

**A PROJECT REPORT ON
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF STREET FOOD
VENDORS AND CUSTOMER INTERACTION IN POKHARA**

BY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled "**An Ethnographic Exploration of Street Food Vendors and Customer Interaction in Pokhara**" submitted to the Department of Hospitality Management is my original research work. It has not been submitted previously for any degree or diploma in this or any other university or academic institution. All sources, literary materials, field observation logs, and qualitative interview data used in this study have been duly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with standard academic conventions.

Luckyna Rai

July, 2026

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Project Work titled “**An Ethnographic Exploration of Street Food Vendors and Customer Interaction in Pokhara**” submitted by Luckyna Rai (Registration No: 2023-2-15-0354, Exam Roll No: 23150232) for the partial fulfilment of the requirements of BHM embodies the Bonafide work done by her under my supervision.

.....

Suresh Raj Adhikari

Supervisor, Project Work

July, 2026

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NTHMC

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Street food culture represents a foundational dimension of the global informal economy, urban socio-cultural identity, municipal food security, and localized culinary tourism. Far beyond serving merely as a venue for low-cost, rapid nutritional intake, street food vending functions as a vibrant, multifaceted interface where indigenous culinary arts, micro-entrepreneurial survival strategies, urban spatial vitality, and community heritage continuously intersect. In developing economies across South Asia, street food vendors operate as living cultural custodians. They animate public thoroughfares, transform sidewalks into lively social plazas, preserve ancestral food preparation techniques, generate immediate self-employment opportunities for low-capital entrepreneurs, support agrarian supply networks, and offer highly immersive, sensory-rich experiential hospitality that formal commercial establishments frequently fail to replicate.

The socio-economic and cultural importance of street food has gained significant scholarly attention within hospitality, tourism, urban sociology, and development economics. According to estimates by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), over 2.5 billion people worldwide consume street food on a daily basis. In many Asian cities, street food accounts for a major portion of daily household food expenditures and provides critical employment opportunities for rural-to-urban migrants, women, and marginalized demographic groups. However, street food hospitality is characterized by a fundamental duality: while it is celebrated for its cultural authenticity, spatial accessibility, culinary diversity, and vibrant sensory appeal, it simultaneously faces ongoing regulatory challenges, municipal space clearings, concerns over environmental hygiene, and structural marginalization by urban administrative bodies.

Pokhara, widely celebrated as the primary tourism capital of Nepal, presents a uniquely compelling geographical, socio-demographic, and commercial landscape for investigating the complex dynamics of informal street food hospitality. Nestled beneath the Annapurna Himalayan range and framed by the waters of Phewa Lake, Pokhara attracts an intricate demographic mixture of international holidaymakers, high-altitude trekkers, domestic vacationers, seasonal migrant workers, higher-

education students, and long-term local residents. Within this dynamic urban ecosystem, informal street food clusters have naturally evolved into essential hubs of daily social interaction, community networking, and culinary exploration.

The geography of street food vending in Pokhara is spatially diverse and functionalized across distinct urban corridors. In the heavily pedestrianized, tourist-centric corridors of Lakeside and Hallanchowk, street vending operates primarily in the late afternoon and evening, catering to domestic and international travelers seeking relaxed leisure, lakeside evening strolls, and late-night snacks. Here, mobile carts and semi-stationary stalls offer Tibetan Laphing, charcoal-grilled Sekkuwa, deep-fried lake fish, and hot Himalayan soups. Conversely, in the densely populated commercial arteries of Chipledhunga, Mahendrapool, and Prithvi Chowk—the commercial and financial heart of Pokhara—street food vending caters to high-footfall volumes of local shoppers, bank workers, retail employees, and college students seeking rapid, highly spiced daytime snacks such as Chatpate, Pani Puri, and steamed Momo. In residential and transit junctions such as Birauta, Amarsingh Chowk, and Bagar, street stalls serve as vital neighborhood gathering nodes where local families and commuters consume traditional evening snacks, fried legume preparations, and seasonal roasted corn (Makai).

Across these varied urban micro-zones, street food vendors prepare and serve an expansive spectrum of indigenous, regional, and cross-border fusion street delicacies. Each culinary offering possesses distinct historical roots, sensory profiles, preparation rituals, and tactile consumption methods:

- **Chatpate:** A highly popular, tangy, and fiery mixture combining puffed rice (Bhoja), dry instant noodles (Wai-Wai or Rara), boiled chickpeas, raw chopped red onions, green chilies, fresh coriander, diced cucumber, boiled potato cubes, mustard oil, lemon juice, and a complex mixture of dry ground spices. It is mixed rapidly by hand using a metal spoon inside an empty tin container (Dabba) and served in small paper cones or leaf plates (Tapaari).
- **Pani Puri:** Crispy, hollow, deep-fried spherical wheat or semolina wafers filled with a spiced potato and chickpea mixture, which are manually punctured by the vendor's thumb and filled with ice-cold, highly aromatic spice water infused with mint, tamarind, black salt, cumin, and green chili.
- **Sekkuwa:** Marinated cuts of buffalo meat, chicken, or pork skewered on thin metal rods and grilled directly over open wooden charcoal embers on portable

metal grills, continuously brushed with mustard oil and regional spices.

- **Momo:** Steamed or deep-fried flour dumplings stuffed with seasoned minced meat or vegetables, served alongside hot, aromatic tomato-sesame chutneys (Achar).
- **Laphing:** A spicy, savory cold starch noodle dish originating from Tibetan cuisine, made from mung bean or wheat starch jelly rolls filled with crushed garlic, soy sauce, chili oil, sesame seeds, vinegar, and ground peanuts, served either wet in a fiery chilled broth or dry.
- **Fried Lake Fish:** Small fish harvested directly from Phewa Lake, coated in chickpea flour, turmeric, garlic paste, and chili powder, deep-fried in large shallow iron skillets (Karai) on sidewalk burners, and served crispy with tangy tomato chutney.
- **Roasted Corn (Makai):** Fresh green corn cobs roasted directly over charcoal stoves on roadside corners, rubbed generously with fresh lime slices and a mixture of salt, chili powder, and local spices.

The interaction that takes place between a street food vendor and a customer in Pokhara far transcends a basic, impersonal monetary transaction. It represents a subtle, expressive socio-cultural encounter characterized by verbal kinship greetings, non-verbal physical gestures, spontaneous humor, shared sensory anticipation, and continuous real-time negotiations of trust and hygiene safety. Unlike formal dining environments—such as star-rated hotels or fine-dining restaurants—where service delivery is strictly governed by formal standard operating procedures (SOPs), scripted verbal interactions, physical distance between staff and guests, and visual separation between the kitchen and the dining room, street food hospitality operates on fluid, highly personalized, and context-dependent interpersonal communication.

