

THE FOOD SAFETY CULTURE OF A NIGHT MARKET

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Abstract

Night markets are a popular food destination among tourists in Southeast Asia. The off-premise nature of these destinations results in a higher risk for food contamination which has brought about the need to improve food safety culture in these destinations. Previous studies have focused primarily on food sanitation practices of vendors; however, food safety culture has been highlighted in recent years as an effective means for improving safety practices. That is why, the study examined the food safety culture of vendors of a night market in Cebu City, Philippines. This descriptive research utilized self-administered survey questionnaires to 40 night market vendors. Results showed high mean scores in the indicators of management and coworker support, communication and self-commitment while lower scores on environment support, work pressure and risk judgment. It is concluded that employees' workload, provision of timely information and feedback are indicators that increase the level of food safety culture. The study highlights the role of management as food safety procedures are followed at a certain extent but time and management pressures contribute to a decrease in following safe food handling.

Keywords:

Food safety, food safety culture, night markets, descriptive research, Cebu City, Philippines.

JEL Classification: M14, Z32

DOI

Introduction

Various research in food tourism have come out in recent years, particularly focused on hygiene issues and its impact on destination experience. The Skift Report (2015) postulated that cuisine has the ability to strengthen and diversify local economies by promoting local food culture and thus is a dynamic segment in the tourism sector. As such, night markets are a popular food destination for tourists because they offer a shopping alternative for cooked food, perishable items, clothing and other household necessities (Ishak, Aziz & Latif, 2012). Furthermore, they act as business incubators as aspiring entrepreneurs would only put in a small investment to start a business. It reflects a piece of unique culture for they portrayed the eating preferences, interaction patterns and some of the evening leisure activities of the various ethnic groups in the country.

Despite exemplifying historical, economic, social and financial meaning, Tsai (2013) postulates that it represents some hidden and negative societal manifestations that should be improved. Among these is the issue on food safety. The study of Huang, Wang & Huang (2012) showed that most night market vendors have minimal educational achievements, learn from observation and during rush hours, food vendors lacked time to wash their hands and used clean napkins or tissues for cleaning. Most night markets are also located in a street or open space and thus, the off-premise nature of the operation where products are prepared outdoors and are exposed to food contaminants increases the risk for cross-contamination and food poisoning.

In Europe, Bellia, Pilato & Seraphin (2016) stressed that the emergence of street food is seen as an area that could pose risks to consumers' health, because of perception of insecurity, lack of manager skills in business and the lack of controls. Additionally, the authors noted that this is even more true for developing countries, food security continues to be a problem and is not well rooted in the mentality of the populace. A study in Africa showed that sanitation emerged as the major gray area of attitudes to Ghana's traditional foods with the concerns being more expressed among elderly, women, and Muslim tourists (Amuquandoh, 2013).

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On the other hand, many countries in Asia have managed to develop various night markets throughout their cities and are a popular spot among tourists such as Shihlin Night Market in Taiwan, Rot Fai Market in Bangkok and Bugis Street in Singapore. As more night food markets open in the Philippines, the challenge of ensuring food safety is an issue as the country has constantly dealt with many food poisoning incidents due to poor food safety standards and lack of government enforcement.

Many studies continue to show food safety as an important indicator of destination competitiveness. The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report (World Economic Forum, 2015) suggests that hygiene in terms of access to drinking water and sanitation are important for the comfort and health of travelers. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (2012) notes that member states vary in levels of development that affect levels of tourist experiences. One of its biggest gaps is that of safety and security. As such, the trends show a shift from common tourist visit motivators of “sea, sun and sand” to “safety, security and sanitation” as essential elements of the tourism experience. Williams (2014) suggests that sanitation should be given importance if the country (Philippines) aims to be world-class. This is done by incorporating sanitation to the very fabric of Filipino culture and lifestyle.

