

Survey Analysis and Countermeasure Research on the Status of Street Vendor Economy around Universities

Qinghuan Li , Xiu Zhang , Jun Hu , Yutong Yang and Xiang Guoqing

Sichuan University of Science and Engineering, School of Management, Yibin 644005, China

**Corresponding author: Li Qinghuan, Email: 2728670372@qq.com*

Abstract

Although the existence of street vendors around universities brings a lot of convenience to students' campus life, the problems of health and space hidden behind them should not be underestimated, and they have become a big problem for governance. This paper is based on the field survey results of Sichuan University of Science and Engineering, combined with the questionnaire data, from the analysis of the current situation of the street vendor economy, to explore the reasons for the prosperity of the street vendor economy around the universities and its problems, and put forward a rationalized countermeasure for the governance of the street vendor economy, in order to reduce the negative impact of the street vendor around the university and to ensure the healthy and orderly development of it.

Keywords

Street vendor economy, University, Governance, Countermeasure

1. Introduction

Street vendor economy has always been a hot topic of social concern, it is a kind of informal economy in which individual workers use portable means of transportation such as tricycles and carts to sell legal goods in order to earn money. Street vendor economy has always been regulated by the government because it is regarded as a business activity that disturbs the public space of the city and hinders the construction of a hygienic city, but in both developed and developing countries, vendors can be found everywhere. Mobile vendors are an important part of the informal economy in cities. On the one hand, they attract a large number of laborers because of "freedom and autonomy" and provide them with a guaranteed income, but on the other hand, their informality brings many problems to urban governance and economic development. In the process of remedying the street vendor economy, it is not absolutely impossible to ban or drive away, but it is more important to define the status and significance of the street vendor economy in the context of the rapid development of society, and to understand the social value of the street vendor economy from the view of people's livelihoods.

2. Overview of the Street Vendor Economy

2.1 Causes of the Street Vendor Economy

The existence of the street vendor economy is not only a choice made by self-employed workers in the face of employment difficulties, overly exploitative working conditions and an increasingly fierce business environment, but also a result of the rapid transformation of the socio-economic structure and the continuous development of the market economy. At the beginning of the reform and opening-up, under the implementation of relevant government policies and systems, the individual economy was strongly supported, and the street vendor economy also expanded rapidly under the impetus of urbanization. With the acceleration of the urbanization process in the future and the new eclectic governance method of "dredging and blocking", the street vendor economy breaks through the traditional business model, and sells a wide variety of goods to satisfy the diversified and personalized needs of consumers. By selling a wide variety of goods to meet the diversified and personalized needs of consumers, vendors have brought a lot of convenience to consumers. Street vendors around universities also meet the psychological needs of young people who pursue diversity and love fresh things because of their innovativeness and flexibility.

2.2 Pros and Cons of the Street Vendor Economy

From the perspectives of freelancers and consumers, the street vendors economy has brought about more positive impacts. The existence of urban mobile vendors increases employment, solves the problem of survival for a large portion of the population, and reduces the factors of social instability. Moreover, due to their characteristics of mobility, autonomy and low cost, vendors meet the needs of consumers in the low-income class. In the face of university students, this economy can also influence the consumption habits of students to a certain extent, and also provide entrepreneurial and employment opportunities for them. Vending is an important way for the grassroots to make a living, and it is also an individual economy that has been convenient and beneficial to the people since ancient times. However, due to its multiple, chaotic and miscellaneous distribution characteristics, it increases the difficulty of urban management and is difficult to be rooted out. From the perspective of city managers, the vendor economy has brought negative impacts on the maintenance of urban spatial order. Firstly, as vendors do not have a fixed place of business, they may cause certain damage to the urban environment, and secondly, the illegal placement of vendors' stalls may impede the flow of vehicles, and even cause traffic accidents. In addition, some unscrupulous traders who sell inferior goods in order to make profits have also seriously jeopardized the rights and interests of consumers.