In the street vending context, the vendor's cart or stall functions as an open, uncontained micro-servicescape. It operates as a public stage where raw ingredients, open fires, hot oil sizzles, spice aromas, spatial proximity, and immediate verbal rapport converge to shape the overall customer experience. From a hospitality management perspective, examining these micro-level interactions provides valuable qualitative insights into informal service delivery, real-time product customization, emotional labor, customer retention without corporate marketing budgets, and the sensory drivers of destination loyalty. While traditional hospitality management literature historically emphasizes standardized service quality, tangible physical

luxury, and formal organizational structures, street food hospitality thrives on authenticity, immediacy, personal connection, open production transparency, and sensory immersion. Therefore, an ethnographic exploration of street food vendors and customer interactions in Pokhara provides essential scholarly and practical insights into how informal hospitality operates, sustains urban livelihoods, and shapes the destination image of Nepal.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the significant economic contribution, socio-cultural value, and destination enhancement provided by street food in Pokhara's urban landscape, informal street food vending is frequently viewed by local municipal authorities through a restrictive regulatory lens focused almost exclusively on urban space encroachment, traffic disruption, visual clutter, and perceived public health risks. Academic literature within hospitality and tourism management in Nepal has overwhelmingly focused on formal, highly structured enterprises—such as star-rated luxury hotels, boutique eco-resorts, formal restaurant franchises, travel agencies, and official trekking operators—while systematically neglecting the operational, communicative, and experiential dynamics of the informal food sector.

Specifically, there is a distinct lack of empirical, qualitative research investigating how street food vendors in Pokhara establish personal rapport, manage consumer perceptions regarding food safety and hygiene, and build customer loyalty through face-to-face communication in open street spaces. Consumers in Pokhara continue to frequent street food stalls in high numbers despite widespread public awareness regarding environmental dust, vehicle emissions, lack of piped tap water, and unstandardized operational settings. However, limited academic inquiry has been conducted to understand the specific socio-cultural, communicative, and psychological factors that alleviate risk anxiety and build consumer trust during these street encounters.

Furthermore, traditional hospitality management literature relies heavily on quantitative measurement frameworks (such as SERVQUAL, DINESERV, or RSQS scales) designed specifically for brick-and-mortar hospitality settings. These standardized survey tools fail to capture the fluid, sensory-rich, highly contextualized, performative, and deeply communal nature of street food service encounters. Without detailed qualitative ethnographic research examining vendor-customer interactions, hospitality educators, urban planning bodies, and tourism policymakers risk

marginalizing an essential sector that defines the authentic, lived culinary heritage of Pokhara. To address this theoretical, empirical, and practical gap, this study provides an ethnographic qualitative examination of the micro-dynamics of interaction between street food vendors and customers in Pokhara.

1.3 Research Questions

To address the core research problem, this study formulates the following primary and secondary research questions:

- How do street food vendors and customers communicate, negotiate service encounters, and build interpersonal relationships within the informal street spaces of Pokhara?
- How does the physical, social, and sensory environment (the street servicescape) of food stalls shape customer engagement, dwelling behavior, and overall dining satisfaction?
- What specific communicative strategies, performative cleanliness behaviors, and visual cues do street food vendors utilize to establish trust, project hygiene safety, and alleviate health concerns during live service encounters?

1.4 Objectives of the Research

The primary objective of this study is to explore, document, and analyze the interpersonal, communicative, and contextual dynamics between street food vendors and customers in Pokhara through a qualitative ethnographic lens. The specific research objectives are:

- To investigate the primary modes of communication, verbal exchanges, kinship address forms, and non-verbal behaviors that characterize vendor-customer interactions across diverse street food clusters in Pokhara.
- To analyze the influence of the physical street servicescape—including spatial layout, seating, cooking smoke, lighting, spice smells, visual displays, and street ambiance—on customer engagement and social interaction.
- To examine the explicit and implicit practices employed by street vendors to project hygiene standards, negotiate consumer trust, and manage perceived health risks in open-air environments.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research offers meaningful theoretical, practical, policy, and socio-cultural contributions across several key domains:

- **Theoretical Contribution:** The study expands conventional hospitality management literature into the informal sector by analyzing service encounters through an ethnographic framework. It deepens theoretical understanding of how hospitality operates organically without corporate standard operating procedures, contributing to South Asian literature on street gastronomy, emotional labor, servicescape dynamics, and informal service management.
- **Practical Insights for Formal Hospitality Operators:** Lessons learned from street vendors regarding rapid real-time customization, operational agility, informal customer connection, open kitchen transparency, and sensory engagement offer practical takeaways for formal restaurant managers and hotel practitioners seeking to foster authentic guest connections.
- **Policy and Urban Planning Implications:** Local municipal authorities, including Pokhara Metropolitan City and tourism promotion bodies, can utilize these qualitative findings to formulate inclusive urban management policies. Rather than pursuing enforcement policies focused on vendor displacement and confiscation, municipal leaders can design designated, aesthetically structured street food zones equipped with essential utility infrastructure (clean water supply, proper drainage, waste management, electricity), preserving local cultural character while safeguarding public health.
- **Socio-Cultural Preservation:** By documenting the lived experiences, communicative skills, operational resilience, and culinary knowledge of street food micro-entrepreneurs, this study validates the contribution of informal hospitality workers who preserve Pokhara's tangible and intangible culinary heritage.

1.6 Literature Review

1.6.1 Theoretical Foundations of Street Food Hospitality

The academic study of street food interactions exists at the intersection of services marketing, urban sociology, sensory anthropology, and informal hospitality management. To thoroughly analyze the multi-layered exchanges occurring at street food stalls, this study integrates four complementary theoretical frameworks: Bitner's (1992) Servicescape Model, Goffman's (1959) Dramaturgical Theory, Pine and

Gilmore's (1999) Experience Economy Framework, and Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964).

1.6.1.1 Bitner's Servicescape Model in Informal Environments

Bitner's (1992) **Servicescape Model** conceptualizes how the physical surroundings of a service environment influence cognitive evaluations, emotional states, and internal behavioral responses of both customers and service employees. While Bitner originally conceptualized this model for enclosed commercial settings like banks, hotels, airports, and formal retail stores, contemporary hospitality scholars (e.g., Line & Runyan, 2012; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011) have extended the framework to outdoor, informal, and open-air environments.

The "street servicescape" is uncontained, fluid, and intensely sensory. It encompasses three core dimensions:

1. **Ambient Conditions:** Natural and created environmental features such as charcoal smoke, crackling fires, mustard oil aromas, street lamp illumination, LED light strips, ambient traffic sounds, acoustic street music, lakeside breezes, and weather variations.
2. **Spatial Layout and Functionality:** The physical positioning of the vendor's cart, spatial arrangement of low wooden benches or plastic stools, proximity to pedestrian sidewalks, standing room around prep counters, and queue organization.
3. **Signs, Symbols, and Artifacts:** Visual ingredient displays, colorful condiment jars, stainless-steel prep containers, hanging chili-garlic clusters, disposable glove displays, price slates, and decorative LED lights.

In street food vending, these physical and sensory elements trigger immediate physiological responses (salivation, appetite arousal), cognitive evaluations (hygiene safety judgment, freshness assessment), and emotional states (comfort, curiosity, excitement, nostalgia) among consumers, directly influencing their decision to approach, dwell, consume, and return.

1.6.1.2 Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory and Front-Stage Performance

Complementing the servicescape model, Erving Goffman's (1959) **Dramaturgical Theory** provides a powerful sociological framework for analyzing vendor behavior during service interactions. Goffman posits that social life resembles a theatrical performance, where individuals present themselves on a "front stage" to an audience while maintaining a separate, hidden "back stage" where raw preparation and private

behaviors occur.

In street food vending, the vendor's cart operates as an open, fully visible, transparent front stage. Because there are no physical kitchen walls or dining room partitions separating the cook from the consumer, every operational action—chopping onions, squeezing limes, measuring spices, tossing *Chatpate* in tin containers, wiping prep surfaces, handling cash, and rinsing utensils—is observed live by waiting customers. The vendor's front-stage performance must demonstrate physical dexterity, operational efficiency, performative cleanliness, and warm, welcoming hospitality to project professional competence and earn consumer trust.

