
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Motivations of Bangkok's Food Truck Owners during the COVID-19 Disrupted Supply Chains and High Inflation of 2020-2023: An Example of Resilience from Bangkok's Informal Economy

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ABSTRACT

This study considers the motivations of food truck owners and prospective owners in Bangkok during a difficult period both locally and globally. Plans for Bangkok's future development were opaque. Inflation was rising rapidly, particularly food and energy costs critical to the industry. COVID-19 continued throughout the research. The aim was to stress-test motivation and commitment within the industry. The study asked participants what motivates them through qualitative and quantitative techniques, the former subject to thematic content analysis. Further, there was discussion with stakeholders and observation. Stakeholders particularly included training providers in the industry. Vendors requested more help so they could sustain themselves and prosper in the industry. Food trucks were of interest because of the relatively casual labour that found a place during COVID-19, although the number of trucks had declined before the pandemic. The study found that food truckers are still highly motivated and eager to help shape Bangkok's food truck industry going forward and, thereby, the urban landscape and economy of the city. Demotivating factors suggested by the participants themselves focused on murky city planning, which became a major element in the study. Clearly, a transparent path forward must be negotiated between relevant stakeholders in determining the future development of the city.

KEYWORDS

Changing city, city planning, food trucks, informal economy, resilience, street food, Bangkok.

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1. Introduction

Street food, meaning food literally prepared on the street, has a lengthy history in Thailand. This arises out of migration, particularly from China and Isaan in North-East Thailand to urban centres. The point of arrival and, arguably, the most avid street food culture has been Bangkok. The city has two faces: ceremonial and commercial (Thompson, n.d.). Historically, Bangkok as a commercial city arose due to Chinese migration. Royal Thai cuisine is anything but street food, highly finessed, created to specific rules, all for perfect balance, with a particular concern for no extremes in spiciness.

The Chinese influence on Thai street food has been profound. This influence came from and thrived among Chinese migrants, though those migrants could be socio-economically very different people. At the one level, there were merchant traders. At another level, were simple "coolies", unskilled labourers. The latter would live in "flop houses", low cost, multi-occupation lodgings with little amenities other than a bed and somewhere to wash. Almost certainly there were no cooking facilities. Coolies could only eat

on the streets, and the more elevated Chinese were likely to have eating-out as part of life's routine. Some elements of Chinese cuisine could have been designed as street food, meaning limited preparation, stir-frying and deep-frying. Multi-thousands of migrants from Isaan, North-Eastern Thailand, also made their way to Bangkok to make a living and provide both labour and customers for street food vending. Many became street food entrepreneurs. Some elements of Isaan food are also well-suited to quick street preparation, and only limited facilities are needed, notably grilled meats and simple spicy salads.

Whatever the source of cuisine, street food is now deeply embedded in Bangkok society and, indeed, Thai culture. It was a natural resource for those with lower incomes, office workers, and growing numbers of tourists until COVID-19. COVID is impacted by loss of income and lower incomes. Also, many now work from home. There were limitations on some businesses opening and on gatherings in Thailand's entertainment centre.

This paper reports on research aimed at investigating the perceptions of a subset of all street food providers who are food truck operators. The research had at its core the research question, "What motivates food truckers and would-be truck owners?". Many cognate areas were covered through informal discussion, often at the behest of participants (see "informal discussion" below). The methodology of the study was qualitative.

2. Literature Review

This literature review refers to pre-reading before any empirical research was undertaken and to reading during the ongoing research. These categories and sub-categories, with their different purposes, are considered below.

2.1 Pre-reading

The starting point for the researchers was generalised reading on food trucks. However, at the outset, it must be reported that there is no great history of academic writing on food truck vendors in Bangkok or Thailand, though one exception has been important, that of Likhitweerawong and Dowpiset (2015), who worked with ten Bangkok food truck owners who owned five trucks. The methodological approach of Likhitweerawong and Dowpiset (2015) informed the multi-faceted approach in the current study.

