate infrastructure facilities, the lack of food choices has been a vital challenge for the street food experience quality, particularly for tourists in Sri Lanka. Mudunkotuwa and Arachchi (2020) also stated that Sri Lanka has vital culinary tourist potential that is underutilized. In this light, interviews with the tourists reveal that though Sri Lanka has diverse food options in many regions street food vendors offer a limited variety of food items for their customers. Especially, different varieties of vadai, fried vegetable items (ie : Potato, Casava etc), samosa, cutlets, rolls, kottu, fried rice,



noodles, ice cream, fruit juices, and different bun items are frequently served as street food items in Sri Lanka. Further, Interviews with government officers and street food vendors reveal those economic considerations, culinary skills, and poor differentiation of products play a crucial role in the limited variety of the food choices available to street food vendors. However, these issues has an effect on the overall street food experience of the tourists and it may prevent the exploration of local cuisine further.

*“When one street seller begins selling mangoes, other vendors in the area follow the same. Similar things happen when corn becomes available here. I think that street food vendors need to provide something unique to their competitors”.*

*(Respondent 08: Personal Communication, 2024)*

Apart from the challenges for Street Food Experiences in Sri Lanka, there are significant opportunities to increase the quality of street food experiences. Thus, this analysis comprises the opportunities for street food experiences in Sri Lanka. Thus, according to the responses, the researcher identified five opportunities such as increasing popularity, availability of ingredients, unique food culture, availability of events, social media support

the Increasing popularity of street food depicts broader trends in globalization, urbanization, and changing consumer preferences. Hence, respondents mention that street foods are often perceived as affordable meal options. Cohen and Avieli (2004); Haleegoah et al. (2020); Henderson (2019); Kowalczyk (2014) also noted that street food is an outstanding food service style that may fulfill tourists’ needs for hunger at a reasonable price. Thus, it attracts tourists who are seeking authentic culinary experiences at reasonable prices. Especially, it attracts tourists who have budget concerns. Thus, the affordability of street foods makes them accessible to a wide range of food items during the stay in Sri Lanka. Apart from the tourists, street food vendors provide diverse food items for locals residing in street food vending areas. Particularly of the workers in urban areas. In addition, it provides an immersive



experience that allows tourists to connect with the local way of life and culinary practices. This interaction promotes greater awareness and respect for the heritage of the culture of Sri Lanka. Further, it makes the journey more enjoyable and memorable.

*“I have seen that tourists visit local restaurants in the evening time and taste local bread items such as rotti, godamba rotti, parata with local gravies. Hence, I think that foreigners are willing to experience the local tastes. Hence, I believe that there is a great opportunity for street food vending to grab that market.”*

*(Respondent 11: Personal Communication, 2024)*

Further, the researchers identified that street food vendors in Sri Lanka obtain ingredients from the surrounding areas of street food vending, particularly fresh items such as fruits, vegetables, fish, meat, and milk. In this, vendors have personal contacts in sourcing ingredients in local marketplaces surrounding the vending stalls. Moreover, researchers identified that some street food vendors use their own produce as ingredients in the foods they prepare rather than sourcing ingredients from local markets. Thus, this local sourcing benefits the vendors in offering diversified menus, getting the advantage of seasonal items, obtaining fresh ingredients, supporting the local community, getting advantage of low cost. Apart from that it assures that the food is authentic and represents Sri Lankan culinary traditions. Supporting the findings of this study, Haleegoah et al. (2020); Hilmi (2020) mentioned that some local farmers also provide raw ingredients to urban vendors and business owners who prepare and sell street foods in urban areas, while they are engaging in street food vending in rural areas and small towns.

*“Street food vendors obtain corn from the surrounding areas from Ella. Sometimes they cultivate corn. They are fresh. Even tourists like to taste them. In addition....., they sell avocados to tourists when avocados are frequent in Ella Area. Further, they obtain the lime from the surrounding areas of Ella such as Bibila to make lime Juices”*



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(Respondent 07: Personal Communication, 2024)

Sri Lanka has a unique food culture similar to the countries where street foods are popular and it is influenced by various cultures including Indian, Dutch, Portuguese, and British. In addition, Sri Lankan traditional cooking methods add unique flavors and appeal. Hence, this unique food culture has great potential to cater to different tastes and preferences, attracting broad local and foreign customer base. These unique food cultures provide many benefits for street food vendors by increasing their attractiveness and success. Furthermore, Sri Lanka has a regionally diverse food culture, which means that culinary offerings differ greatly from one location to the next. This diversity creates a possibility for street food vendors as it allows tourists to experience and taste a wide range of dishes when they travel around the country. In this light, Kowalczyk (2014); Privitera and Nesci (2015) mention that some street food dishes have become popular in many regions of the world and have begun to be viewed as a tourist destination for certain dishes. For Instance, hot dogs of New York, the kebab of Istanbul, panelle of Palermo, sauerkraut of Germany and samosa of India. Thus, researcher identified that Street food sellers can experiment by combining traditional Sri Lankan cuisines with international culinary methods to promote Sri Lanka as a destination for certain street foods.

