

# What is Done? What Has To Be? Mapping the Research Landscape on Street Food Vendors a Bibliometric Perspective

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## Abstract

This study investigates the evolving landscape of street food vending by employing a bibliometric and thematic analysis of Scopus-indexed literature spanning from 2004 to 2024. Street food vending, a vital segment of the urban informal economy, plays a crucial role in employment generation, food accessibility, and cultural representation. The study aims to uncover the socio-economic significance, prevailing challenges, and research trends associated with this sector. Using the search query TITLE-ABS-KEY (“street food” AND “vendors”), the analysis filtered relevant literature across disciplines such as social sciences, business, economics, psychology, and multidisciplinary studies. Data were processed through co-occurrence mapping and network analysis, leading to the identification of key themes and scholarly clusters. Thematic mapping categorised the research landscape into motor, basic, niche, and emerging/declining themes, offering a structured lens to understand intellectual progression in the field. Findings reveal that food security, public health, regulatory barriers, and informal entrepreneurship are dominant research areas, with motor themes such as urbanisation and human interaction underscoring the embeddedness of street vending in city economies. Despite a growing body of literature, there exists a noticeable gap in studies addressing policy implementation, sustainability practices, and the digital transformation of street food enterprises. The study calls for a more nuanced exploration of inclusive regulatory frameworks and the

integration of vendors into formal economic systems. This research contributes a comprehensive scholarly overview, offering actionable insights for policymakers, urban planners, and researchers committed to enhancing the resilience, visibility, and sustainability of street food vendors in rapidly urbanising societies.

**Keywords:** Street Food, Vendors, Food Security, Informal Economy, Urbanisation, Bibliometric Analysis

## Introduction

Street food vending is a vital component of the informal economy, playing a crucial role in urban food systems, employment generation, and socio-economic development. Across the globe, street food vendors contribute to local economies by providing affordable, accessible, and culturally diverse food options, particularly in developing countries where formal employment opportunities are limited. Despite their economic significance, street food vendors often operate in precarious conditions, facing regulatory challenges, health and safety concerns, and social stigmatisation. Over the years, academic research on street food vendors has gained traction, spanning multiple disciplines such as the social sciences, business, economics, psychology, and urban studies. This study employs a bibliometric and thematic analysis to map the

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intellectual structure and research trends surrounding street food vendors, offering insights into the evolving discourse and key thematic clusters shaping the field.

Street food vending intersects with several socio-economic and business-related aspects, making it a rich domain for multidisciplinary inquiry. From an economic perspective, street food vendors represent a critical segment of the informal sector, contributing to urban employment and entrepreneurial activity, particularly among marginalised populations, including women and migrants. From a business standpoint, these vendors engage in micro-entrepreneurship, operating within highly competitive and dynamic environments that require innovation, adaptability, and resilience. Socially, street food vending fosters cultural identity and community interactions, offering a space for social integration and urban vibrancy.

However, the sector also faces pressing challenges, including regulatory restrictions, inadequate infrastructure, hygiene and food safety concerns, and vulnerability to external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic. A bibliometric analysis of street food vendor research provides a systematic understanding of the field's scholarly development, identifying influential studies, prominent authors, and key journals that have shaped the discourse. Furthermore, thematic mapping allows for a deeper exploration of research clusters, categorising emerging, basic, niche, and motor themes within the literature. By employing bibliometric techniques, this study uncovers the intellectual trajectory of research on street food vendors, shedding light on dominant and evolving themes in the academic landscape. The study uses data extracted from Scopus, applying the search query TITLE-ABS-KEY ("street food" AND "vendors") and filtering results within subject areas such as social sciences, business, multidisciplinary research, arts, economics, and psychology. The thematic map generated through bibliometric tools categorises themes based on centrality and density, offering a nuanced understanding of research progression.

Initial findings indicate that the core themes include food security, entrepreneurship, informal sector dynamics, and urban food policies, while emerging themes explore sustainability, consumer behaviour, and public health implications. The presence of niche themes related to neoliberalism, public attitudes, and socio-political

dynamics highlights evolving academic perspectives that require further investigation. Given the importance of street food vendors in shaping urban economies and food systems, this study contributes to the literature by synthesising existing research trends and identifying knowledge gaps. Understanding the interplay between socio-economic factors, business strategies, and regulatory frameworks is essential for developing inclusive policies that support the sustainability of street food vendors. The findings of this study aim to inform policymakers, urban planners, and scholars on the critical dimensions influencing the street food vending ecosystem, facilitating a more comprehensive approach to addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities within the sector.

## Materials and Methods

This study employs a bibliometric and thematic analysis to systematically assess research trends, intellectual structures, and emerging themes related to street food vendors. Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative approach that enables the evaluation of scientific literature through citation metrics, co-authorship networks, keyword co-occurrence, and thematic mapping. Thematic analysis, on the other hand, helps to identify research clusters based on relevance (centrality) and development (density), categorising them into emerging, basic, niche, and motor themes. This combined approach offers a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of research in this domain.