For countries like Taiwan, street food and night markets are almost entirely unregulated (Ferry, 2015). The lack of monitoring may result to higher risks of food-borne illnesses and other health risks. In Malaysia, night market vendors admit that they cook and use oil repeatedly, making it unfit for food consumption (Azman, et al., 2012).

Food safety culture, in recent years, has been found as an effective means of improving food safety in the workplace. Griffith, Livesey and Clayton (2010) suggested that food safety performance is affected by six culture factors: leadership, food safety management systems and style, commitment to food safety, food safety environment, risk perception and communication. It was further explored in the study of Ungku Fatimah (2013) in measuring food safety culture of onsite foodservice operations. The study presented a model for determining the food safety culture. The following factors came out as components of food safety culture: leadership, communication, self-commitment, management system and style, environment support, teamwork, accountability, work pressure and risk perception.

1 Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the study of Ungku Fatimah (2013) in measuring food safety culture of on-site foodservice operations. The study presented a model for determining the food safety culture in an onsite foodservice operation. The six food safety culture factors were identified using a mixed methods approach and was analyzed through factor analysis. The six factors are 1) Management and co worker support 2) Communication 3) Self- Commitment 4) Environment Support 5) Work Pressure and 6) Risk Judgment.

This study uses the principles of both Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) regulations and the Codex Alimentarius Recommended International Code of Practice – General Principles of Food Hygiene. Both quality assurance systems lay the foundation in food production by creating an environment conducive for making food that is safe for consumption. To add, this also takes into consideration the Philippine Code of Sanitation (Presidential Decree No. 856) as an additional resource.

2 Objectives of the study

The purpose of the study is to determine the food safety culture of the night market vendors at a night market in Cebu City and establish customers’ perception of the night market’s food safety habits. Specifically, the study sought to: 1) assess night market vendors’ food safety culture in the areas of: 1.1 Management and Coworkers Support; 1.2 Communication; 1.3 Self-commitment; 1.4 Environment support; 1.5 Work Pressure and 1.6 Risk Judgment and 2) determine customers’ perception on the night market vendors’ practices in terms of: 2.1 Buildings and facilities; 2.2 Equipment and utensils; 2.3 General Provisions of Food Hygiene and 2.4 Production and process control.

3 Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study used the descriptive research design utilizing the survey method to collect the relevant data for the study. This method is preferred for this kind of research because the expected responses and results are best presented by descriptions.

3.2 Research Site

For the purpose of anonymity, the research environment shall be named Cebu Night Market located in Cebu City. On an average, Cebu Night Market has around 35 to 45 vendors at a time, is open from Thursday to Sunday weekly. All vendors offer food and beverages. It is a year-round open air food and lifestyle market in Cebu aimed at boosting the campaign to patronize regional local products and attract people to travel to the region and is recognized by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Tourism as an official food market bazaar.

3.3 Instrument

The researcher used a survey questionnaire in the main data gathering tool in the study. This is based on the work of Ungku Fatimah (2013) where they created a compressed six-factor structure of food safety culture. However, some modifications were incorporated to fit the questionnaire into the night market setting. The scope of the instrument is on 1) Management and co worker support (10 items) – refers to management roles in encouraging safe food handling practices and teamwork among coworkers; 2) Communication (6 items) – evaluates employee perception towards transfer of information and knowledge within management, supervisory staff and food handlers; 3) Self-Commitment (5 items) - evaluates employee perception towards employees values and beliefs on food safety in line with their team/ organization. 4) Environment Support (4 items) – represents measures on adequacy and quality of infrastructures that support safe food handling practices; 5) Work Pressure (3 items) - evaluates employee perception towards pressure in preparing food that may affect safe food handling and, 6) Risk Judgment (3 items) – evaluates employee perception associated with organization risk taking decisions when implementing and complying with food safety rules and regulations.