2.3 Understanding the Street Vendor Economy through a Postmodernist Perspective

The purpose of the postmodern critique is not to deny the significance of spatial permits, but to reflect on the conceptual and methodological issues of the formalization of the informal economy (Huang et al., 2019). The concept of "Good Governance" based on postmodernism emphasizes the process of social management that maximizes the public interest, thus constituting a new cooperative relationship between the political state and civil society. In street vendor economy, this cooperative relationship is embodied in the relationship between city administrators and vendors, so that the formalization of urban public space cannot mechanically adopt the management system of the formal economy. The formalization of urban public space cannot mechanically adopt the management system of the formal economy, but needs to take into account the characteristics and situation of the informal economy, such as the street vendor economy. Formalization should be seen as a gradual ongoing process involving incremental steps and different dimensions leading

towards varying degrees and types of formality (Chen, 2009).

In the context of postmodernism, the street vendor economy is no longer a symbol of "dirty, chaos and disorder", but rather a dynamic economic form. The street vendor economy is facing the challenge of balancing public interests and individual rights while embracing opportunities.

2.4 Prospects for the Development of the Street Vendor Economy

Since the founding of the China, the street vendor economy has been regarded as a major problem in urban management. Government attitudes and measures towards this economy have varied according to the needs of development over a certain period of time. After 2010, the government's exclusionary attitude towards vendors has gradually been changed into a spatial control model that combines "dredging and blocking", i.e., adopting the methods of education and diversion to deal with the relationship between city administrators and vendors - from "chasing and running away" to "living together in harmony". In 2020, due to the impact of the COVID-19, many places have "untying" their policies on the street vendor economy, triggering a wave of popular participation in the street vendor economy, and releasing the vitality of this economy like never before. The street vendor economy is expected to continue to play its role in promoting employment and consumption in the future. However, in order to ensure the sustainable development of the street vendor economy, the rough development of it is not a long-term solution. We should shift from "relaxing" to "upgrading" by adopting a more scientific and refined urban management plan, and should not only "relax" the "highly restrictive" regulation, but also carry out scientific, orderly, normal governance and guidance. (Ma, 2020).

3. Analysis of the Current Economic Situation of Vendors around Universities

This paper takes Sichuan University of Science and Engineering as an example to start the research on street vendor economy. Sichuan University of Science and Engineering(Libaihe) is located in Da'an District of Zigong, and its surrounding businesses are not developed except for the commercial street of C District on this campus, which has given rise to the "Snack Street" across the southeast gate of the campus. The survey for the students who are the main consumer group issued a network questionnaire, a total of 100 valid questionnaires were collected.

3.1 Reasons for the Prosperity of Vendors around Universities

3.1.1 The Unique Advantages of Street Vendor Economy

In terms of cost, the vendors in the southeast gate of the school only need to pay the cleaning fees for their stalls, rather than paying rent, which in turn enables the vendors to provide good quality and low-priced goods, compared with the formal traders have a competitive advantage. In terms of the location of the vendors, according to the survey, 57% of the students said that they were very satisfied or satisfied, 37% of students said that they feel average, and only 6% of the students said that they were dissatisfied. In terms of the business hour, the vendors around the universities have the convenience of time, and they can adjust their business hour according to the consumption habits of the students. The vendors around the author's school usually come out one after another around 6:00 p.m., and a large number of students will go to the "Snack Street" who even choose snacks as their dinner after the evening course.

3.1.2 Diversified Consumption Needs of Students

As a group without fixed income, students have insufficient purchasing power so that they tend to prefer

cost-effective goods, and the street vendor economy meets this demand by providing not only affordable goods but also a wide variety of products. In addition, due to various factors, restaurants and stores in schools fail to meet the diversified consumption needs of students, which makes such needs become the main force for the survival and prosperity of vendors around universities. Besides, under the drive of higher profits, vendors are crazy about setting up stalls around universities (Zheng et al., 2012).

3.1.3 Students' Attitudes towards the Street Vendor Economy

First of all, according to the survey, more than half of the students (66%) are worried about the food of vendors, but it is not a big problem, only a few students (7%) basically do not buy vendors' food because of the fear of the hygiene problems, and another 27% of the students said that they are not worried about the food hygiene problems. This shows that most of the students have a fluky attitude towards the food hygiene of vendor and do not care much about the hygiene of the food. Secondly, according to the data, students are supportive of mobile vendors around the school. Among them, the number of people who are very supportive is the largest, accounting for 53%, the number of people who are generally supportive or relatively supportive accounted for 47%, and no one chose not to support. Again, according to the data on the frequency of consumption of stalls in Figure 1, 26% of the students who participated in the survey went to stalls around the school every day, 35% went 3-5 times a week, 38% went 1-2 times a week, and only 1% said they had never been to food stalls around the school. Finally, the survey allowed the students to score the overall service level, commodity price, and experience on a scale of 1-5. According to the scoring results, the students' overall evaluation of the current situation to the vendors was high.