1.6.1.3 Experience Economy and Sensory Experience Realms

Pine and Gilmore's (1999) **Experience Economy Framework** asserts that modern consumers increasingly seek memorable, authentic, and emotionally engaging experiences rather than simple commodities or basic services. Pine and Gilmore categorize customer experiences across four realms:

- **Entertainment:** Observing the vendor's acrobatic spice-tossing or rapid chopping skills.
- **Educational:** Learning about local ingredients, regional chili varieties, or traditional recipes directly from the vendor.
- **Aesthetic:** Immersing oneself in the visual and atmospheric charm of glowing charcoal grills beside Phewa Lake under evening streetlights.
- **Escapist:** Stepping out of formal daily routines to gather informally on sidewalk stools alongside diverse community members.

Street food consumption in Pokhara represents an experiential transaction where value is derived not merely from nutritional intake, but from the immersive experience of standing on the street, customizing spice levels directly with the cook, observing live food preparation, and sharing public space with fellow diners.

1.6.1.4 Social Exchange Theory and Relational Dynamics

Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964) posits that human social interactions are guided by subjective cost-benefit analyses and mutual expectations of reciprocity. In informal street food vending, where formal written contracts, legal warranties, and corporate guarantees are absent, social exchange principles govern vendor-customer relationships. When vendors offer small extra portions (*Sukha Puri*, extra chutney, sample bites), warm kinship greetings, and flexible credit (*Udharo*), customers reciprocate with personal loyalty, word-of-mouth recommendations, and

repeat patronage. This reciprocal social exchange transforms simple financial transactions into enduring social bonds.

1.6.2 Review of Key Empirical Themes

1.6.2.1 Influence of Street Servicescape on Customer Experience

Empirical research across major Asian street food capitals—such as Bangkok, Penang, Kolkata, Hanoi, and Jakarta—consistently demonstrates that the physical and sensory surroundings of street stalls significantly shape consumer emotions and behavioral intentions. Studies highlight that open street settings foster an intimate physical proximity between customer and vendor that formal indoor dining cannot replicate. The sights of glowing charcoal embers, the sound of crackling *Puri* shells, and the aroma of roasted spices create an immediate sensory connection. Scholars observe that consumers frequently interpret this direct physical openness as evidence of food freshness and culinary honesty, as no preparation steps are hidden behind kitchen doors.

1.6.2.2 Emotional, Sensory, and Socio-Cultural Dynamics in Food Interaction

Food consumption at informal street stalls is deeply embedded in social rituals and cultural identity. Academic studies emphasize that street food stalls serve as egalitarian social spaces where individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds—students, office executives, international travelers, and local manual laborers—gather and share communal space without formal social barriers. Interactions at street stalls are rarely purely transactional; they frequently include casual neighborhood gossip, discussions on local sports and politics, lighthearted banter, and localized humor. Furthermore, emotional attachment to street food is strongly tied to culinary nostalgia. Consuming street food often evokes personal memories of school-day habits, family outings, or regional flavors, providing emotional comfort that standardized restaurant chains rarely reproduce.

1.6.2.3 Service Aesthetics, Trust, and Hygiene Perception

A major theme in informal food literature addresses the paradox of high consumer demand alongside recognized hygiene concerns. Studies demonstrate that street food consumers navigate perceived health risks by relying on observable visual micro-indicators of trust during live service encounters. Rather than expecting sterile, laboratory-like cleanliness, street food patrons evaluate visible cleanliness practices, such as frequent wiping of prep counters, clean glass display covers, disposable gloves, segregated cash handling, and fresh water availability. When vendors actively

demonstrate these visible cleanliness steps while maintaining a welcoming demeanor, consumer anxiety decreases, and trust is established in real-time.

1.6.3 Literature Gap

While international academic literature extensively covers street food safety standards, economic survival strategies, and tourist motivation models across South East Asia and Latin America, there remains a distinct research gap regarding the ethnographic, communicative, and interpersonal micro-dynamics of street food encounters in Nepal, particularly in major tourist cities like Pokhara. Existing hospitality studies centered on Pokhara focus almost exclusively on formal hospitality management, including luxury hotel occupancy, formal restaurant operations, adventure tourism management, and trekking logistics. Almost no academic inquiry has systematically documented how informal street food vendors in Pokhara utilize personal communication, kinship address forms, performative cleanliness cues, and spatial setups to foster customer trust and loyalty. This study addresses this empirical gap by providing a qualitative ethnographic investigation into street food service encounters in Pokhara.

1.7 Research Methodology

1.7.1 Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative ethnographic research design. Ethnography is uniquely suited for investigating culture, daily routines, social interactions, non-verbal behaviors, and shared meanings within their natural, undisturbed environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through sustained participant observation, naturalistic field immersion, semi-structured interviews, and visual documentation, an ethnographic approach enables the researcher to capture the nuanced, lived realities of street food encounters in Pokhara without imposing artificially controlled experimental conditions.

1.7.2 Population and Participants

The target population for this study encompasses both street food vendors operating informal stalls across Pokhara and the customers (including local residents, domestic visitors, and international tourists) who frequent these stalls. To ensure a comprehensive representation of Pokhara's street food landscape, field research was conducted across four key geographical clusters:

1. **Lakeside and Hallanchowk:** High-density tourist corridors featuring a mix of local snack carts, Tibetan *Laphing* stalls, deep-fried lake fish setups, and evening

charcoal-grilled *Sekkuwa* operations.

2. **Chipledhunga and Mahendrapool:** Commercial heart of Pokhara, characterized by high-footfall *Chatpate*, *Pani Puri*, and *Momo* vendors serving local shoppers, college students, and office workers.
3. **Birauta and Amarsingh Chowk:** Major residential and transit junctions offering traditional evening snacks, fried legumes, and seasonal roasted corn (*Makai*).
4. **Prithvi Chowk and Bagar:** High-transit commercial and institutional hubs catering to commuters, bus passengers, and university students.

The final participant sample comprised **12 street food vendors** and **18 street food customers** who engaged in detailed semi-structured interviews, supported by extensive direct observations conducted across **25 field visits** across these study zones.

1.7.3 Sampling Technique

This study employed a combination of **purposive sampling** and **snowball sampling**. Purposive sampling was used to intentionally select street food vendors representing varied food categories (*Chatpate/Pani Puri*, *Sekkuwa*, *Laphing*, *Momo/Thukpa*, Fried Fish, Roasted Corn) and diverse operational locations to ensure rich data variation. Customers were recruited on-site using opportunistic sampling immediately following observed service encounters. Snowball sampling was used when experienced vendors introduced the researcher to neighboring long-term vendors within their local street vending networks.

1.7.4 Data Collection Method

Qualitative field data were gathered over an eight-week period utilizing four primary qualitative collection techniques:

1. **Participant and Direct Field Observation:** The researcher conducted naturalistic observations at street stalls during peak operating hours (11:00 AM to 2:00 PM for lunch/snack shifts; 4:00 PM to 9:00 PM for evening shifts). Observations focused on vendor preparation rituals, non-verbal cues, greeting patterns, queue dynamics, spatial setups, hygiene handling, and customer reactions. Detailed field logs were recorded immediately following each observation session.
2. **Semi-Structured Interviews:** In-depth, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with vendors and customers using tailored interview schedules.

