

Exploring the Informal Street Vendors' Substantial Benefits to University Students at the University Belt

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Abstract

This research explores the substantial benefits of informal street vendors to the university students in university belt Manila, Philippines. The research approach utilizes a qualitative, ethnographic approach through structured interviews, Geographic Information System (GIS), and foot surveys. The result shows that informal street vendors provide university students with accessible, affordable, and convenient food options, contributing to a vibrant and social university environment. This study also emphasized the benefits for the informal street vendors themselves, who acquire a reliable customer base and income source. This study concludes with recommendations for collaboration between NGOs, local government, and universities to support the informal street vendors through legal support, health insurance, and safety training programs. Together, these initiatives would help informal street vendors and university students develop a mutually beneficial relationship.

Keywords

Informal Street Vendors, University-Belt, Geographic Information System (GIS)

1. Introduction

An existing sub district of Manila, Philippines, is referred to as the University Belt, or U-Belt, informally. It refers to the area of a city where there are a lot of schools and institutions. (*Filipino de Leon, 2012*). Street vendors are an integral part of urban economies around the world (WIEGO, n.d.). They offer almost everything, including apparel, gadgets, media, souvenirs, hot and prepared food and drinks, fruits and vegetables, and keepsakes. In addition, shoe mending and shoe polishing are offered by street vendors. Many vendors set up shop in one location and come back there every day to establish a routine with their customers (Schoenecker, 2023).

Generally speaking, postsecondary education, or education beyond high school, is referred to by the term college, university, and school. As far as general postsecondary education or degree programs are concerned, it is acceptable to use all three titles equally. Colleges can be public or private, smaller in size than universities, and customized for specific demographics like genders, ethnicities, or religious groups. It offers associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees and certificates in relation to their educational pathways. While university is a four-year, private or public educational establishment that grants degrees at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Private universities typically have lower enrollment numbers, although institutions typically have tens of thousands of students enrolled (Zpace, 2024).

Street vendors are one of the obvious unique aspects of the University-Belt that have a significant impact on the daily lives of many individuals. As a result of the neighborhood's variety of goods and services, people eventually find themselves acquiring its tastes and demands. It is clear that the typical human lifestyle develops into one in which one can obtain a consistent and very accessible source for daily consumption, whether it is a delicious, cheap, or accessible meal. Somehow, these street vendors are frequently undervalued in the informal economy and the vibrancy of public areas. The street vendors are undervalued in terms of having an insecure place of work. Lack of storage, theft or damage to stock are the common issues street vendors face. In addition, many street vendors are vulnerable to harassment, confiscations, and evictions due to the unclear bylaws governing street trade and the difficulty in obtaining licenses. Undervaluing the street vendors affects their family, livelihood, contribution to the economic sector as well as the lives of the students who heavily rely on their goods and services. This study will focus and be limited only to the investigation of the informal street vendors' positive contributions and advantages to urban life and economic development. The street vendors' income and revenue from street vending will serve as the priority to look into by the researchers. In developing countries, the informal economy is essential to maintaining social well-being and economic progress. In Ethiopia, street vending is a significant source of income for urban populations (Singh,2020b).

1.1. Students

Informal street vendors have an impact on our daily lives, especially for students. These informal street vendors provide students' everyday needs by offering meals and snacks, which are essential for the development and growth of students because of their affordable and accessible food options (Malhotra, 2017). But it can also affect the health of the students because some informal street vendors lack proper hygiene and sanitation practices (Pratadina et al., 2017). Unsanitary food preparation facilities have been linked to food-borne illnesses caused by microbes like Salmonella, Escherichia coli, Norovirus, and Staphylococcus aureus contaminating ready-to-eat food (Lues et al., 2006). Therefore, to protect the health of the students, it is important that food choices, cleanliness, and hygiene be given top priority by educational institutions and especially by the informal street vendors (Pratiwi et al., 2018). Informal street vendors have an impact on the lives of the people in the Philippines. They offer convenient, flexible food choices close to schools and campuses, along with affordable and easily accessible meals and snacks that are essential for students' growth, it also supports the livelihoods of many low-income Filipinos and contributes to the vibrant street life and local character. Studies show affordable good options that informal street vendors can provide play a crucial role (Hidalgo et al., 2022) and contribute to the livelihood of many Filipinos by providing affordable goods and services to communities, especially those in marginalized sectors (Gonzales & Pabilando, 2023). But there are some concerns about the food safety practices of some informal street vendors, with studies showing insufficient food handling approaches and knowledge (Madario et al., 2023). It is important to prioritize the implementation of health rules, good manufacturing practices, and improving awareness of food safety in order to safeguard the welfare of vendors and consumers (Recio, 2020).