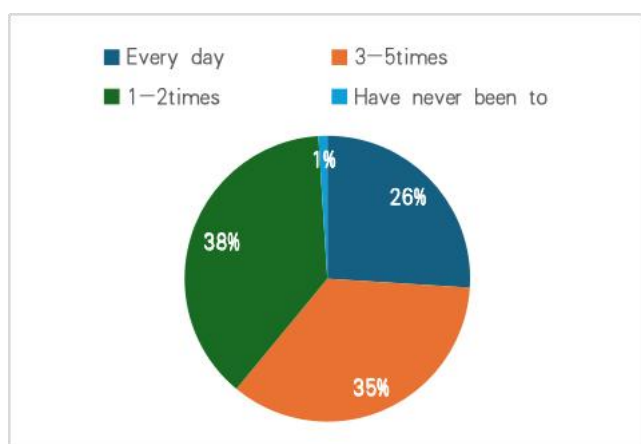


Figure 1: The frequency of consumption of respondents



Figure 2: The overall evaluation of street vendor

3.1.4 Innovative Mechanisms of Street Vendor's Services

As the takeaway service industry has gradually matured, some vendors have adopted a service mechanism similar to that of takeaways in order to improve their own service quality and competitiveness with their peers. They take orders through channels such as WeChat and use school students as intermediaries to deliver the goods to customers. By combining the traditional business model with the modern takeaway service mechanism, these vendors not only provide consumers with a more convenient dining experience, but also expand their business scope.

3.2 Problems of the Street Vendor Economy around Universities

3.2.1 Food Safety Hazards

Compared with the restaurant, the entry threshold for vendors is lower and lacks restrictions, such as business licenses and food hygiene rating that mobile vendors cannot provide, and the mobility and randomness of vendors makes it difficult for consumers and law enforcement agencies to hold vendors accountable when there are problems with the quality and safety of their food.

3.2.2 Affecting the Business of Restaurant in the Vicinity

Mobile vendors, because of their low thresholds, small inputs and low costs, constitute unfair competition with formal economy, which directly affects the incomes of them. This kind of unfair competition relationship has seriously blew the motivation of the restaurant runners, and the disorderly development of mobile vendors will also disrupt the market economic order (Zhang, 2020). An owner who sells pancakes in C District, whom the author knows at the school, said that the gathering of vendors at the gate has had a serious impact on the business of her shop. The presence of a large number of vendors has seriously affected the neighboring restaurant, creating a situation in which bad money drives out good and affecting the normal business order (Zhai, 2010).

3.2.3 Impacting the Image of the University

The large number of mobile vendors tends to create a "crowded zone" around schools. With the gradual increase in the number of vendors, some vendors will even fight for a favorable stall, and do not cooperate with the urban management officers. The accumulation of garbage on the ground caused by the vendors, as well as the haphazard parking of vendors, will have a certain degree of negative impact on the image of the university.