## Data Collection

The dataset for this study was retrieved from the Scopus database, one of the most comprehensive and widely used academic indexing platforms for bibliometric research. The search query used was: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("street food" AND "vendors"). To ensure relevance, the search results were filtered by subject areas including social sciences, business, multidisciplinary research, arts, economics, and psychology. The inclusion of these disciplines allowed for an interdisciplinary exploration of street food vending, capturing its socio-economic, business, and policy dimensions. The study was restricted to final-stage publications, focusing on journal articles, book chapters, and reviews, ensuring high-quality, peer-reviewed sources. Non-English publications were excluded to maintain consistency in data analysis.

## Data Processing and Analysis

After data extraction, bibliometric analysis was conducted using R Studio's Bibliometrix package and the Biblioshiny interface, which facilitates the visual representation of research trends. The following key bibliometric indicators were analysed:

*Descriptive Analysis* – This involved assessing the annual publication trends, citation metrics, and most prolific authors, journals, and institutions contributing to the field.

*Co-Occurrence Analysis* – Keywords were analysed to identify frequently used terms and their relationships, shedding light on dominant research themes.

*Co-Citation and Collaboration Networks* – These analyses helped map influential studies and academic collaborations, providing insights into knowledge diffusion.

For thematic mapping, the Strategic Diagram technique was applied, categorising themes based on their density (development level) and centrality (relevance) in the research field. Thematic clusters were classified into:

*Motor Themes* – Well-developed and highly relevant topics driving the research field.

*Basic Themes* – Foundational research areas with broad applications but lower developmental density.

*Niche Themes* – Highly specialised topics with limited interdisciplinary connections.

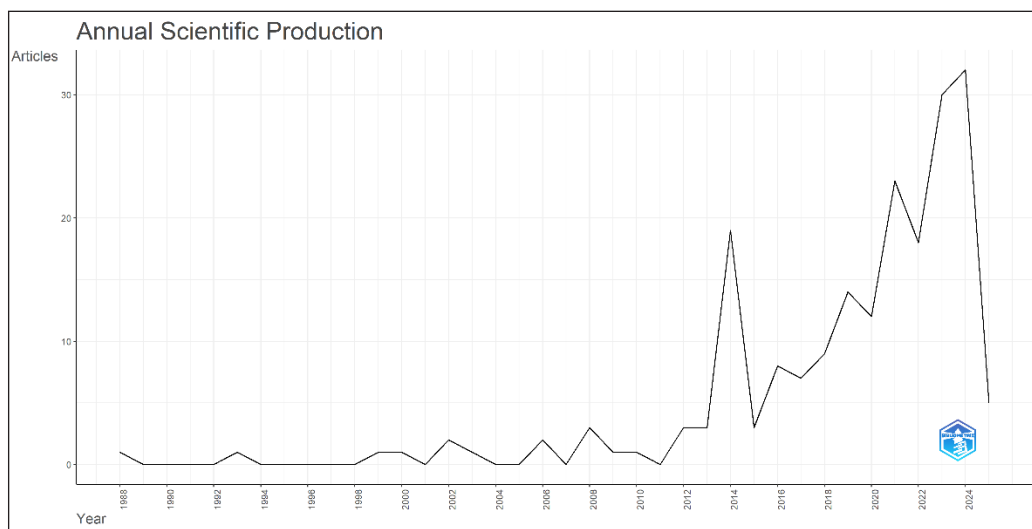
*Emerging or Declining Themes* – Topics either gaining traction or losing scholarly interest over time.

## Validation and Interpretation

The bibliometric outputs were validated by comparing the results with existing systematic reviews on street food vending, ensuring alignment with broader scholarly discussions. Further, the thematic categorisation was interpreted in the context of contemporary urban food policies, informal sector dynamics, and entrepreneurial challenges. This rigorous methodological approach provides a structured and objective analysis of street food vendor research, contributing valuable insights for academics, policymakers, and industry practitioners seeking to understand the evolving landscape of street food entrepreneurship.