*“We can promote diverse culinary experiences in Sri Lanka via street foods. More importantly, for example, northern and eastern province street foods have palmyra yams. We cannot see them in the other areas of the country. In addition, coastal areas have sea foods. They are reign-specific food items. Further, it helps locals to start up small businesses.”*

(Respondent 01: Personal Communication, 2024)

Moreover, respondents mentioned that, in the Sri Lankan context, many events have the potential to attract large crowds locally and globally. In this light, events provide opportunities for street food vendors to showcase their products to a wider audience. In addition, events aid in boosting sales of street food vendors. Apart from that, street



food vendors can network with other food businesses, suppliers, and industry professionals. Further, the researcher identified underutilized events in Sri Lanka that can promote the street food culture, particularly in the northern and eastern provinces. Besides the potential to promote street foods to tourists, these events serve to highlight and promote the destinations themselves. Thus, events attract more visitors and boost tourism in Sri Lanka. . In this light, Di Matteo (2021); Mason and Paggiaro (2012) mentioned that street food events have already become an important method for attracting tourists from both inside and outside of a particular region

*“We have an event after each monsoon where we catch a special variety of fish called Needle Fish. Needle Fish are rich in flavour. we catch and cook them with our local spices. We continue this tradition annually. However, only people in the Jaffna are aware about this event. I believe that we can incorporate Needle Fish into our street food culture ”*

*(Respondent 04: Personal Communication, 2024)*

According to the respondents, Facebook, Instagram Youtube, and TikTok are the common platforms used by street food vendors in Sri Lanka. Thus, supporting to the findings of this study, Parasecoli (2021) mentioned that street food vendors have designed their establishments with more spaces as it enables consumers to take photographs and post them on social media platforms In this light, respondents mentioned that they are utilizing social media platforms to reach a broader audience via posts, recommendations, and sharing. In addition, social media enables street food vendors to interact directly with potential customers. Moreover, compared to other traditional advertising methods, social media marketing has been a relatively low-cost option for street food vendors. Additionally, social media enable government officials to navigate the food related issues. On the other hand, tourists mentioned that they found street food vending areas via social media channels. particularly, the street food vending locations in the Colombo area.



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*"Yes, I am using social media to promote my stall. I have profiles on Facebook and YouTube. I have my own YouTube channel called Megumi Food House.."*

*(Respondent 12: Personal Communication, 2024)*

Thus, the researchers identified that abovementioned challenges and opportunities can affect the overall street food experiences of tourists.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In the analysis of challenges in the street food experiences, researchers identified critical challenges and opportunities for street food experiences, particularly for tourists. Thus, researchers recommended enhancing hygiene practices through training and more inspections. In addition, it is necessary to organize awareness programs for street food vendors. Further, regulatory processes related to street food vending should be amended to facilitate vendors to enhance the service they offer to their customers. Moreover, it is necessary to foster collaboration among street food stakeholders to provide financial support and technical assistance, especially with the banks. In addition, government authorities must invest in infrastructure facilities such as portable water stations, parking lots, and designated locations for street food vending. Thus, Government authorities may seek the assistance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in infrastructure development. In addition, it is necessary to encourage the diversification of food choices available in street food stalls via the unique food culture in Sri Lanka. Moreover, researchers recommend to utilize the underutilized food related events to promote street food culture among tourists. Further, relevant authorities should create a map or app which comprises the street food vending locations and need to available for tourists. The app should have the facility to rate the hygiene and quality of the street food experiences. Accordingly, implementing these recommendations allows stakeholders to work collaboratively to offer better street food experiences, preserve local culinary culture, and promote Sri Lanka as a food tourism destination.



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## 6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study presents an overview of challenges and opportunities on street food experiences in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, government authorities and policy makers can obtain clear idea particularly on making regulations on food safety and urban development. In addition, this study offer more insights to the street food vendors on the directions they need to improve further to offer quality street food experience for tourists and locals. Further, this study offers comprehensive knowledge for the undergraduates and other academics on street food experiences in Sri Lanka. In this light, the researcher suggest future researchers conducting studies on economic impacts, cultural exchanges, and tourist behaviours with related to the street foods in developing nation.

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