To ensure internal consistency, the researcher used Cronbach's alpha to evaluate the reliability of the research instrument. The instrument administered to the night market vendors resulted in the internal-consistency coefficient value of 0.916 which is described as reliable.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

In the gathering of data, the researcher initially requested permission from the night market organizing body to conduct the study. The survey questionnaire was distributed personally. It was forwarded with a cover letter describing the study and indicating the confidentiality of the information that may be given out by the respondents. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the questionnaire administered to night market vendors using a 6-point likert scale.

4 Results and Discussion

As reflected in the table (table no. 1), the overall mean for this indicator was 4.79 (SD=1.36), which is described as slightly agree. This means that employees agree to a certain extent that leaders inspire them and are actively involved in the practice of safe food handling. employees only slightly agree that leaders inspire them and are actively involved in the practice of safe food handling. Furthermore, they slightly agree that their leaders enforce food safety rules among all team members and watch them to check if they practice food safety handling. The importance of leadership in the practice of food safety culture was posited by Yiannas (2009) where leaders of organization should choose to have strong food safety culture as they influence attitude towards food safety, willingness in discussing concerns and place emphasis on its importance. Improving management guidance will ensure employee compliance in the practice of food safety.

Table no. 1: Night Market Vendor Perception on Management and Coworkers Support

Management and coworker support	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Leaders inspire me to follow safe food handling practices	4.88	1.40	Slightly Agree
My leader is actively involved in making sure safe food handling is practiced	4.88	1.70	Slightly Agree
There is good cooperation among team members to ensure that customers receive safely prepared food	4.88	1.57	Slightly Agree
New and experienced team members work together to ensure food safety practices are in place	4.75	1.63	Slightly Agree
Leaders enforce food safety rules consistently with all team members	4.73	1.57	Slightly Agree
When lots of work needs to be done quickly, employees work together as a team to get the tasks completed safely	4.95	1.45	Slightly Agree
My leader always watches to see if I am practicing safe food handling	4.60	1.65	Slightly Agree
My coworkers are always supportive of each other regarding food safety	4.70	1.64	Slightly Agree
Team members remind each other about following food safety practices	4.75	1.56	Slightly Agree
Team members are disciplined or reprimanded when they fail to follow food safety practices	4.73	1.63	Slightly Agree
Overall Mean	4.79	1.36	

Source: by author based on research

Moreover, team members only slightly agree that coworkers are encouraging each other, remind one another and discipline each other in the practice of food safety. At the same time, they slightly agree that new and experienced team members work together to ensure food safety is practiced and cooperate among one another to prepare food safely. It can be deduced that members of the team need to support each other more to properly prepare safe food. The lowest mean score was on team members slightly agreeing that leaders watch them to see if they are practicing safe food handling (4.60). As suggested by Adesokan et al. (2015), management support in providing regular refresher training for food handlers further assist in the adoption of safe food handling behaviors.

The overall mean for communication (table no. 2) was 4.80 (SD=1.30), which is described as slightly agree. It is generally interpreted that employees only slightly agree that employees are able to freely speak up, provide suggestions and be provided with information with regard to food safety issues that can affect safe food production. Communication with management is considered significantly important to improve employee commitment and develop a positive food safety culture in the organization (Nayak & Waterson, 2017)

Table no. 2: Night Market Vendor Perception on Communication

Communication	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
I can freely speak up if I see something that may affect food safety	4.73	1.63	Slightly Agree
My leader generally gives appropriate instructions on safe food handling	4.93	1.44	Slightly Agree
I am encouraged to provide suggestions for improving food safety practices	4.95	1.38	Slightly Agree
All managers give consistent information about food safety	4.88	1.51	Slightly Agree
All of the necessary information for handling	4.70	1.56	Slightly Agree

food safely is readily available to my area			
Leaders provide adequate and timely information about current food safety rules and regulations	4.60	1.47	Slightly Agree
Overall Mean	4.80	1.30	

Source: by author based on research

Furthermore, team members also only slightly agree that managers give consistent information on food safety, provide appropriate instructions and provide adequate timely information on food safety. The need to reevaluate engagement on food safety practices and consistency in communicating food safety information was stressed by Reynolds (2016).