## Results

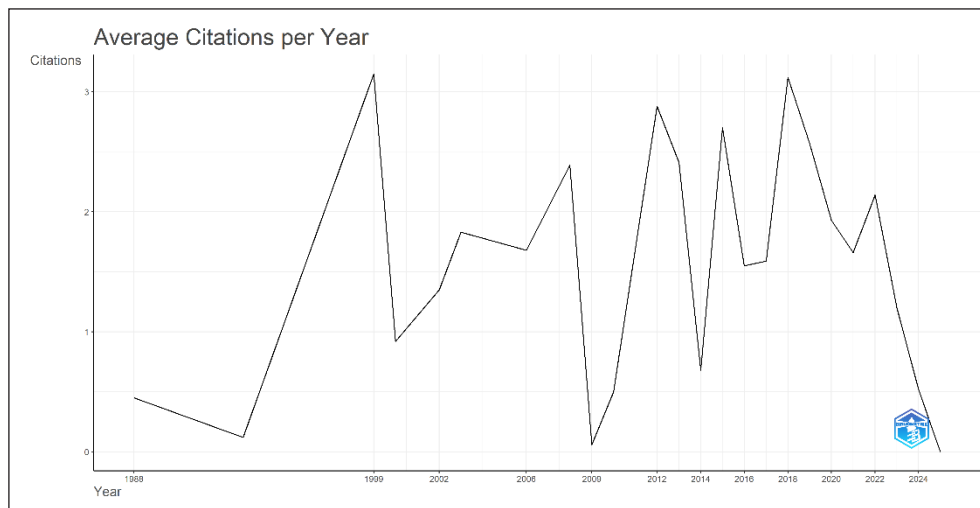
### Annual Scientific Production



The graphical representation of annual scientific production illustrates the evolving research trajectory over the years, revealing a significant upward trend in scholarly contributions, particularly post-2015. While early years exhibit minimal publication activity, the gradual rise in research output underscores growing academic interest in the domain. The pronounced peaks in recent years, notably around 2020–2023, signify heightened research engagement, potentially driven

by emerging scholarly discourses, policy relevance, or technological advancements in the field. The sharp decline in 2024, however, warrants further examination, possibly indicating incomplete data, shifts in research priorities, or a publication lag. Such bibliometric insights are instrumental in assessing the dynamism of academic discourse, identifying knowledge gaps, and forecasting future research directions, reinforcing the importance of systematic bibliometric analyses in scholarly assessments.

## Average Citations Per Year

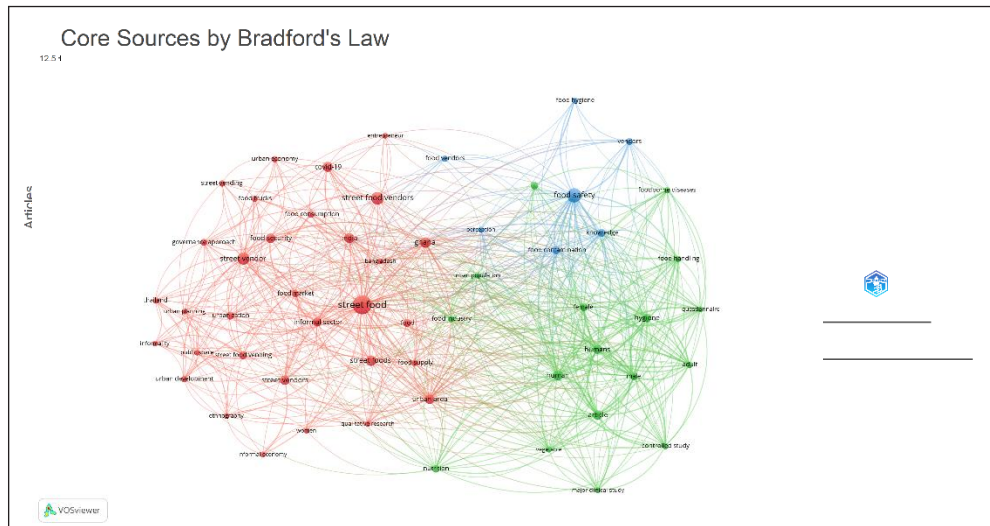


The temporal analysis of average citations per year reveals fluctuating citation patterns, indicating variations in the scholarly impact of research outputs over time. The observed peaks suggest periods of heightened academic influence, potentially driven by seminal works, emerging research trends, or policy relevance. Conversely, the notable declines highlight shifts in citation dynamics, possibly influenced by the increasing volume of publications, evolving research priorities, or the effects of citation lag. The recent downward trend post-2022 may be attributed to incomplete data, given that citations accumulate over time. Such bibliometric insights are crucial for evaluating the sustained impact of scholarly contributions, identifying influential research periods, and guiding future investigations. These findings underscore the necessity for continuous bibliometric assessments to comprehend knowledge dissemination patterns and citation trajectories in an evolving research landscape.

## Bradford's Law for the Data

The application of Bradford's Law to the dataset identifies the core sources contributing to the scholarly discourse within the research domain, as illustrated in the figure. The delineation of core journals, highlighted in the shaded region, signifies the concentration of high-impact literature, aligning with Bradford's proposition that a small set of journals account (accounts) for a substantial proportion of relevant publications. The steep decline beyond the core sources indicates the transition to less frequently contributing journals, reflecting the typical dispersion pattern observed in bibliometric analyses. Such findings provide valuable insights for researchers seeking to prioritise high-relevance sources for literature reviews and citation tracking. Understanding the distribution of scholarly output through Bradford's Law enables the optimisation of research strategies, ensuring engagement with the most influential and authoritative academic outlets within the domain.