There has been some academic writing on food truck customers in Thailand pre COVID-19, but mostly in the Thai language. The history of academic writing on food trucks is essentially that of American academics and relates to USA venues and, food truck practices and customers. The USA has a long history of food trucks, dating back to the days when the trucks were horse-drawn. A lot of economic growth has ensued, and with it, there is market segmentation by truck-based prepared food sellers. For many years, associated with poor quality, poor hygiene, low price and feeding the working man; there is now even a gourmet food truck sector in the market (e.g. Strand, 2015 Mc Neill & Young, 2019).

Thailand's food trucks are frequented by the young, rising middle class who can afford high prices. In Thailand, working people are supplied by pavement vendors, not trucks. Some of those pavement vendors will sell off carts and trolleys. The carts and trolleys also pitch at individual schools and factories and, occasionally, offices. Writing of any relevance in or on Thailand concerns street food in general. Note that food trucks are regarded in Thailand as a type of street food, but the reality is that street food is normally taken to mean food that is prepared, cooked and served on the pavement. Kowalczyk and Kubal-Czerwinska (2020) cover both street food in the reduced, normal sense, and truck food and do so globally, in fact talking of the growth of urbanisation in the global South and more particularly South East Asia and such cities as Bangkok, Singapore and Ho Chi Min City as drivers. Unfortunately, whilst bringing cheap and reasonably healthy food and providing work, this expansion has also brought tension around different views for the City going forward, meaning more or less planned, e.g. Debray et al. (2023).

Generalised reading on the motivations of small business entrepreneurs, including food truck owners, was the researchers' next task. Ha (2021) has portrayed a very wide range of food truck owners, from those who do not have many options for work and income, often immigrants just earning enough to get by, doing this work for bare survival. On the other hand, Ha (2021) also describes food truckers who openly avoid the corporate 9-5 life. Ha (2021) speaks of people fired by passion who value control and autonomy over their lives "more than anything" (Ha, 2021).

Unsurprisingly, the same motivations generally show for those wishing to start a business in any area of business. Six factors count for 68% of the variance between nascent entrepreneurs and those not entrepreneurially inclined: self-realisation, financial success, roles, innovation, recognition and independence (Carter et al., 2003). This is, of course, highly reductionist; for instance, individual personality plays a strong role in the decision to actually enter entrepreneurship and the longevity of the business started (e.g. Caliendo et al., 2013). Risk attitudes are an important example (Caliendo et al., 2013). Also to be taken into account is whether an individual is being "pulled" into entrepreneurship by personal choice or "pushed" through a lack of better alternatives. Shapero (1975), for instance, found most entrepreneurs to be displaced people, sometimes literally as refugees but more often being

dismissed from their jobs as employees or unable to advance in their jobs. Reynolds et al. (2003) see business founders as opportunity and necessity entrepreneurs. Specifically, global figures are offered of three in five entrepreneurs being opportunity-based, seeing an opportunity, while two in five entrepreneurs are because they see no viable alternative.

The reading material in this section was particularly concerned to help shape the interviews in this study and the Likert-based question set, albeit also concerned with specifics of the food truck industry, such as working hours and exactly the opposite in generalising for informal and casualised employment typical of the food truck industry. The questioning designed by the researchers aligned with all elements. Arguably, entrepreneurship can be defined differently for food truck entrepreneurs than purist mainstream notions of entrepreneurship. Elements of artisanal crafting can be present, meaning low volume and hand crafting, but also in terms of attitudes derived from passion, whereby there is a concern to inform and educate others and a lack of concern about maximizing profitability or income (Azavedo & Gogatz, 2021, Watne 2012, Watne, Hakala, & Kautonen, 2012).

2.2 Ongoing reading

As the current research progressed, it became obvious that the participant food truck operators were not focusing on the recent past with COVID-19 or the present with rapid inflation, especially in food costs, and supply chains still subject to some degree of disruption. They assumed that they and their businesses would survive or take adaptive actions to sustain their businesses and income. From the discussion, what many regarded as their real problem was going forward amid the confusion of Bangkok City planning.