1.2. Environment and Health

The environment was also affected by informal street vendors, as evidenced by a variety of studies. Research shows that a lot of informal street vendors operate in unsanitary conditions that can have a significant impact on public health with a high percentage having suboptimal food handling practices, posing risks of food-borne diseases (Gichunge et al., 2023). Further, in order to address these concerns, government measures such as relocation policies are sometimes used when informal street vendors are present in metropolitan areas (Karaçar, 2022). However, they play a crucial role in a street's vitality and attractiveness by offering things at a reasonable price and enhancing the vibrancy of the city (Putri et al., 2023). The complicated relationship between informal street vendors and the urban environment is shown

by the fact that, despite possible drawbacks such as hindering pedestrian mobility, informal street vendors are recognized for their positive impact on the street life experience.

1.2. Factors that influence students to purchase from Informal Street vendors

There are many factors that influence students' choices during consumption (Affordability, Variety, Convenience, Unique Flavor, Creativity, Accessibility, and Support Small Businesses). By increasing the variety of goods, the informal street vendors improve their businesses. The informal street vendors have a friendly relationship with their customers, which can also be a reason to increase the profit of their business (Kumar, 2024).

The purpose of this study is to identify and emphasize the significant advantages of street vendors in the U-Belt area through answering these two (2) research questions: (1)How do informal street vendors contribute to the daily lives of university students?; and (2) How does the location of informal street vendors around university campuses in the University Belt area contribute to the vendors' business viability, profitability, and overall sustainability? The outcome of this research will add to the body of knowledge already in existence by providing insight into the importance of street vendors and how they can affect the neighborhood. Furthermore, the research aims to foster a more inclusive, vibrant, and supportive environment for all individuals in the U-belt, enhancing their overall experience and quality of life. The study's findings will be helpful for government representatives, non-governmental organizations, foreign establishments, and researchers addressing this matter.

2. Methodology

2.1. Data Gathering Techniques

The researchers used a qualitative, ethnographic approach to study the experiences and impacts of informal street vendors. This involves in-depth interviews, observations, and discussions to understand the phenomenon from the vendors' and community's perspective. The research specifically examined the beneficial impacts and contributions of these informal vendors, rather than just identifying challenges or problems. This suggested a focus on the positives and value they bring to the local area.

For the sampling population, a total of 2 to 3 students from each university in the university belt participated in the structured interview. They are asked regarding how many minutes or meters of walking to reach their preferred street vendors is walkable for the students. After acquiring their desired distance from their respective universities, the researchers utilized the GIS to map out the distance and did buffer analysis about the street vendors who are located within the desired distance. After the analysis, the researchers conducted a foot survey around the buffered areas that informal street vendors occupy.

Another set of sampling population with a count of 20 students are gathered and answered the survey questionnaires about their preference or what influences themselves for purchasing from informal street vendors. The acquired data are then analyzed using Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) to determine which factor influenced them the most.

2.1.1 Primary Data

The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with university students in the University Belt area. The

interviews focused on how far they can travel when making purchases from informal street vendors, starting at their university, and understanding the students' interactions with and perceptions of the informal street vendors who are near their university.

The researchers utilized the geographic information system (GIS) to map the locations of the informal street vendors throughout the University Belt. This enabled the researchers to examine how the vendors' spatial distribution relates to university campuses and foot traffic from students. Researchers have been able to identify any patterns or clusters in the vendors locations that would suggest the best arrangement for benefiting the students.

The researchers conducted on-the-ground surveys by walking through the universities in the university belt area and directly observed the informal street vendors and their interactions with university students. This offered first-hand information about the kinds of products being offered, pricing, customers' traffic, and the overall dynamics of the vendor-student relationships.