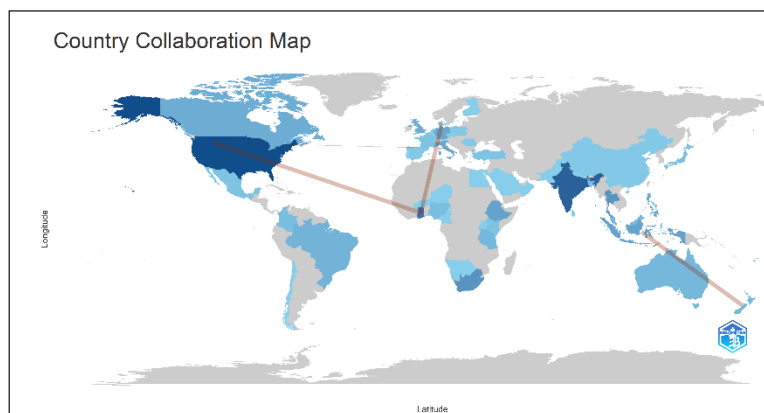
### Co-Occurrence Using VOSviewer



The co-occurrence network visualisation, generated using VOSviewer, elucidates the interrelationships among key research themes in street food studies. The clustering pattern highlights three dominant thematic areas: the socio-economic and governance aspects of street food (red cluster), food safety and contamination concerns (blue cluster), and nutrition and public health dimensions (green cluster). The prominence of “street food” as the central node underscores its integrative role across these

research dimensions. Strong interconnections between “food security,” “informality,” and “urbanisation” indicate an ongoing scholarly focus on the intersection of street food vending and urban socio-economic dynamics. Similarly, the linkage between “food hygiene,” “foodborne diseases,” and “food handling” emphasises health-related concerns in street food consumption. This visualisation provides a systematic framework for understanding the evolving landscape of research within this domain.

### Country Collaboration Map Using Data

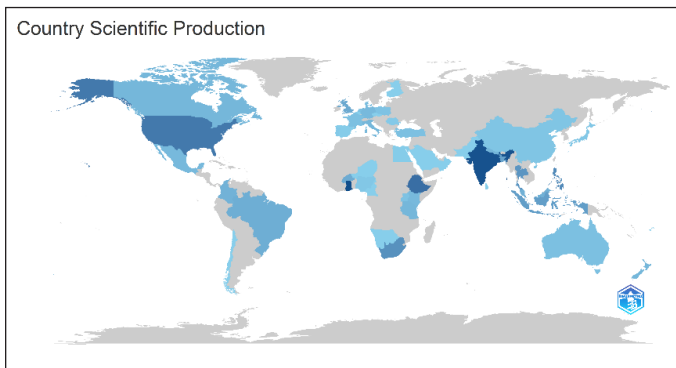


The country collaboration map illustrates the global research network in the domain under study, highlighting key transnational partnerships. Darker shades of blue

indicate countries with higher research contributions, with the United States, India, and select African and Southeast Asian nations emerging as prominent contributors. The

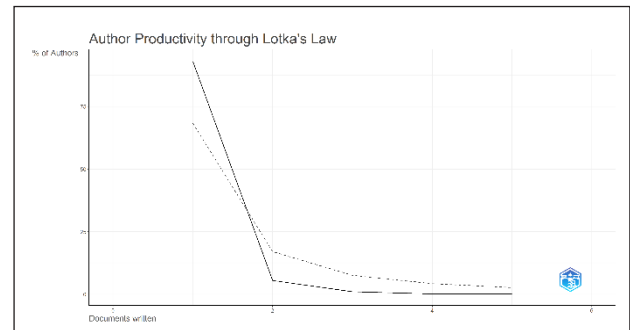
interlinking lines represent collaborative research efforts, signifying scholarly exchanges between regions. The presence of strong collaboration pathways connecting North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia underscores the internationalisation of research in this field. Notably, emerging economies such as India and select African nations are actively engaging in collaborative research, reflecting the growing global significance of their academic contributions. This visualisation offers valuable insights into the geographical distribution of scholarly networks, fostering a deeper understanding of international cooperation in knowledge production.

### Countries Scientific Production Using Data



The country's scientific production map provides a comprehensive visualisation of the global research output distribution, highlighting nations with significant contributions to scholarly publications. Darker shades of blue indicate higher research productivity, with countries such as the United States, India, and various African, Asian, and South American nations emerging as key contributors. The geographical dispersion of scientific output suggests the expanding role of emerging economies in global knowledge creation, reflecting an increasing emphasis on research-driven development. Notably, the presence of diverse contributors across multiple continents underscores the democratisation of scientific inquiry, fostering a more inclusive academic landscape. This visualisation serves as an essential tool for assessing regional research strengths, enabling policymakers and scholars to identify potential areas for collaboration and investment in scientific progress.