Among all indicators, leaders providing adequate and timely communication resulted the lowest mean (4.60). This means that management is inconsistent in providing updates and communicating food safety information. The General Principles of Food Hygiene (2009) entails handlers have adequate information about the product such as ingredients, expiration and proper storage in cases where consumers may need it.

Table no. 3 presents the means and standard deviation of the perception of night market vendors on self-commitment. Data revealed that the night market vendors have a high self-commitment towards practicing food safety, as indicated by a grand mean response rating of 5.00. This result can be explained by the vendors' general agreement that they follow food safety rules because it is important (5.00) and because it is their responsibility to do so. Vendors also agree that they keep their area clean due to a general dislike to clutter (5.13). For the night market vendors, they slightly agree that they are committed to follow all safety rules (4.98). They also slightly agree on making food safety a high priority (4.85). A strong commitment to food safety from all levels of management is needed to ensure a consistent, comprehensive and responsive approach to food safety.

Table no. 3: Night Market Vendor Perception on Self-Commitment

Self-Commitment	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
I follow food safety rules because it is my responsibility to do so	5.03	1.58	Agree
I follow food safety rules because I think they are important	5.00	1.52	Agree
I am committed to following all food safety rules	4.98	1.49	Slightly Agree
I keep my work area clean because I do not like clutter	5.13	1.52	Agree
Food Safety is a high priority for me	4.85	1.85	Slightly Agree
Overall Mean	5.00	1.48	

Source: by author based on research

Rustia, Azanza & Gascon (2017) posited that food safety knowledge does not essentially equate to compliance to the requirements. This means that vendors have to understand its importance and advocate for it.

Table no. 4 showed the means and standard deviation of the perception of night market vendors on environment support. Referring to the overall result, the overall mean for this indicator was 4.28 (SD=1.40), which is described as slightly agree. The table revealed that vendors only slightly agree that equipment items and adequate supplies needed to prepare safe food are available, which has a mean of 4.73 and 4.43, respectively. The rating explains that the vendors only agree to a certain extent. This suggests that employees may not always have all the equipment needed to perform their jobs and may have to improvise at times.

Table no. 4: Night Market Vendor Perception on Environment Support

Environment Support	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Equipment items needed to prepare food safely are readily available and accessible.	4.73	1.54	Slightly Agree
Adequate supplies are readily available to	4.43	1.75	Slightly Agree

perform safe food handling practices			
Facilities are of adequate quality to follow safe food handling practices	3.98	1.97	Slightly Disagree
It easy for me to follow safe food handling practices	3.98	1.87	Slightly Disagree
Overall Mean	4.28	1.39	

Source: by author based on research

However, the table also revealed some values of the means resulted in 3.98 which are all interpreted as “Slightly Disagree”. Vendors slightly disagree that facilities are of adequate quality to follow food handling practices (3.98). This can be interpreted as vendors perceiving night market facilities such as toilets, hand-washing facilities, stall sizes and the like as somewhat inadequate which could also result in a certain level of difficulty in following food handling practices.

Lack of facilities and equipment has been identified by Ball et al (2010) and Macheke et al (2013) as a barrier towards practicing food safety and the implementation food safety management systems. The General Principles of Food Hygiene (FAO, 2012) also notes proper sanitation and maintenance of premises were recorded as important to permit continuous and effective control of food hazards and agents likely to contaminate food.

Table no. 5 showed the means and standard deviation of the perception of night market vendors on work pressure. Work pressure refers to evaluating employee perception towards pressure in preparing food that may affect safe food handling. Referring to the overall result, the overall mean for this indicator was 4.24 (SD=1.57), which is described as slightly agree. Among the three items, vendors were found to slightly agree on always having enough time to follow safe food handling procedures even during rush hours, having a mean of 4.28, and always having enough time to follow safe food handling procedures, even during rush hours, with a mean of 4.48. This means that food safety and quality were generally not the same among vendors when they are in the middle of rush hours, such that the overall level seems to be varying from one vendor to another.