4. Conclusion: Countermeasures for the Governance of Street Vendors around Universities

4.1 Divide and Rule - Inclusion and Exclusion Coexisting

Urban planning is a spatial strategy used by the ruling class to enhance its ability to rule and govern the country (Huang et al., 2019). Street vendor is an economic form outside the urban governance system, and their mobility is a key target of urban planning, both to avoid law enforcement by urban management officers and to find a wider economic source to maximize profits. It is not desirable to completely eliminate the existence of vendors, which will intensify the conflict between vendors and urban management officers. The spatial divide-and-rule approach, a method of managing vendors with an attitude of "inclusion and exclusion", emphasizes the combination of "dredging and blocking", preventing a large number of vendors from gathering through "blocking", and effectively controlling the presence of vendors in the city through "dredging" in terms of quality, quantity, and degree, and ultimately establishing a dynamic balance between the protection of people's livelihood and employment and urban development. For example, in the placement of stalls, under the premise of not affecting the traffic order, the vendors around the university can be designated a certain area for mobile stalls, and stipulated the closing time, the basic guidelines to be followed when operating, and regulated the vendors from the regional structure. In terms of the rental of stalls, vendors can be provided with weekly and monthly contracts, which not only has the formal constraints of the contract, but also meets the needs of different vendors. In terms of rent payment, the amount of rent should be determined in accordance with the economic situation of the region in which the vendors are located, the flow of people and other aspects of the local conditions, in order to avoid the occurrence of generalization.

4.2 People-oriented - Changing the Traditional Urban Management Model

China's urbanization is compressed urbanization, shouldering the traditional task of urbanization while at the same time fulfilling the mission of building an international metropolis in line with international standards under the wave of globalization (Xu, 2007). In this process, China's population is constantly moving and expanding along with the rapid economic development, and new problems have emerged in urban management, with constant conflicts between vendors and urban management officers. According to the survey data, 84% of the respondents believe that both the vendors and the urban management officers have responsibility in the conflicts. Governance to vendors is not a one-sided problem. Vendors are trying to survive and urban management officers is trying to fulfill their duties, and it is difficult for both sides to make compromises when conflicts occur. Therefore, for the street vendor economy, the government management should abandon the formalized concept and break through the traditional management mode. First, from the perspective of people-oriented to protect the right to survival of vendors. Give vendors space to live, rather than without actual investigation to introduce "one-size-fits-all" governance policy. Secondly, the construction of law enforcement teams should be strengthened, with education as the main focus, so that they can establish a people-oriented philosophy of law enforcement, strengthen the sense of service to vulnerable groups, and guide law enforcers to actively communicate with vendors.

4.3 Rational Consumption - A Proper View of the Street Vendor Economy

According to the results of the survey, it can be found that university students, as the main consumer group of street vendors around universities, are relatively satisfied with the goods provided by vendors, but they cannot regard vendors' goods as an indispensable consumption object. As an unstable economy, although the price and taste of vendors' snacks are relatively better than that of canteens, they cannot provide any guarantee in terms of safety and after-sale service, and the frequent use of vendors' snacks as regular meals will cause certain damage to the body. Students do play a role in promoting the economy of street vendors around universities, which makes the vendors regard the university as a precious place. In street vendors gathering area, consumers can also play a supervisory role, rationally identify the advantages and disadvantages of goods, timely complaints to the urban management department of low-quality stalls, to improve the quality of vendors at the same time also enable them to flourish.

References

- Chen, M. A. (2009). Informalization of labour markets: Is formalization the answer? In *The gendered impacts of liberalization* (pp. 191-218): Routledge.
- Huang, G., Xue, D., Xu, K., Yang, Y., & Chen, K. (2019). Governance of Informal Public Space in Urban China: A Post-modern Critique of Spatial Formalization of Urban Street Vending. *Urban Planning International*, 2, 47-55.
- Ma, J. (2020). Restricting Factors and Promoting Ways of Modernization of Social Governance in City. *Administration and Law*, 9, 54-62.
- Xu, H. (2007). Can Big Cities Accommodate the 'Street Stall Economy'? *China Economic Weekly*, 12, 26-29.
- Zhai, D. (2010). Research on the Governance of Mobile Street Vendors in University Towns: A Case Study of Fuzhou University *Legal System and Society*, 35, 228-229.
- Zhang, W. (2020). Rationality and Issues Analysis of Street Vendors: A Case Study of SC Street. *MARKETING MANAGEMENT REVIEW*, 6, 84-85.
- Zheng, L., Peng, R., Xie, J., Zhu, W., Chen, X., & Fang Jiwei. (2012). Reflection on the "Street vendor Economy" around Universities: A Case Study of Jiaying Region. *Journal of Hubei University of*

Economics(Humanities and Social Sciences), 5, 47-48.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

Our team is very grateful to our teacher for his help and support with the research. Special thanks to Professor Huang, his research and study of the street vendor economy gave us a lot of inspiration.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).