### Lotkaws Law Using Data



The graphical representation of author productivity through Lotka's Law illustrates the inverse relationship between the number of publications and the proportion of contributing authors. The steep decline in the curve signifies that a majority of authors contribute only a single publication, whereas a significantly smaller fraction of authors demonstrates higher research productivity by publishing multiple documents. This aligns with Lotka's Law, which posits that the number of authors producing  $n$  publications is inversely proportional to  $n^2$ . The plotted trend reinforces the widely observed phenomenon in bibliometric studies, where prolific researchers constitute a small segment of the scholarly community, driving cumulative knowledge production. Such insights are crucial for understanding authorship patterns, academic influence, and research concentration, thereby assisting policymakers and institutions in shaping strategies to foster sustained scholarly engagement and publication output.

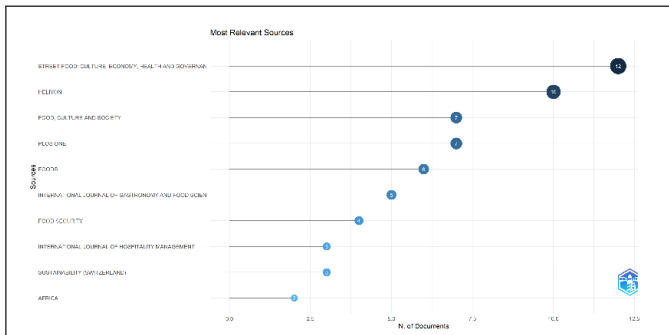
### Most Cited Countries Using Data

The visualisation of the most cited countries provides a bibliometric assessment of global research influence, highlighting the geographical distribution of academic impact. India leads with the highest citation count (250), followed by the USA (159), indicating their prominent contributions to the scholarly discourse. Other nations such as South Africa (128), Denmark (123), and Ethiopia (123) also demonstrate significant citation impact, reflecting their active research output and influence within the domain. The presence of countries like Ghana



The bibliometric analysis of the most relevant authors provides insights into the key contributors within the research domain, highlighting the distribution of scholarly output. Abdullah T emerges as the most prolific author, with five published documents, followed by Lee C with four contributions. Several other scholars, including Carr N, Companion M, De Cassia Vieira Cardoso R, Etzold B, and Gupta V, each contribute three documents, indicating their significant role in advancing the field. Additionally, Henderson JC, Ahiadeke C, and Aidoo R, with two publications each, further enrich the scholarly discourse. This distribution of authorship underscores a diverse research landscape, with multiple contributors actively shaping the domain. The findings also reflect a blend of regional and international scholarly engagement, promoting interdisciplinary perspectives and advancing the academic dialogue in this research area.

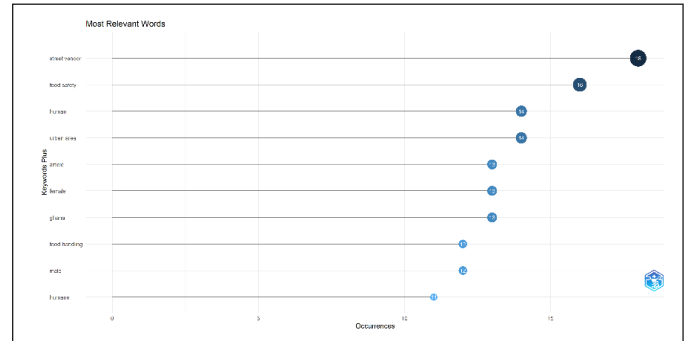
### Most Relevant Sources in the Data



The bibliometric analysis of the most relevant sources provides a comprehensive overview of the key academic journals contributing to the scholarly discourse in the domain. The journal Street Food: Culture, Economy, Health, and Governance emerges as the leading source, with 12 published documents, followed by Heliyon with 10 publications. Food, Culture and Society and PLOS ONE each contribute seven articles, further emphasising their role in disseminating research. Other significant sources, including Foods (6), International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science (5), and Food Security (4), highlight interdisciplinary engagement with food-related studies. Additionally, International Journal of Hospitality Management and Sustainability (Switzerland) each contribute three publications, reinforcing the intersection of sustainability and hospitality research. The findings underscore the critical role of these academic

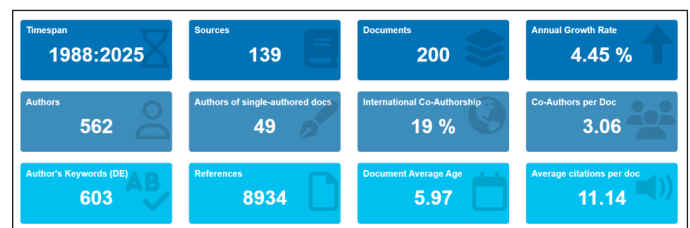
sources in shaping contemporary food studies and policy discussions.