Interviews explored interaction experiences, trust negotiation, flavor customization, communication styles, and emotional connections. Interviews were conducted in Nepali or local dialects, audio-recorded with explicit consent, and subsequently translated and transcribed into English for analysis.

3. **Field Photographic Documentation:** Visual photographs of street stall configurations, ingredient displays, interaction proximity, and servicescape layouts were captured to support narrative analytical claims.
4. **Informal Field Conversations:** Brief, spontaneous chats held with waiting customers and passing pedestrians to capture immediate, unscripted impressions of street food dining.

1.7.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Collected qualitative interview transcripts, field observation logs, and informal conversation notes were analyzed using **Thematic Analysis**, following the established six-phase qualitative framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

- **Phase 1: Familiarization with Data:** Repeated reading of transcribed interview texts and descriptive field logs to gain deep familiarity with the dataset.
- **Phase 2: Initial Code Generation:** Generating initial conceptual codes labeling meaningful segments of text (e.g., "kinship greeting," "spice customization," "performative wiping," "smoke ambiance," "nostalgia," "informal credit").
- **Phase 3: Searching for Candidate Themes:** Grouping related initial codes into broader thematic categories representing underlying patterns of interaction.
- **Phase 4: Reviewing and Refining Themes:** Reviewing candidate themes against the full dataset to ensure internal consistency and logical thematic narrative.
- **Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes:** Establishing final precise thematic names and conceptual definitions capturing the core essence of findings.
- **Phase 6: Producing the Report:** Integrating thematic narratives with direct illustrative quote extracts, field notes, and scholarly discussion.

1.7.6 Qualitative Rigor and Trustworthiness

To ensure academic rigor, qualitative trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria:

- **Credibility (Internal Validity):** Achieved through prolonged field immersion over eight weeks, data triangulation across observations, interviews, and visual notes, and informal member-checking with key vendor participants.

- **Transferability (External Validity):** Facilitated by providing thick, detailed qualitative descriptions of Pokhara's street servicescape, participant demographics, and interaction contexts, allowing future researchers to assess contextual applicability.
- **Dependability (Reliability):** Maintained through a transparent, documented audit trail detailing field observation dates, interview transcripts, coding trees, and analytical decisions.
- **Confirmability (Objectivity):** Ensured through reflective reflexivity journal keeping, acknowledging the researcher's background as a BHM scholar and ensuring interpretations remained strictly grounded in participant data.

1.7.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were strictly observed throughout the research process:

- **Informed Consent:** Informed verbal or written consent was secured from all interview participants prior to conducting interviews or recording audio.
- **Anonymity and Confidentiality:** All participant names were replaced with pseudonyms
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participants were explicitly informed of their right to decline answering any question or withdraw from the study at any point without negative consequences.
- **Vulnerability Sensitivity:** Recognizing that informal vendors occasionally face municipal enforcement actions or cart confiscations, the researcher assured participants that collected data would be utilized exclusively for academic degree research, ensuring no identifying business locations were reported to municipal enforcement bodies.

1.7.8 Delimitations and Limitations

- **Delimitations:** This study is geographically delimited to urban street food clusters within Pokhara Metropolitan City and focuses specifically on qualitative interactional, communicative, and sensory dynamics rather than quantitative revenue metrics or laboratory microbiological testing of food items.
- **Limitations:** Findings are contextually grounded in Pokhara's distinct urban and tourism culture and may not be universally generalizable to all informal food contexts across Nepal. Additionally, seasonal monsoon rainfall occasionally altered evening street vending schedules and pedestrian footfall during the fieldwork period.

CHAPTER II

FINDINGS

This chapter presents how the physical street environment and small atmospheric details influence people's experiences and behaviors. It includes elements such as street layout, cleanliness, lighting, noise, smells, temperature, pedestrian movement, storefronts, and interactions among people. These micro-level conditions can shape how comfortable, attractive, safe, and engaging a street feels.

2.1.1 Spatial Configuration, Cart Topography, and Pedestrian Dynamics

Field observations across Chipledhunga, Lakeside, Mahendrapool, and Hallanchowk revealed that the physical configuration and spatial orientation of street food carts play a decisive role in shaping customer-vendor interactions, pedestrian flow, and social gathering behaviors. Unlike formal restaurants where physical walls, reception counters, hostesses, and carpeted floors establish strict spatial boundaries between production and consumption, the street food cart operates as an open, uncontained, four-sided spatial hub directly embedded within the pedestrian sidewalk.

Street carts in Pokhara generally fall into three distinct physical design typologies:

- **Stationary Glass-Fronted Carts (*Chatpate/Pani Puri/Momo Carts*):** Elevated four-wheeled wooden or metal carts equipped with eye-level transparent glass display boxes, stainless-steel prep counters, and lower storage compartments. The glass enclosure faces the pedestrian sidewalk, displaying vibrant bowls of yellow potatoes, chickpeas, puffed rice, chopped onions, and fresh coriander, serving as an immediate visual invitation to passing pedestrians.
- **Low Portable Charcoal Grill Setups (*Sekkuwa Stalls*):** Compact, lower-to-the-ground rectangular iron trough grills filled with burning wood charcoal, flanked by small wooden side tables holding raw marinated meat skewers, oil bottles, and spice shakers. These setups are typically accompanied by low plastic stools or folding wooden benches arranged in a semi-circle around the grill.
- **Mobile Basket or Bicycle Setups (*Laphing/Roasted Corn Vendors*):** Highly agile vendors utilizing bicycle rear racks or wide bamboo baskets (*Doko*) modified into insulated prep stations, allowing rapid setup and movement along pedestrian thoroughfares.

A key finding is that the physical height and open layout of these carts create an intimate spatial proximity between vendor and customer. At a typical *Chatpate* cart in

Chipledhunga, the distance separating the vendor's hands from the customer's chest is less than two feet. There is no physical barrier blocking the customer's line of sight.

Field Note Excerpt (Location: Chipledhunga, Time: 4:30 PM, Weather: Clear):

The vendor stands behind a 3.5-foot-high glass-covered cart positioned right at the edge of the pedestrian sidewalk. Three college students approach and stand in an arc around the cart's front edge. Their forearms rest directly on the stainless-steel outer rail of the cart. The vendor operates within immediate touching distance of the customers. As he chops onions, tiny fragments fly onto the counter right before the students. The physical arrangement eliminates all operational distance; the customers are not merely waiting for food—they are standing inside the preparation zone.

This spatial closeness directly encourages informal conversation, immediate visual feedback, and spontaneous social engagement that would feel intrusive in a formal dining establishment.

2.1.2 Ambient Conditions and Sensory Micro-Environments

The street servicescape in Pokhara is characterized by an intense, multi-sensory micro-environment that actively engages passing pedestrians long before any verbal encounter occurs. Field observations confirmed that ambient conditions—specifically olfactory diffusion, auditory cues, visual displays, and lighting effects—act as powerful sensory catalysts that draw customers toward food stalls.

In Lakeside and Hallanchowk, evening *Sekkuwa* stalls create a distinct atmospheric presence. As marinated meat skewers are placed over red-hot wooden charcoal, plumes of garlic and cumin-scented smoke rise into the cool lakeside evening air. The aroma drifts down the pedestrian sidewalk, acting as an ambient olfactory magnet. Simultaneously, the crackling sound of dripping fat hitting hot embers and the visual glow of radiant charcoal fires create a warm, inviting visual focus against the dimming twilight.