2.1.2 Secondary Data

The researchers also browsed peer-reviewed papers to provide further context and identify research gaps. It provided a theoretical framework and background information on the benefits of street vendors, how they influence life satisfaction and quality, economic contributions, and social factors.

2.2 Unit of Analysis

This unit of analysis of this research study are the informal vendors scattered around the university-belt. The key variables include the independent variable (Universities around U-Belt: National University, University of Sto. Tomas, Arellano University, San Beda University, Centro Escolar University, University of the East, and Far Eastern University) and the dependent variable (Informal Street Vendors). By using the structured interview, mapping, and direct observation, the researchers gained a comprehensive understanding of the substantial benefits that the informal street vendors offer to the community of university students in the target area.

Figure 1. Area of Study

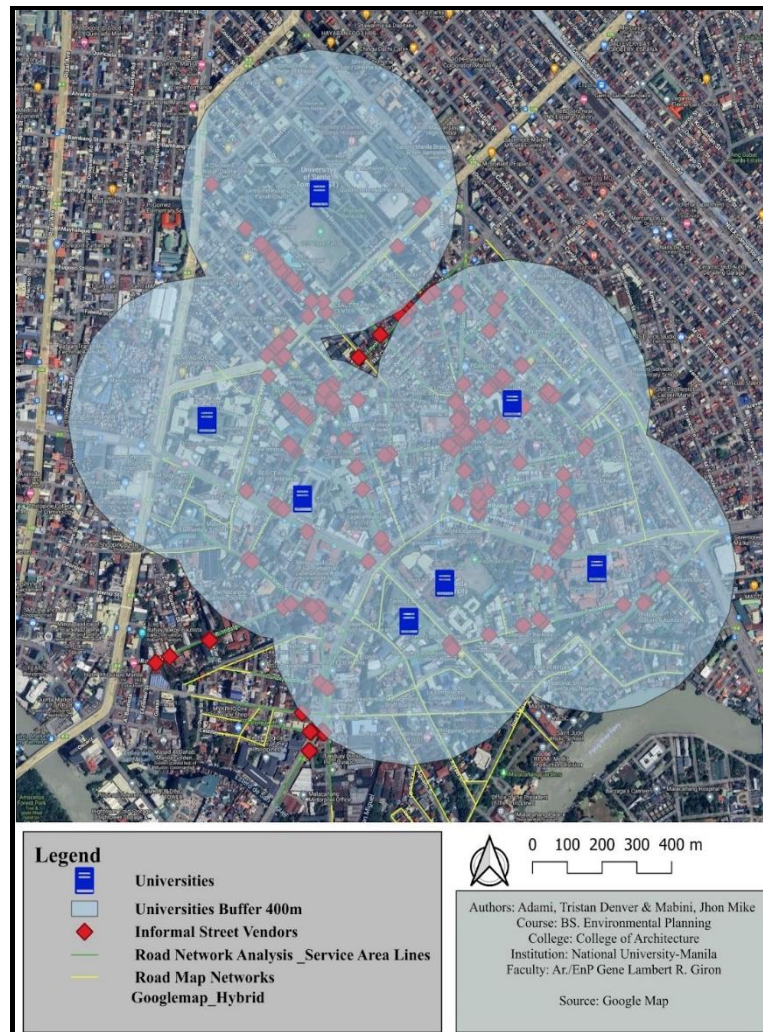


Source: Google Earth

This is the University-Belt in Sampaloc Manila which is the area of the study.

3. Results and Discussion

Figure 2. Buffered Universities with Informal Street Vendors in University Belt



3.1 Students

3.1.1 Tolerable Walking Distance

After conducting structured interviews among students from the different universities at the university-belt, the researchers determined which distance is the tolerable walking distance for the students. From the four different distances (100 meters (1-minute walk), 200 meters (2-minute walk), 300 meters (3:30-minute walk), 400 meters (5-minute walk), the average distance which the majority of the students preferred is 400 meters or five-minute walk. Therefore, the researchers used the 400 meters as a basis of distance for the buffer analysis shown in figure 2. The various informal street vendors within the 400-meter area around each of the universities at the university-belt are located and identified in the buffer analysis.