### Most Relevant Keywords Using the Data



The bibliometric analysis of the most relevant keywords highlights the dominant thematic areas within the scholarly discourse. Street vendor emerges as the most frequently occurring term (18 occurrences), reflecting the prominence of research on informal food enterprises. “Food safety” (16 occurrences) underscores the critical concern regarding hygiene and regulatory compliance in street food vending. Keywords such as human and urban area (14 occurrences each) suggest a focus on socio-demographic factors and urban food systems. Additionally, article (13 occurrences) indicates the methodological nature of studies, while female and male (13 occurrences each) highlight the gendered dimensions of food entrepreneurship. The presence of Ghana (13 occurrences) suggests regional specificity in food vending studies, while food handling (12 occurrences) and humans (12 occurrences) emphasise health and operational concerns within this sector.

### Main Information of the Data

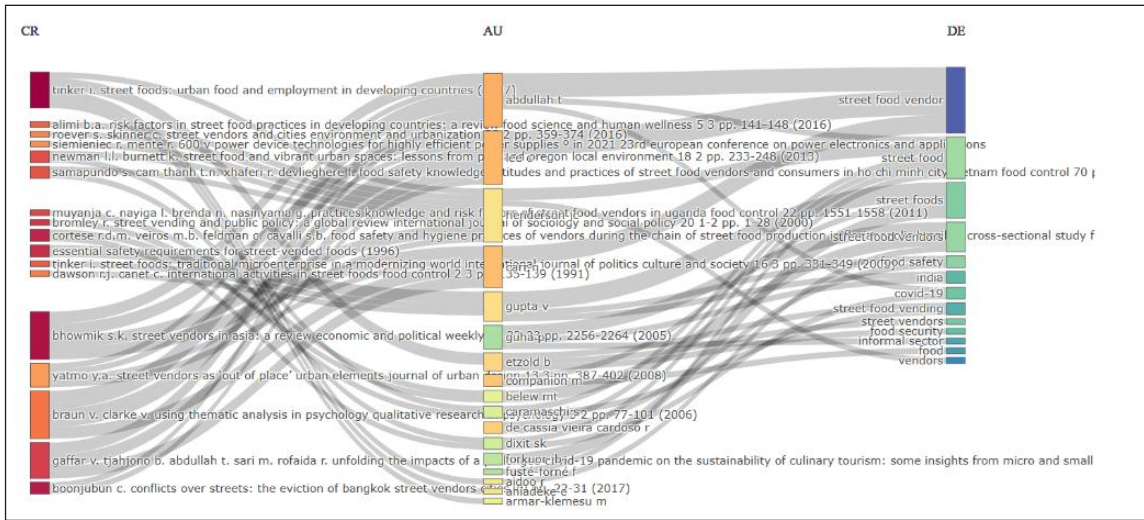


The bibliometric analysis spans a period from 1988 to 2025, encapsulating 200 documents sourced from 139 outlets, with an annual growth rate of 4.45%. The scholarly contributions stem from 562 authors, with 49 engaging in

single-authored works, while the average co-authorship per document is 3.06, reflecting a collaborative research landscape. International co-authorship accounts for 19% of the total publications, highlighting cross-border academic engagement. The dataset comprises 603 unique author keywords, indicating thematic diversity, and the references total 8,934, demonstrating extensive scholarly

interlinkages. The average document age is 5.97 years, positioning the corpus within a relatively contemporary research timeframe. Furthermore, the average number of citations per document stands at 11.14, denoting a moderate impact within the academic discourse, thus reinforcing the significance of this body of research in the studied domain.

### Three Field Plot the Data



The Sankey diagram visually represents the interconnections between cited references (CR), authors (AU), and author keywords (DE) within the scholarly discourse on street food vending. The analysis emphasises key academic contributions, with seminal works such as Tinker’s (1997) “Street Foods: Urban Food and Employment in Developing Countries” and Bhowmik’s (2005) “Street Vendors in Asia: A Review” serving as foundational literature. The author network reveals strong research linkages, with contributions spanning topics such as food safety, informal sector dynamics, and public policy. Author keywords indicate a predominant focus on “street food vendors,” “food security,” and “informal sector,” reflecting critical research themes. This visualisation underscores the multidimensionality of street food research, highlighting its relevance in urban studies, public health, and economic sustainability, thereby informing policy and academic discourse.