At *Pani Puri* and *Chatpate* carts in Mahendrapool, auditory stimuli dominate the ambient servicescape. The continuous, rhythmic tapping of metal spoons against the inside of tin mixing containers ("*Clank-clank-clank*"), the crunching sound of hollow *Puri* shells being punctured by the vendor's thumb, and the bubbling splash of cold spiced tamarind water create an energetic auditory background that signals fresh, real-time culinary production.

A 28-year-old domestic tourist from Chitwan interviewed at Hallanchowk described the compelling nature of these sensory cues:

"You can be walking down Lakeside after a long day of sightseeing, not feeling particularly hungry. But as soon as you pass Hallanchowk, the smoke from the Sekkuwa charcoal hits your nose, you hear the sizzle of the meat on the grill, and you see people sitting on low stools laughing with warm plates in their hands. The whole environment pulls you in. You don't just decide to eat because of a menu board; you sit down because your senses tell you that something delicious and exciting is happening right there."

Furthermore, visual lighting choices heavily influence nighttime servicescape appeal. Vendors in Pokhara increasingly utilize bright white or warm LED light strips powered by 12-volt motorcycle batteries, illuminating their glass display boxes and raw ingredient bowls. This concentrated lighting casts a theatrical spotlight over the prep surface, highlighting the vibrant green of fresh coriander, the rich red of chili pastes, and the clean stainless steel of mixing bowls, reassuring customers of food freshness under dark evening conditions.

2.1.3 Informal Hospitality, Kinship Address, and Welcoming Ambience

A major empirical finding of this study is that street food vendors in Pokhara generate a powerful sense of welcoming hospitality through the strategic use of informal **kinship address terms** and personalized, unscripted verbal greetings. In contrast to formal hotel environments where staff adhere to professional honorifics (e.g., "Sir," "Madam," "Guest"), street vendors instantly integrate customers into an informal social family structure by utilizing familial terms:

- **"Dai" (Older Brother):** Used when addressing older or peer male customers, establishing immediate respect and camaraderie.
- **"Didi" (Older Sister):** Used when addressing older or peer female customers, conveying warmth and respectful familiarity.
- **"Baini" (Younger Sister):** Used affectionately when addressing younger female customers or students.
- **"Bhai" (Younger Brother):** Used warmly when addressing younger male customers.
- **"Mama" or "Kaka" (Uncle):** Used when addressing middle-aged or elderly male patrons.

Field observations across all study locations demonstrated that vendors initiate nearly 90% of service encounters using these kinship markers, frequently combined with an open smile and direct eye contact.

For example, a 42-year-old vendor who has operated a *Chatpate* cart near Chipledhunga for over ten years explained his philosophy of street hospitality during an interview:

"In a luxury hotel, the waiter stands far away, hands behind their back, saying 'Good evening, Sir.' It sounds polite, but it is cold and distant. At my cart, when I say 'Aau Baine, k khane aajha?' ('Come younger sister, what would you like to eat today?'), it instantly breaks down all barriers. The customer feels like she is visiting her own brother's home. She feels safe, comfortable, and welcomed. My warm greeting and my smile are my true advertisement. If I sit with a stern, plain face, customers will walk right past me to the next cart down the road."

This kinship framing transforms what could be a cold commercial exchange into an emotionally warm social interaction. It creates an egalitarian space where socio-economic class differences dissolve; a bank manager, a college student, and a construction laborer are all addressed as "*Dai*" or "*Bhai*" while standing side-by-side around the cart.

Field observations identified three primary greeting patterns employed by vendors across Pokhara street food hubs:

1. **Familial Kinship Greeting:** The consistent use of address terms such as "*Dai*," "*Didi*," "*Baine*," or "*Bhai*." This communicative strategy breaks down formal societal hierarchies, creates an egalitarian social space on the pavement, and establishes immediate emotional warmth.
2. **Customized Preference Attention:** Proactive inquiries such as "*Tapai ko piro besi ki kam?*" ("Do you prefer high spice or mild?"). This signals attentive guest care, operational flexibility, and personal dedication to individual customer preferences.
3. **Playful Banter and Local Humor:** Expressions like "*Aajha ta naya special chutney chha hai!*" ("Today I have a special new chutney!"). This approach stimulates culinary curiosity, entertains waiting patrons, and builds strong local neighborhood rapport.

2.2 Theme 2: Interpersonal Dynamics, Trust, and Hygiene Negotiations

2.2.1 Verbal/Non-Verbal Communication, Customization, and Emotional Labor

Service encounters at street food stalls in Pokhara are characterized by continuous, rapid, multi-modal communication involving direct speech, hand gestures, facial expressions, and acute observational listening. Because food is prepared live to order, real-time product customization is a central feature of every service exchange.

During peak afternoon and evening hours, vendors perform complex mental multi-tasking. A single *Chatpate* vendor simultaneously manages customized requests from three to five customers standing around the cart—one demanding high chili content ("*Ekdam piro*"), another requesting no raw onions ("*Pyaz haldai nahalnu*"), a third asking for extra lime juice ("*Kagati ali besi*"), and a fourth requesting extra crisp noodle topping ("*Wai-Wai sukha mathi bat halnu*"). Vendors execute these micro-customizations with remarkable precision while maintaining active conversation and managing physical prep speed.

Field Note Excerpt (Location: Lakeside Laphing Stall, Time: 6:15 PM):

A customer takes her first spoonful of spicy cold noodle soup. As the fiery chili oil touches her tongue, her eyebrows contract slightly, and she lets out a small gasp ("Uff"). The vendor, observing her face while slicing starch noodles for another customer, immediately notices her reaction. Without waiting for the customer to speak, the vendor picks up a small metal pitcher of chilled unseasoned broth, pours a splash into her bowl, adds a pinch of crushed peanuts, and says with a warm laugh: 'Baini, piro ali besi bhayo? Yo jhol halera khau, thik hunchha.' ('Sister, was the chili a bit too strong? Drink it with this extra broth, it will balance out.'). The customer smiles in immediate relief.

This interaction illustrates a high level of **emotional labor** and acute perceptual awareness. The vendor actively reads non-verbal physical cues (wincing, hesitation, micro-expressions) made possible by direct physical proximity, interpreting them correctly and offering immediate compensatory service recovery without extra charge. This real-time interaction pathway follows a clear multi-stage progression:

1. **Non-Verbal Detection:** The vendor continuously monitors customer physical expressions and consumption reactions made visible by close physical proximity.
2. **Empathetic Verbal Inquiry:** The vendor initiates a direct, caring verbal check using familiar kinship address ("*Dai/Baini, Kasto chha?*").

3. **Immediate Live Modification:** The vendor instantly adjusts flavor balances (adding broth, lime, salt, or crushed ingredients) directly in front of the customer.
4. **Relational Consolidation:** The customer feels individually valued and understood, reinforcing deep trust and emotional attachment.

2.2.2 Performative Cleanliness, Visual Hygiene Cues, and Risk Perception

A central dynamic explored in this study is how street food vendors and customers negotiate food safety and hygiene in outdoor street environments. Pokhara's streets present environmental challenges, including road dust, vehicle exhaust emissions, lack of piped tap water, and variable weather. Despite these challenges, street stalls attract steady streams of loyal customers. Empirical data show that customers manage health risk concerns through a process of visual evaluation based on **performative cleanliness**.