3.1.2 Goods and Services

The majority of university students, according to the interview's findings, regularly buy and eat "tusok-tusok" foods, including kikiam, fishballs, and kwek-kwek, with siomai being second. When it comes to street

food, “ihaw”, which comprises grilled foods like barbecue and isaw, is the second most popular option among students.

3.1.2 Basis for patronizing informal street vendors (Analytic Hierarchy Process)

Table 1. Pair-wise Comparison Matrix

	Affordability	Variety	Convenience	Unique Flavors	Creativity	Accessibility	Supporting Small Businesses
Affordability	1	9	1/9	1/7	7	1/9	1/3
Variety	1/9	1	1/9	1/7	7	1/7	1/5
Convenience	9	9	1	5	7	1/7	5
Unique Flavors	7	7	1/5	1	3	1/7	1/5
Creativity	1/7	1/7	1/7	1/3	1	1/9	1/7
Accessibility	9	7	7	7	9	1	5
Supporting Small Businesses	3	5	1/5	5	7	1/5	1

Table 2. Scale of Relative Importance

1	Equal Importance
3	Moderate Importance
5	Strong Importance
7	Very Strong Importance
9	Extreme Importance
2,4,6,8	Intermediate Values
1/3,1/7,1/9	Values for Inverse Comparison

Table 3. Pair-wise Comparison Matrix

	Affordability	Variety	Convenience	Unique Flavors	Creativity	Accessibility	Supporting Small Businesses
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Affordability	1	9	0.11	0.14	7	0.11	0.33
Variety	0.11	1	0.11	0.14	7	0.14	0.2
Convenience	9	9	1	5	7	0.14	5
Unique Flavors	7	7	0.2	1	3	0.14	0.2
Creativity	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.33	1	0.11	0.14
Accessibility	9	7	7	7	9	1	5
Support Small Businesses	3	5	0.2	5	7	0.2	1
Sum	29.25	38.14	8.76	18.61	41	1.84	11.87

Table 4. Pair-wise Comparison Matrix

	Affordability	Variety	Convenience	Unique Flavors	Creativity	Accessibility	Supporting Small Businesses
Affordability	1/29.25	9/38.14	0.11/8.76	0.14/18.61	7/41	0.11/1.84	0.33/11.87
Variety	0.11/29.25	1/38.14	0.11/8.76	0.14/18.61	7/41	0.14/1.84	0.2/11.87
Convenience	9/29.25	9/38.14	1/8.76	5/18.61	7/41	0.14/1.84	5/11.87
Unique Flavors	7/29.25	7/38.14	0.2/8.76	1/18.61	3/41	0.14/1.84	0.2/11.87
Creativity	0.14/29.25	0.14/38.14	0.14/8.76	0.33/18.61	1/41	0.11/1.84	0.14/11.87
Accessibility	9/29.25	7/38.14	7/8.76	7/18.61	9/41	1/1.84	5/11.87
Support Small Businesses	3/29.25	5/38.14	0.2/8.76	5/18.61	7/41	0.2/1.84	1/11.87
Sum	29.25	38.14	8.76	18.61	41	1.84	11.87

Table 5. Normalised Pair-wise Comparison Matrix

	Affordability	Variety	Convenience	Unique Flavors	Creativity	Accessibility	Supporting Small Businesses	Criteria Weights
Affordability	0.0341	0.2359	0.0125	0.0075	0.1707	0.0597	0.0278	0.0783
Variety	0.0037	0.0262	0.0125	0.0075	0.1707	0.076	0.0168	0.0447