### Thematic Evaluation of the Data

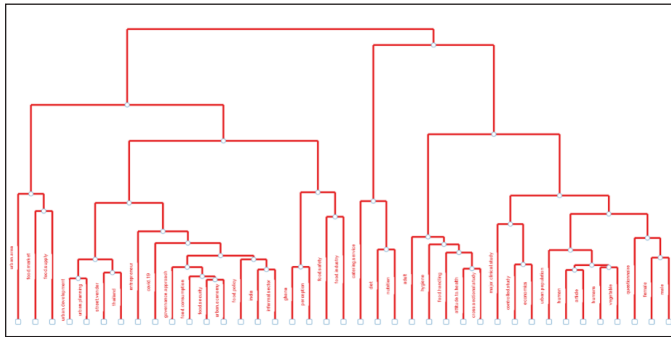


The word cloud visualisation presents key thematic areas in street food research, with dominant keywords such as “street vendor,” “food safety,” “urban area,” and “food security,” highlighting the intersection of public health, informal economy, and urbanisation. The



intersection of urbanisation, economic informality, and public health in food vending studies.

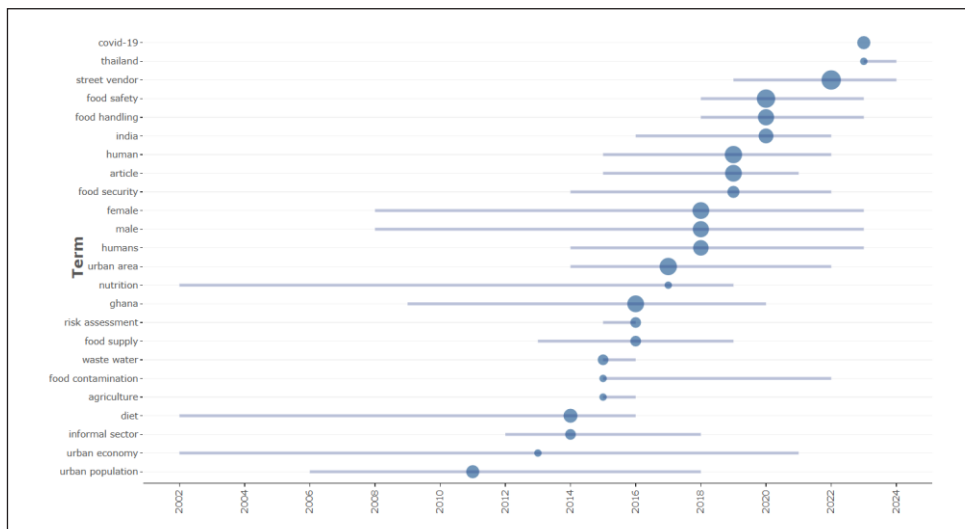
### Topic Dendrogram Using the Data



The hierarchical clustering dendrogram presented in the visualisation delineates thematic groupings within the

scholarly discourse on street food vending, urban food systems, and public health. The structured clustering of terms such as “urban areas,” “food markets,” and “food supplies” underscores the intricate interconnections between urbanisation and food security. The convergence of “food policies,” “informal sector,” and “entrepreneurship” reflects the regulatory and economic dimensions of food vending. Furthermore, the clustering of “food safety,” “catering service,” and “hygiene” emphasises public health concerns, while the grouping of “nutrition,” “diet,” and “attitude to health” highlights consumer behaviour and dietary implications. The inclusion of “cross-sectional studies” and “multiclinical studies” suggests methodological approaches employed in this research domain, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the evolving landscape of food vending research.

### Thematic Exploration of the Data



The thematic map illustrates the structural positioning of key research themes within the domain of street food vending and food security. The upper-right quadrant (motor themes) identifies “human,” “urban areas,” and “articles” as highly relevant and well-developed themes, suggesting their pivotal role in the discourse. The lower-left quadrant (emerging or declining themes) includes “food consumption” and “public attitudes,” indicating areas of low centrality and development. The lower-right quadrant (basic themes) features “Delhi,” “New Delhi,” and “questionnaire survey,” signifying fundamental research areas. The upper-left quadrant (niche themes)

positions “India,” “informal sector,” and “entrepreneur,” reflecting specialised yet less interconnected topics. Notably, “street vendor,” “COVID-19,” and “food security” emerge as central but moderately developed themes, highlighting their significance in contemporary discussions on urban food systems and socio-economic resilience.

### Findings and Discussion

The importance of street vending as a vital part of informal food systems and urban economies is highlighted by the

bibliometric and thematic analysis of research on street food vendors, which reveals an academic environment that is becoming more complicated and multifaceted. Using a thematic map, this study classifies research trends by classifying topics into motor, basic, niche, and emerging or declining categories, according to their density and significance in the academic discourse. Food contamination, food security, and the socioeconomic effects of COVID-19 are examples of motor themes that draw attention to pressing public health issues and underscore how susceptible informal food markets are to systemic shocks. Because of their implications for urban food safety and governance, these subjects have attracted a lot of scholarly interest. The socioeconomic significance of vendors in densely populated areas is reinforced by fundamental themes such as urban food policy, vendor contributions to economic sustainability, and structured survey-based research.