Customers in Pokhara do not expect informal street vendors to operate with sterile, industrial laboratory conditions. Instead, they look for specific, observable visual micro-indicators of care and hygiene discipline during the live preparation process. Field interviews revealed that customers conduct rapid mental safety audits before placing orders, evaluating specific visual cues:

- **Continuous Surface Maintenance:** Frequent, rhythmic wiping of stainless-steel counters, cutting boards, and tin containers using clean cloths.
- **Physical Ingredient Protection:** Keeping chopped vegetables, boiled potatoes, spice mixes, and fried puris covered inside clear glass display boxes or covered stainless containers, protecting them from ambient dust and flies.
- **Hand Hygiene and Protection Barriers:** Using disposable plastic gloves or clean plastic bags over hands when mixing food items directly, or utilizing long-handled metal spoons to avoid direct hand-to-food contact.
- **Water Vessel Clarity:** Presenting clear, visible water containers for rinsing spoons and bowls, rather than murky, stagnant water buckets stored out of sight.
- **Segregated Currency Handling:** Consciously avoiding touching paper currency notes directly with the same hand used to handle raw food, or utilizing a separate container/bowl for cash collection.

A 24-year-old female college student interviewed near Mahendrapool explained her decision-making process:

"When I walk up to a Chatpate cart, I don't just look at the food; I watch the vendor's hands for two minutes. If I see a vendor take dirty, wrinkled

paper notes from a customer, put the money in his pocket, and then immediately dip his bare fingers into the Pani Puri water or mix Chatpate with his bare hands, I quietly turn around and walk away. But if I see that he wears a clean plastic glove on his mixing hand, uses stainless steel spoons, keeps his glass display box wiped clear, and keeps his spices covered, I feel completely safe eating there. Hygiene on the street isn't about having a fancy tiled kitchen—it's about showing the customer through your live actions that you respect their health."

Vendors who understand this psychological dynamic consciously transform cleanliness into a **front-stage performance**. They intentionally wipe their counters in full view of arriving customers, visibly display fresh glove boxes, and highlight clean water containers.

A 36-year-old *Pani Puri* vendor at Chipledhunga shared his operational perspective:

"I know people worry about street food making them sick. That is why I make sure my wiping cloth is bright white and clean, my glass box is spotless, and I wear fresh plastic gloves for every new batch. When customers see me put on a fresh glove right before making their plate, their eyes relax. They see that I care. Cleanliness is not something you hide in the back; on the street, you must show it proudly to the customer."

2.2.3 Informal Credit, Relational Loyalty, and Repeat Patronage

In addition to verbal greetings and hygiene performance, relational trust is significantly reinforced through informal credit practices (*Udharo*) and flexible payment arrangements. In residential and commercial hubs such as Birauta, Amarsingh Chowk, and Chipledhunga, regular local customers (shopkeepers, taxi drivers, college students) frequently consume street snacks on informal credit, settling their accumulated tab on a weekly or monthly basis.

A veteran *Chatpate* vendor in Birauta noted:

"Many of my regular customers are local shop staff and students who don't always have cash in their pocket every afternoon. When a student comes and says, 'Dai, cash today isn't available, I'll pay tomorrow,' I never say no. I smile and say, 'Eat well, pay whenever you have it.' That 50-rupee credit builds a bond that money cannot buy. They will never go to another cart because they know 'Dai' trusts them."

Furthermore, the recent rapid adoption of mobile digital QR code payment systems

(such as eSewa, Fonepay, and Khalti) across Pokhara's street stalls has further bridged the gap between informal vending and modern convenience. Digital payments eliminate direct cash handling, improving visual hygiene while providing friction-free transactions for tech-savvy younger consumers.

2.3 Theme 3: Experiential Value, Authenticity, and Culinary Nostalgia

2.3.1 Culinary Authenticity, "Asli Swaad", and Sensory Engagement

A recurring motif across all customer interviews was the concept of "**Asli Swaad**" (True, Original, or Authentic Flavor). Customers consistently emphasized that street food in Pokhara offers a distinct, vibrant, and uncompromised sensory taste profile that formal hotel restaurants and commercial dining chains are unable to replicate. When asked why formal hotel kitchens fail to match street food flavor, participants cited several operational and socio-cultural factors:

1. **Unstandardized Culinary Intuition:** Formal hotel kitchens rely on standardized recipes, precise gram measurements, and uniform portioning controlled by rigid SOPs. In contrast, street food vendors cook using intuitive experience, adjusting spice levels, mustard oil intensity, and citrus acidity dynamically based on taste testing and customer feedback.
2. **Freshness and Sourcing:** Street vendors source fresh ingredients daily in small quantities from local Pokhara bazaars (such as Palikhe Chowk market), utilizing regional spices such as mountain *Jimbu* (wild Himalayan aromatic herb), *Timmur* (Sichuan pepper), local garlic, mustard oil, and freshly harvested Phewa Lake fish.
3. **Open Charcoal and High-Heat Cooking:** The use of open wood charcoal fires (*Sekkuwa*) and high-heat iron skillets (*Fried Fish*) imparts a distinct smoky depth (*Smoky Flavor*) that electrical or gas appliances in enclosed commercial hotel kitchens cannot reproduce.

A 35-year-old local hotel front-office manager interviewed as a customer at a Lakeside fish stall noted the contrast:

"I work in a four-star hotel dining room every day. We serve pristine plates, but the food often lacks soul—it is toned down, standardized, and made mild to avoid offending anyone. But when I come to this street stall by the lake after my shift and eat hot fried fish prepared in front of me with raw garlic, mustard oil, and local chili chutney, my taste buds wake up. This is 'Asli Swaad.' It is raw, intense, authentic, and connected to the

real earth of Pokhara."

The multi-sensory engagement operating within Pokhara's street food servicescape can be understood across distinct sensory dimensions:

- **Olfactory Domain:** Sights and scents of charcoal smoke, toasted mustard oil, cumin, and minced garlic trigger immediate appetite and deep culinary nostalgia.
- **Visual Domain:** Bright red chili pastes, green coriander, clear spice waters, and open fire flames signal ingredient freshness and culinary vitality.
- **Auditory Domain:** Sizzling meat on metal plates, crackling puris, rhythmic chopping of spices, and ambient street sounds heighten appetite and anticipation.
- **Tactile Domain:** Warm hand-held leaf plates (*Tapaari*), cool lake breezes, and crisp food textures create a grounded connection to the physical environment.

2.3.2 Social Cohesion, Communal Space, and Place-Making in Pokhara

Street food stalls in Pokhara function as vital "**Third Places**" (Oldenburg, 1989)—informal public gathering spaces distinct from the home (the first place) and the workplace (the second place). In these open street spaces, traditional social hierarchies, economic status differences, and caste boundaries recede, fostering social cohesion and urban community bonding.

At evening *Sekkuwa* stalls in Hallanchowk and *Chatpate* carts in Chipledhunga, customers gather in close physical proximity, standing around the same cart rail or sitting on shared low plastic stools. This physical setup naturally triggers spontaneous conversation between strangers. A local high school teacher, an international backpacker from Germany, a municipal worker, and a tourist from Kathmandu routinely find themselves sharing the same wooden bench while waiting for their orders.