Note that food trucks are regarded in Thailand as a type of street food. The broad debate about street food comes down to safety versus character. That single word, "safety", may mean food safety or street safety. In either case, characterful may be at odds with safety, perhaps the key focus of more or less planned as representing the future of Bangkok. Safe food from any vendor is an increasing priority. Safe streets are also a priority, but perhaps there are trades-off to be seen with character, and also, there is less straightforward clarity over what safe streets mean, for instance, safety from accidents, safety from attack, or safety from nuisance.

Boland probably reaches the core difference over street trading in a conflict over visions of the city, one preferring a modernised, planned Bangkok and one wanting to preserve a more open, flexible space (Boland, 2019). Boland (2019) goes on to outline conflicting human drives, on the one hand toward order and structure and on the other toward chaos and creativity. Different minds align differently over what is positive and what is negative.

Bromley (2000) talks of the vitality of streetscapes alive with economic activity and service provision but offers that many observers see something different, meaning health and safety issues, shoddy merchandise, tax evasion, disorder, congestion and crime. Next comes political contextualising of meaning, in which groups focus on the positives and the negatives of street trading. Bromley sees those who are against it as mainly urban elites and big businesses.

It is suggested that Thailand has an anti-democratic Deep State aside from formalised local and national processes (Merieau, 2016). Arguably, the Bangkok elites have hidden power beyond the ballot box, locally and nationally. The argument has been further put forth (Merieau, 2016) that currently, the lead actor is the judiciary, which might limit judicial redress in the localities. Additionally, it has been argued that Thai local administrations are very weak organisations, externally dominated by central government and dominated by local business (Chaowarat, 2010).

Generally, flash points with the authorities, be that the Government or Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, have been over on-pavement street food vending. There have been irregular clampdowns over many years, perhaps the most notorious over Sukhumvit Soi 38. It has been argued that "Soi 38 was previously a mecca for visiting foodies, locals and expatriates living in the fashionable Thonglor district" (Cochrane, 2017).

Clampdowns mean closing down and moving on. An example occurred in March 2017 when the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) ordered all street stalls along Soi Thong Lor, Soi Ekkamai, and Soi Pridi Banomyong (aka Sukhumvit Soi 71, the main street in Phra Khanong) to remove by April 17th (Coconuts Bangkok, 2017). Adisak Guntamanglee of Chulalongkorn University's Urban Design and Development Centre has argued that the government is trying to make street vendors disappear (Charoensuththipan, 2018).

Food trucks are not immune from bureaucratic control, more often to do with fining or informal "fining". The new marijuana trucks are a particular point of contention (Rojanaphruk, 2022). It is worth noting that Thailand has no specific body of law covering food trucks, including pollutants therefrom (Soonthornsaratool, 2017). As an example, pollutant emissions and waste dumping are covered under various sections of the Enhancement and Conservation of National Environment Quality Act B.E 2535 (1992). Likewise, food truck operation in public places or on public roads requires approval, but it is under the broad remit of the City

Cleanliness and Orderliness Act B.E. 2535 (1992). Traffic Obstruction is covered by the Land Traffic Act B.E. 2522 (1979). Much is simply not covered, such as the standard equipping of trucks to minimise pollutant emissions, the absence of coverage when vehicles are operating in private areas, and the absence of demand for the food truck operator to complete a food safety course.

There is similarly no requirement that food vendors on the street have completed a course in food safety. Generally, there has been much talk about food safety but little action, and this is when there is clear public concern. Charoenjarasrerk (2014) found that the majority of his primary research participants felt that the food practices of street food vendors were unhygienic and messy: "Actually, I do not know exactly where vendors go to the toilet and how can I ensure that vendors wash their hands before cooking including where do they get water from?" "When they wash the utensil, they use water from the gallon [sic], which has limited quantity; hence, water will be changed after many times wash up. I think it is not clean enough". "I saw some dust and flies around stalls". "The worker doesn't dress in the proper way, such as in slippers and shorts. Some workers have long hair, but they do not wear hair net". Talk of water, hot water, and toilets often comes forward in discussions of movement to hawker centres, for instance, in Singapore, but the stumbling blocks of affordability for vendors and loss of local character are brought up.