Convenience	0.3076	0.2359	0.1141	0.2686	0.1707	0.076	0.4212	0.2277
Unique Flavors	0.2393	0.1835	0.0228	0.0537	0.0731	0.076	0.0168	0.095
Creativity	0.0047	0.0036	0.0159	0.0177	0.0243	0.0597	0.0117	0.0196
Accessibility	0.3076	0.1835	0.799	0.3761	0.2195	0.5434	0.4212	0.4071
Support Small Businesses	0.1025	0.131	0.0228	0.2686	0.1707	0.1086	0.0842	0.1269

$$\frac{0.0341+0.2359+0.0125+0.0075+0.1707+0.00597+0.0278}{7} = 0.0783$$

Table 6. Calculating the Consistency

	Affordability	Variety	Convenience	Unique Flavors	Creativity	Accessibility	Supporting Small Businesses
Affordability	1 x 0.0783	9 x 0.0447	0.11 x 0.2277	0.14 x 0.095	7 x 0.0196	0.11 x 0.4071	0.33 x 0.1269
Variety	0.11 x 0.0783	1 x 0.0447	0.11 x 0.2277	0.14 x 0.095	7 x 0.0196	0.14 x 0.4071	0.2 x 0.1269
Convenience	9 x 0.0783	9 x 0.0447	1 x 0.2277	5 x 0.095	7 x 0.0196	0.14 x 0.4071	5 x 0.1269
Unique Flavors	7 x 0.0783	7 x 0.0447	0.2 x 0.2277	1 x 0.095	3 x 0.0196	0.14 x 0.4071	0.2 x 0.1269
Creativity	0.14 x 0.0783	0.14 x 0.0447	0.14 x 0.2277	0.33 x 0.095	1 x 0.0196	0.11 x 0.4071	0.14 x 0.1269
Accessibility	9 x 0.0783	7 x 0.0447	7 x 0.2277	7 x 0.095	9 x 0.0196	1 x 0.4071	5 x 0.1269
Support Small Businesses	3 x 0.0783	5 x 0.0447	0.2 x 0.2277	5 x 0.095	7 x 0.0196	0.2 x 0.4071	1 x 0.1269

Table 7. Calculating the Consistency

	Affordability	Variety	Convenience	Unique Flavors	Creativity	Accessibility	Supporting Small Businesses	Weighted Sum Value
Affordability	0.0783	0.4203	0.025	0.0133	0.1372	0.0447	0.0418	0.9856

Variety	0.0086	0.0447	0.25	0.0133	0.1372	0.0569	0.0253	0.536
Convenience	0.7047	0.4203	0.2277	0.475	0.1372	0.0569	0.6345	2.6563
Unique Flavors	0.5481	0.3339	0.0455	0.095	0.0588	0.0569	0.0253	1.1635
Creativity	0.0109	0.0066	0.0318	0.0313	0.0196	0.0447	0.0177	0.1626
Accessibility	0.7047	0.3339	1.5939	0.665	0.1764	0.4071	0.6345	4.5155
Support Small Businesses	0.2349	0.2385	0.0455	0.475	0.1372	0.0814	0.1269	1.339

$$0.0783 + 0.4203 + 0.025 + 0.0133 + 0.13273 + 0.0447 + 0.0418 = 0.9856$$

Table 8. Calculating the Consistency

Weighted Sum Value	Criteria Weights	WSV/CW
0.9856	0.0783	12.5874
0.536	0.0447	11.991
2.6563	0.2277	11.6657
1.1635	0.095	12.2473
0.1626	0.0196	8.2959
4.5155	0.4071	11.0918
1.339	0.1269	10.5516

$$\lambda_{max} = \frac{12.5874+11.991+11.6657+12.2473+8.2959+11.0918+10.5516}{7}$$

$$\lambda_{max} = 11.2043$$

$$Consistency\ Index(C.I.) = \frac{\lambda_{max} - n}{n-1}$$

$$CI = \frac{11.2043-7}{7-1}$$

$$CI = 0.7007$$

Table 9. Random Index (R.I)

n	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
RI	0	0	0.58	0.9	1.12	1.24	1.32	1.41	1.45	1.49

Consistency Ration = Consistency Index (C.I.)/Random Index (R.I.)

CR= 0.7007/1.32

CR= 0.5308

Table 10.

	Criteria Weights	Percentage
Affordability	0.0783	7.83%
Variety	0.0447	4.47%
Convenience	0.2277	22.77%
Unique Flavors	0.095	9.50%
Creativity	0.0196	1.96%
Accessibility	0.4071	40.71%
Support Small Businesses	0.1269	12.69%

After analyzing the gathered data through pair-wise comparison matrix, normalized pair-wise comparison matrix and calculation of the consistency, the researchers came up with the result. The criteria that are given the most importance of the students when purchasing from informal street vendors based on the AHP is the accessibility with a 40.71% of importance. Informal street vendors' location within the university-belt is beneficial for the students as it is easier for them to access their wants and needs.