Field Note Excerpt (Location: Hallanchowk Sekkuwa Stall, Time: 7:30 PM):

Four low plastic stools are arranged around a small wooden bench near the grill. A domestic tourist couple from Kathmandu sits on two stools, while a local Pokhara taxi driver sits on the third. While waiting for their chicken skewers, the driver notices the couple looking at a lake map on their phone. He points out a local scenic viewpoint, saying: 'Dai, don't waste money on private cabs to Sarangkot; take the early local bus from Prithvi Chowk.' The couple thanks him warmly, and when the vendor hands over the hot skewers, they share a dish of spicy tomato chutney. The street stall functions as an organic community center.

Through these daily micro-interactions, street food stalls contribute significantly to urban **place-making**, transforming ordinary concrete sidewalks and asphalt road corners into memorable, culturally vibrant public places that define Pokhara's living destination appeal.

2.3.3 Culinary Nostalgia, Identity, and Emotional Attachment

For local residents, returning migrant workers, and domestic visitors, street food consumption is deeply intertwined with **culinary nostalgia** and personal identity.

Many adult customers interviewed shared that eating *Chatpate* or *Pani Puri* on the street instantly transports them back to their childhood school days, evoking memories of shared pocket money, adolescent friendships, and carefree leisure.

A 32-year-old software engineer visiting Pokhara from Australia reflected during an interview at Mahendrapool:

"I have lived in Sydney for six years, and you can buy expensive Nepali food in formal restaurants there. But nothing compares to standing on this exact sidewalk in Pokhara where I used to stand in my school uniform fifteen years ago, eating Chatpate out of a twisted paper cone with a piece of cardboard used as a spoon. The taste of the mustard oil, the cold wind coming off the Annapurna mountains, the sound of the vendor calling 'Aau Bhai'—it brings back my entire childhood. It reminds me of who I am and where I came from. You cannot buy this emotional feeling in a formal restaurant anywhere in the world."

A long-term street food vendor who has operated a cart near Mahendrapool for over twelve years corroborated this deep emotional connection:

"I have operated this cart right here on this street corner for twelve years. I have watched school children in blue uniforms come to my cart for 20-rupee Chatpate, grow up into college students, get jobs, and today they bring their own young children to my cart. For me, this work is not just about exchanging a plate of food for fifty rupees. It is about being a living part of people's lives and memories in Pokhara. When past customers return after years away and say, 'Dai, your taste hasn't changed at all,' that brings real joy to my heart."

2.4 Cross-Thematic Synthesis and Discussion

Synthesizing the qualitative findings across all three analytical themes reveals that customer-vendor encounters within Pokhara's street food ecosystem represent a highly sophisticated, organic model of **informal experiential hospitality**.

Connecting these empirical findings back to established theoretical frameworks:

1. **Re-conceptualizing Bitner's Servicescape:** Bitner's (1992) model, traditionally applied to enclosed, controllable physical spaces, must be expanded when analyzing street gastronomy. In Pokhara, the street servicescape is uncontained and dynamic. Ambient factors (charcoal smoke, lake breezes, mountain views, acoustic street sounds) and spatial proximity directly enhance consumer appetite and social engagement. Sensory cues act as primary drivers of customer approach behavior, compensating for the lack of formal physical luxury.
2. **Validating Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory:** Street food vending represents an extreme form of Goffman's (1959) front-stage performance. With zero operational back-stage separation, vendors utilize performative cleanliness (visible gloving, continuous surface wiping, glass display maintenance) and physical dexterity as theatrical tools to establish real-time trust, alleviate health risk perceptions, and demonstrate professional competence.
3. **Illustrating Pine & Gilmore's Experience Economy:** Street food consumption in Pokhara transcends basic transactional commodity purchase. Value is co-created across all four experience realms—Entertainment (watching rapid acrobatic spice mixing), Educational (learning local spice compositions), Aesthetic (soaking in evening lakeside charcoal smoke and street lighting), and Escapist (stepping out of formal societal roles to sit on sidewalk stools).
4. **Demonstrating Social Exchange Theory:** Relational loyalty in informal hospitality is built through mutual social exchange (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964). Kinship greetings (*Dai, Didi, Baini*), proactive flavor customization, sample bites, extra portions (*Sukha Puri*), and informal credit (*Udharo*) create enduring relational bonds, ensuring high customer retention without formal marketing expenditures.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Conclusion

This qualitative ethnographic research has explored the micro-world of street food vendors and customer interactions across primary urban hubs in Pokhara, Nepal. By investigating the lived dynamics of informal service encounters through field observations, semi-structured interviews, and visual documentation, this study concludes that street food vending is far more than an informal economic survival mechanism or basic commercial transaction; it represents a vibrant, highly responsive, and deeply embedded form of **informal experiential hospitality**.

The key qualitative conclusions derived from this research are:

1. **Interpersonal Communication and Kinship Hospitality:** Street food vendors cultivate deep guest rapport, emotional warmth, and psychological comfort by consistently employing familiar Nepalese kinship address terms (*Dai, Didi, Baini, Bhai, Kaka*), maintaining close physical proximity, exercising acute observational empathy, and delivering real-time, personalized flavor modifications tailored to individual guest preferences.
2. **Servicescape Dynamics and Urban Vitality:** The uncontained, multi-sensory street servicescape—combining physical cart layouts, open charcoal flames, sizzling sounds, drifting spice scents, lake breezes, ambient lighting, and shared sidewalk seating—acts as an active co-creator of the overall dining experience. Stalls function as vital "Third Places" that foster social cohesion, egalitarian community interaction, and urban place-making across diverse socio-economic groups.
3. **Trust Negotiation through Performative Cleanliness:** Consumer health risk anxiety in outdoor street environments is successfully managed and alleviated through visible, front-stage performative cleanliness behaviors. Practices such as continuous counter wiping, clean glass display box usage, visible plastic gloving, clear water container presentation, and segregated cash handling serve as visual trust indicators that build consumer confidence.
4. **Culinary Authenticity, Nostalgia, and Destination Value:** Street food delivers authentic culinary flavor (*Asli Swaad*) through intuitive seasoning, local ingredient sourcing, and open-fire preparation that formal hotel restaurants

struggle to replicate. Consuming street food triggers deep culinary nostalgia and emotional attachment, making street food an essential, irreplaceable element of Pokhara's living cultural heritage and overall tourism destination image.

In summary, the informal street food sector represents a cornerstone of Pokhara's urban hospitality identity, seamlessly bridging traditional culinary arts, micro-entrepreneurial resilience, and authentic human connection.

3.2 Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings and theoretical synthesis of this research, targeted recommendations are formulated for street food vendors, local municipal authorities, formal hospitality practitioners, and future academic researchers:

3.2.1 Recommendations for Street Food Vendors

- **Standardize Visible Performative Cleanliness Cues:** Vendors should intentionally adopt and maintain visible hygiene practices—including consistent usage of disposable gloves, clean aprons, transparent glass display covers, hairnets, and dedicated clean wiping cloths—to visually signal safety and enhance consumer trust.
- **Implement Hygiene-Conscious Cash Management:** To prevent cross-contamination between paper currency and raw food, vendors should utilize a designated cash collection box or bowl, or actively encourage digital QR code mobile payments (eSewa, Fonepay, Khalti).
- **Preserve Authentic Kinship Communication:** Vendors should maintain their warm, kinship-based communication style, active observational empathy, and real-time taste customization agility, as these informal hospitality qualities represent their primary competitive advantage over formal dining establishments.
- **Enhance Nighttime Cart Lighting:** Installing low-cost, battery-powered warm LED light strips over prep counters can dramatically improve nighttime cart visibility, aesthetic appeal, and visual cleanliness perception.