Table no. 5: Night Market Vendor Perception on Work Pressure

Work Pressure	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
My work load does not interfere with my ability to follow safe food handling practices	3.98	1.94	Slightly Disagree
I always have enough time to follow safe food handling procedures, even during rush hours	4.28	1.75	Slightly Agree
The number of staff scheduled at each shift is adequate for me to get my work done and handle food safely	4.48	1.71	Slightly Agree
Overall Mean	4.24	1.57	

Source: by author based on research

Overall slight agreement on these items means that at some point, they are poised to produce what the customers demand at a shorter time, compromising some food safety measures without having to inform or manifest them outright to them. The results agree with the study of Clayton et al (2015) that participants identified pressure to prioritize other food service tasks such getting the food from the fryer to the table over proper food safety procedures as a barrier to food safety.

The table no. 6 presents the means and standard deviation of the perception of night market vendors on risk judgment. This indicator evaluates employee perception associated with organization risk taking decisions when implementing and complying with food safety rules and regulations. Referring to the overall result, the overall mean for this indicator was 4.19 (SD=1.60), which is described as slightly agree. In addition, the mean of the three items range from 4.15 to 4.23, all are described to be slightly agree. This means that at some point, employees feel that written food safety policies and procedures are nothing more than a cover-up in case of a law suit (4.23) such that it reached to a point when they are asked to cut corners with food safety so we can save on costs when preparing food,

and being told to work faster by taking shortcuts with food safety. This can be attributed to employees feeling that documents on food safety and permits are available, yet are not practiced in the food service setting. The results support the study of Sun et al. (2012) that even though vendors are aware of proper hygiene knowledge, they rarely put it into practice because of time-constraints in their business.

Table no. 6: Night Market Vendor Perception on Risk Judgment

Risk Judgment	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
I believe that written food safety policies and procedures are nothing more than a cover-up in case of a law suit.	4.23	1.83	Slightly Agree
I am sometimes asked to cut corners with food safety so we can save on costs when preparing food	4.20	1.81	Slightly Agree
When there is pressure to finish production, team leaders sometimes tell us to work faster by taking shortcuts with food safety	4.15	1.88	Slightly Agree
Overall Mean	4.19	1.60	

Source: by author based on research

5 Conclusions and recommendations

Night market vendors in Cebu City exhibit good safety culture in the factors of self-commitment, communication and management and coworker support. An employees' workload, provision and sanitation of proper equipment and timely feedback were found to be indicators that give rise to the level of food safety culture in an organization. The influence of management was highlighted to affect the level of food safety practices and that organizations can improve food safety culture by managing work pressure, adherence to proper sanitation procedures and by fulfilling structural requirements in accordance to law. At a certain extent, vendors follow food safety rules but time and management pressures become contributory factors to a decrease in following food safety procedures.

The results highlight some recommendations for improvement. In terms of management, increased visibility of leadership will ensure consistent enforcement of food safety policies at all levels in the organization. There is also a need for effective and relevant hygiene training enforced by management commitment to food safety. In terms of marketing, the night market can promote food safety standards as a unique selling point for tourists and locals and set out performance recognition for stalls exhibiting food safety standards.

Operationally, the facilities currently unavailable such as toilets and hand-washing stations should be provided to food handlers in the process of preparing food. This will help ease staff workload and ensure safe production of food. Food safety audits should also be done, either scheduled or random. The distribution of a personal food hygiene checklist may be used to improve personal hygiene. This will ensure that staff adherence to good personal hygiene and personal protective equipment. Furthermore, a crisis management plan on food safety may be created in the event of food poisoning outbreaks in collaboration of all market stakeholders.

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