Niche topics provide detailed insights into legislative, cultural, and social dynamics by delving into specific questions, especially those pertaining to vendor business models, informal entrepreneurship, and context-specific studies from nations such as India. Neoliberalism, dietary changes, and consumer perceptions are some of the rising or waning themes that suggest how urban food consumption is influenced by shifting sociopolitical environments and lifestyle choices. There are still a number of urgent research needs in spite of this conceptual breadth. Waste management, sanitary infrastructure, and environmentally friendly packaging are examples of sustainable practices that are still not fully explored, particularly in view of the escalating environmental and public health issues. These gaps may come from a combination of financial constraints, lack of institutional support, and inadequate vendor knowledge, highlighting the need for more targeted research into why such advances have yet to be extensively implemented.

Furthermore, although regulatory frameworks are frequently discussed, little is known about how these regulations are implemented and perceived by local vendors, especially in low- and middle-income areas where informal hawking is frequently required rather than optional. The scarcity of longitudinal and mixed-method studies restricts our knowledge of how street vending adapts over time to legislative changes, market fluctuations, and emergencies such as the COVID-19

outbreak. Another uncharted territory is digital transformation. Even while social media marketing, delivery platforms, and mobile payments are becoming easier to use, little research has been conducted on how they affect vendor scalability, customer reach, and operational resilience.

Furthermore, the geographic distribution of the research that is now available shows notable disparities, with a concentration in nations like Ghana, Thailand, and India and a relative neglect for Latin America as well as other parts of Africa and Southeast Asia. The worldwide application of scientific generalisations and policy insights is challenged by this unequal representation. Future studies must use multidisciplinary, context-sensitive methodologies that incorporate viewpoints from the social sciences, business, public health, and urban planning in order to overcome these limitations. Inclusion, digital preparedness, environmental responsibility, and policy pragmatism have to be given top priority in such frameworks. Scholars and policymakers may collaborate to provide evidence-based solutions that strengthen the sustainability, legitimacy, and resilience of street food vendors in quickly urbanising economies by filling up current knowledge gaps.

## Conclusion

Around the world, and especially in emerging nations, street food vendors have become an integral and vital element of metropolitan economies. In addition to providing a means of subsistence for underserved populations, they make a substantial contribution to the availability of food, the creation of jobs, and the liveliness of society and culture. Based on 200 Scopus-indexed papers from 2004 to 2024, this bibliometric and thematic study offers a thorough summary of the prominent themes, changing trends, and intellectual structure of the academic discourse on street food vendors. The results show that basic concerns including food safety, public health, and urban informal economies have become the focus of more and more study in this area. Thematic mapping highlights the importance of tackling health-related concerns in informal food contexts by identifying key topics, such as food contamination, food security, and the socioeconomic effects of COVID-19. The epidemic has made street vendors even more vulnerable, since

tighter regulations and increased consumer worries about sanitation have drastically changed vendor operations and customer confidence.

Furthermore, key themes such as “urban area” and “human” highlight how street food vendors are ingrained in larger processes of migration, urbanisation, and unorganised labor markets. But the survey also identifies a number of important but little-studied research areas. Despite their increasing importance in the context of climate change and sustainability objectives, sustainable practices including waste management, eco-friendly packaging, and environmentally conscious food sourcing are seldom examined in depth. The lack of attention to the digital transformation of street vending is another noteworthy gap. There is still a dearth of academic research on the growing use of digital payment systems, food delivery services, and social media marketing by small business owners in metropolitan areas. In order to bring informal food economies into line with current technology and economic trends, it is crucial to comprehend how digitisation may improve vendor resilience, market access, and consumer participation.

Geographically speaking, the study corpus reveals a regional concentration in nations like Ghana, Thailand, and India, while Latin America and some portions of Africa continue to be comparatively underrepresented. This unequal distribution limits the generalisability of policy suggestions and highlights the need for greater, more inclusive geographical coverage in future studies. The expansion and formalisation of street food businesses are nevertheless hampered by issues including insufficient licensing frameworks, onerous regulations, and limited access to institutional assistance, despite increased scholarly interest. According to the analysis, rather than acknowledging vendors as genuine micro-entrepreneurs promoting urban food security and economic sustainability, current policies frequently see them through a regulatory or compliance lens.

This study advocates a more interdisciplinary research strategy that incorporates viewpoints from business, urban planning, public health, and sociology in order to solve these complex issues and gaps. Additionally, it urges evidence-based policies that support inclusive urban government, vendor empowerment, sustainable practices, and food safety. This research provides a systematic basis

for promoting scholarly conversation, guiding real-world interventions, and creating equitable regulations for street food sellers in the changing urban environment by going beyond descriptive patterns and integrating analytical insights.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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## Ethics Approval

There is no ethical clearance needed for this study.

## Author Contributions

Mr. Ajay Adithya M and Dr. Geetha R contributed equally to the conceptualisation, methodology. Data analysis, and writing of this article has been taken care by both Mr. Sundar S and Dr. Gurupandi M equally.

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