3.2.2 Recommendations for Municipal Authorities and Tourism Boards

- **Establish Designated "Street Food Hubs" and Pedestrian Night Markets:** Pokhara Metropolitan City should transition away from punitive street clearings and cart confiscations. Instead, municipal urban planners should design dedicated, structured, and aesthetically pleasing "Street Food Zones" in high-demand areas (e.g., dedicated evening pedestrian night markets in Lakeside, Chipledhunga, and Hallanchowk).

- **Provide Essential Utility Infrastructure:** Designated street food zones must be equipped with essential municipal utility infrastructure, including clean running water taps, hygienic drainage channels, covered waste segregation bins, public restroom access, and stable electrical lighting points.
- **Conduct Tailored Food Safety and Hospitality Workshops:** Local municipal bodies, in collaboration with hospitality management colleges and tourism development boards, should provide free, practical training workshops for informal vendors covering safe food handling, personal hygiene, basic accounting, digital financial management, and customer service.
- **Issue Formal Micro-Entrepreneurship Licenses:** Implementing a streamlined, affordable licensing framework for street food vendors will provide micro-entrepreneurs with legal recognition, operational security, and access to formal financial services while allowing the municipality to monitor food safety standards effectively.

3.2.3 Recommendations for Formal Hospitality Practitioners

- **Adopt Open Kitchen and Live-Preparation Concepts:** Formal hotel restaurants and upscale dining establishments should incorporate transparent, open-kitchen formats and live preparation stations, allowing guests to observe visual culinary performance, smoke dynamics, and fresh ingredient assembly, mimicking the engaging transparency of street stalls.
- **Embrace Authentic Personalization and Agility:** Hotel food and beverage managers should train service staff to exercise greater flexibility and personal attentiveness, allowing real-time flavor adjustments tailored to individual guest preferences rather than rigidly adhering to standardized, unyielding menu recipes.
- **Integrate Authentic Street Flavors into Formal Menus:** Hotel executive chefs can elevate guest satisfaction by incorporating authentic, locally sourced street delicacies (*Chatpate, Sekkuwa, Laphing, Fried Lake Fish*) into hotel menu offerings, presenting local culinary heritage with high presentation standards for international and domestic guests.

3.2.4 Recommendations for Future Researchers

- **Expand Comparative Geographic Scope:** Future academic studies should employ comparative qualitative or mixed-methods research designs comparing

street food interaction dynamics in Pokhara with other major Nepalese urban centers such as Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Chitwan, and Dharan.

- **Integrate Microbiological Testing with Qualitative Perceptions:** Scholars can combine ethnographic observational methods with empirical laboratory microbiological testing of food and water samples to evaluate the precise scientific correlation between observed performative hygiene practices and actual microbiological safety outcomes.
- **Conduct Longitudinal Socio-Economic Mobility Studies:** Researchers should conduct longitudinal studies tracking the socio-economic trajectories, generational business transitions, and economic mobility of informal street food micro-entrepreneurs over time as they transition into formal food enterprise ownership.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Ethnographic Observation Protocol

Observation Checklist and Field Log Parameters:

1. Location, Time, and Ambient Weather Conditions:

- Specific Cluster: (Lakeside, Hallanchowk, Chipledhunga, Mahendrapool, Birauta, Amarsingh Chowk, Prithvi Chowk, Bagar).
- Shift & Time: (Morning, Peak Afternoon, Late Evening).
- Weather & Environment: (Clear, Humid, Rain, Dust, Streetlight brightness).

2. Physical Cart Layout and Servicescape Architecture:

- Cart Type: Stationary glass cart, low charcoal grill, mobile bicycle/basket.
- Spatial Setup: Proximity to sidewalk, presence of stools/benches, counter height.
- Visual Displays: Arrangement of ingredients, spice jars, LED lighting strips, signage.

3. Vendor Performative Behavior and Front-Stage Interaction:

- Greeting Rituals: Kinship terms used (*Dai, Didi, Baini, Bhai*), eye contact, smiling.
- Dexterity & Speed: Chopping speed, mixing agility, handling multiple orders.
- Performative Cleanliness: Glove usage, cloth wiping routines, glass box maintenance, water bucket condition, cash handling method.

4. Customer Behavior and Dwell Dynamics:

- Demographic Mix: Local shoppers, college students, domestic tourists, foreign tourists.
- Group Composition: Solo consumers, couples, peer groups, families.
- Dwell Behavior: Standing position, counter touching, queue organization, consumption duration.
- Non-Verbal Reactions: Spice reactions (wincing, gasping, smiling), head nods, verbal feedback.

5. Atmospheric and Socio-Cultural Environment:

- Sensory Conditions: Smoke density, oil aromas, sound of sizzling/clinking, background traffic/music.
- Social Interactions: Conversations between strangers, vendor-customer humor, informal credit negotiations (*Udharo*).

APPENDIX B: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule (Vendors)

1. Background & Operation:

- How long have you been operating your street food stall in Pokhara, and why did you select this specific location?
- What primary street food items do you prepare, and where do you source your ingredients daily?

2. Hospitality & Customer Interaction:

- How do you welcome new and returning customers when they approach your cart?
- What specific words or address terms do you use when greeting customers, and why?
- How do you manage and adjust spice, citrus, and flavor levels to meet individual customer requests?

3. Hygiene Perception & Trust Building:

- What visual habits or cleanliness steps do you practice at your cart to show customers that your food is safe and clean?
- How do you handle situations when a customer expresses concern about environmental dust or food safety?
- How do you manage cash handling while preparing food?

4. Relational Loyalty & Community:

- How do you build long-term relationships with regular local customers and tourists?
- Do you offer informal credit (*Udharo*) or extra portions (*Sukha Puri*) to regular patrons? What impact does this have?

5. Challenges & Future Outlook:

- What major operational challenges do you face regarding municipal regulations, weather, or space allocation in Pokhara?

APPENDIX C: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule (Customers)

1. Consumption Patterns & Motivation:

- How frequently do you consume street food in Pokhara, and which specific locations do you prefer visiting?
- What specific factors motivate you to eat at street stalls rather than inside formal hotel restaurants?

2. Sensory & Experiential Evaluation:

- How would you describe the flavor (*Asli Swaad*), aroma, and overall sensory experience of street food in Pokhara?
- How does the physical atmosphere (smoke, sizzle, lakeside air, streetlights) influence your dining enjoyment?

3. Hygiene & Risk Assessment:

- What specific visual cues or vendor behaviors do you look for to decide whether a street stall is clean and safe?
- Have you ever decided not to eat at a cart after observing the vendor? What specific behavior triggered that decision?

4. Vendor Relationship & Communication:

- How does the vendor's greeting style, warm demeanor, and use of kinship terms (*Dai, Didi, Baini*) make you feel?
- How important is it that you can customize your food spice levels directly with the cook in real-time?

5. Culinary Memory & Nostalgia:

- Does consuming street food in Pokhara evoke any personal memories, feelings of nostalgia, or cultural connection for you? Could you share an example?