Even some Thai Universities have food trucks to use at events, mainly as learning spaces for food industry students, but other students might be included, maybe management students, as might other motivations, essentially to gain income. Student involvement might differ substantially from running all aspects of the truck to staffing various aspects of the truck, the latter often with close supervision by faculty members. Some examples are Suan Dusit University and Rajamangala University of Technology, Phra Nakhon.

King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang (KMITL) School of Food Industry works in two ways to benefit their undergraduate students, existing food truck entrepreneurs, and those considering food truck ownership. In the latter two cases, non-graduate courses are openly available at their Smart Food Truck Academy. For entrepreneurs, this is mainly learning by doing, including business processes and food safety. Such training is much needed and also much wanted by these vendors. The undergraduate students, young food scientists and technologists can also learn by experience working with the food truckers, for instance, testing trucks for safe handling of food and safe environments within trucks in the field as those trucks are working.

Nonetheless, both pavement-based street food and truck-based food vending seem to offer uncertain futures post-COVID. At simplest, that means whether or not customers return, but it also means what view of city planning will prevail and what the attitudes of the recently elected Bangkok governor, Chadchart Sittipunt, are. Relevant here is that in August 2022, City Hall announced a new initiative to improve street food quality and safety (Petpallin, 2022). Detailed news has not been available, and funds are limited (e.g. Papart, 2022 and Rattanasavee, 2022), but Sittipunt has brought up the suggestion that hawker centres and street vendors are unhappy (Inoue, 2022). Firdaus, Rasidi and Ismail (2021) see stakeholder agency as critically important in community-building, but this means stakeholder interactions and the use of that agency to build social bonds. This appears to be lacking in the ongoing approach from Bangkok City Hall. Adaptive action through stakeholder interaction would build community resilience.

During times of economic downturn, people may demonstrate resilience by reducing expenditure, postponing consumption and diversifying their activities to find alternative sources of income (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). Throughout Thailand, but in urban centres in particular, it is quite easy for people to move into and out of informal sector activities, which have relatively low entry and exit costs. Examples of this include selling snacks to schoolchildren at the school gates at the beginning and the end of the day, becoming a mobile salesperson of household goods or joining one of the many burgeoning motor cycle delivery networks. Studies of informal street vending (e.g. Walsh & Maneepong, 2012) indicate that people will take opportunities to earn income on a short-term basis, perhaps even daily (Walsh & Jha, 2012), following the Rimmer and Dick (2009) explanation of households in which all members contribute as they can under shifting circumstances that require continual re-evaluation of prospects. Tax is unlikely to be an issue, but claiming COVID benefits became one. There is also a cost to the state in that unregulated activities may also represent a threat to public health and the rule of law. Legal changes concerning the sale of cannabis, for example, are currently contested and subject to change overnight. In these situations, street vendors and other informal sector workers have an incentive to avoid everyday interactions with the state, especially with respect to the police, since they may be vulnerable to sanction, in addition to low level harassment.

In some cases, informal sector workers may find themselves under closer scrutiny when authorities have designated the area as a place of gentrification. This may be the result of a public health campaign to ensure that vendors follow the so-called Singapore model, under which they are required to occupy a specific area where electricity and other utilities are regulated, and fees are paid. In other cases, the workers may be deemed undesirable, making the area look dirty or pre-modern in some way. Several parts of central Bangkok have received this designation in recent years, and (e.g., Sutthavong, 2018) this has brought about the possibility

of confrontation. Thai society makes extensive use of patronage networks, which means that many individuals can claim access to land commons based on their closeness to such a network and can use force to achieve their goals. Informal sector workers constantly scan to see if they need to hastily retreat. This is perhaps less so for the food trucks, perhaps more concerned with the police.

These issues tend to promote a sense of solidarity among those working on the streets, especially those in relatively stable arrangements where there may be shared childcare on offer and the willingness to cover for neighbours should they have to leave their stall unattended for some period (Walsh, 2014). However, these relationships are not automatically conferred, and they may be reduced in effect or replaced by no cooperation with other people who infringe on unwritten rules, such as aggressively stealing customers or undermining the efforts of other vendors.