3.2 Informal Street Vendors

3.2.1 Benefits of Informal Street Vendors to the University Students

Several substantial benefits of informal street vendors for university students are emphasized by the interview's findings. To begin with, the low cost of the food items these vendors offer greatly contributes to students saving money, which is especially crucial considering the financial hardships many students experience. Together with satisfying people's desires and snacking preferences, informal street vendors also provide a range of well-liked foods like tusok-tusok, siomai, ihaw, and fried desserts. Street vendors often become integral parts of the communities they serve, fostering social interactions and a sense of community. In addition, students who are stressed for time and want quick and reasonably priced food in between classes and other events will find these informal street vendors to be a convenient and accessible option. They are easy to locate across campus.

3.2.2. Benefits that Informal Street Vendors Obtain

The strategic positioning of informal street sellers near university campuses has been shown to provide a continuous daily income due to a constant supply of foot traffic from students and staff, who served as a dependable consumer base. Most street vendors provide the main source of income for their households, bringing food to their families and paying school fees for their children with the help of street vending. Furthermore, vendors were able to customize their product offerings to the unique requirements and tastes of the university community by being close to academic institutions. Example, they were able to provide convenient and reasonably priced meals and snacks. A sense of community and cross-cultural interaction between vendors and their students/faculty customers was also developed by the lively environment that surrounds universities, bringing in vendors. The informal vendors were able to benefit from continuous customer demand and offer a useful service to the university community by locating themselves across the universities. Overall, this proved to be an advantageous location.

4. Conclusion

For the students, the availability of these informal street vendors gives the students an accessible, affordable, and convenient method to satisfy their needs for food and drinks, saving them the time and money that would otherwise be spent traveling to well-known businesses. Beyond the financial and time saving benefits, they also contribute to the University Belt's overall liveliness and social interaction, fostering a sense of community among students and enhancing their overall university experience. Furthermore, the research has shown how much the informal street vendors themselves benefit from the continuous flow of student foot traffic, which guarantees them to maintain their livelihoods and support their families while also improving the local economy.

The findings of this research emphasize the beneficial relationship that exists between informal street vendors and university students. Since universities strive to provide welcoming and stimulating environments, incorporating these informal street vendors should be considered as a valuable component to enhancing the overall campus experience.

5. Recommendation

Based on the results of this study which explored the significant benefits of informal street vendors to university students, some recommendations can be made:

5.1. Partnership with NGOs and Local Government

Since the study provides the factors of why informal street vendors are important to university students, NGOs and Local Government Bodies must consider partnering with the informal street vendors to design and implement programs specifically specialized to the needs of the informal street vendors. In this way, we can shift the informal street vendors into formalized vendors which can help in a three-way process including the informal street vendors themselves, the students at universities, and lastly, the government.

5.2. Legal Support and Advocacy

Initiate legal aid clinics to help the informal street vendors understand their rights, obtain essential permits, and handle legal challenges. Through the help of the legal aid clinics the informal street vendors may stand up to public authorities who are in charge of their eviction. Advocating for policies that protect the rights of informal street vendors, such as secure vending zones, fair taxation, and protection from harassment

may help them to continue their livelihood while providing accessible, convenient, and affordable goods and services to university students.

5.3. Health and Safety Programs Health Insurance

By providing informal street vendors with access to health insurance, they may get insurance for medical costs and seek care, when necessary, without having to worry about running out of money. By maintaining their health, these informal street vendors are able to run their enterprises and offer local university students convenient, reasonably priced food options.

5.4. Occupational Safety Training

By keeping the street food environment clean and lowering the danger of foodborne diseases for student customers, occupational safety training on issues like safe food handling and workplace cleanliness can help reduce health concerns. All in all, making investment in the health and safety of informal street vendors benefits both parties: university students continue to have access to the affordable, easily accessible food alternatives that informal street vendors in the U-belt area.

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