The food truck sector is similar to these other forms of street vending. One difference is in the higher entry costs to join the sector, even for an already-owned vehicle that needs adaptation. Another is that food trucks have become associated with a more affluent market, such as those familiar with semi-permanent sites featuring container-based businesses, which may also be rapidly converted to new uses (Reddick, 2017). This means the sector is very agile, but that comes at a price.

3. Methodology

The research question for this study was “What motivates food truck owners and would-be truck owners?”. Data collection included gathering some data for descriptive statistical analysis but was primarily qualitative, as shown below in Table 1:

Table 1
Research Design

Data Collection	Data Analysis
Informal Discussion	Thematic Content Analysis
Formal Semi-structured interviews	Descriptive Statistics & Thematic Content Analysis
Contextual Observation	Thematic Content Analysis

3.1 Formal Semi-structured interviews

These interviews were to be of food truck owners or sometimes staff participating in a twenty-one truck event at Iconsiam, Bangkok. The event was to be attended on two weekends, and formal interviews were undertaken. Written explanations of the questions were to be available in Thai and English to aid oral communication. The main point that was needed was a Likert scale-based question on trucker participant motivations to be in the industry and continue in it, as in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Likert Scale of Motivations for Food Truck Operation

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
To try something new			✓	
To have a hobby		✓		
To socialise				✓
To make money		✓		
To begin a business that will become full-time and a main income source.	✓			
To run a business that is NOW my main income source				✓
To run a business that has hours of work, I find good.	✓			

Additional to the Likert-based questions, a number of other structured questions were to be asked. These questions included what motivated participants to run a food truck that was not listed in the Likert, what the participants most enjoyed and most disliked about running a food truck, where they normally sell/in how many places, and what they would be interested to learn more about running a food truck business. All questions were designed to elicit motivations for participants’ involvement with food trucks but also simply to add time to the interviews for participants to say whatever they wanted. This, for instance, is how the matter of being primarily concerned with Bangkok city planning first arose.

The advantage of multi-method data collection was picturing the broad sweep through the more quantitative work whilst getting detailed insights and commentary through the qualitative elements. The complexity of reality is not foregone, and a flavour was gained for different people's realities; one worried about the water supply to her truck, another concerned about the weather. Put simply, following Jick (1979), it was hoped that using mixed-methodology mitigates the disadvantages of singularly either quantitative or qualitative methodology.

3.2 Informal Discussion

Informal discussion was very much at the core of this research. At whichever venue and whatever they were selling, the food truckers would be serving customers. They would be busy. Few would be able to spare time for formal interviews, and large numbers of vendors would not be attending. The need was to collect information stealthily and as possible, above all, not detracting from sales and the customer experience. Other researchers have mentioned this in food service environments, e.g., Khalid et al. (2021). That would apply in all cases, but in the case of cannabis businesses, customers and prospective customers might be particularly concerned about gaining detailed product information and potentially have concerns for their own privacy. Finally, Likhitweerawong and Dowpiset (2015) have noted the sheer lack of numbers of food trucks in Bangkok as a research constraint and push toward qualitative approaches.

3.3 Contextual Observation

The aim of this observation, very much at a distance, in their workplace was simply to gauge the demeanour of the food truck owners and staff as an indication of motivation. Would they appear happy? Were they genial with customers? Were they genial with each other? How genial would they be with the KMITL students who would be inspecting their trucks and their food handling? Were interactions maximised to be good experiences?

4. Results

As mentioned, the research question for this study was simply "What motivates food truck owners and prospective owners?" Inevitably and quite correctly, the discussion involved an interplay of suggestions by both the interviewer and the participants. In fact, participants often suggested demotivators from their lived experiences that the researcher could never have predicted. Rich and detailed data was gathered.

4.1 Formal Semi-structured interviews

At the outset, it was decided that a "backbone" of some more objective, cross-comparable data was needed in addition to granular detail. The study included a small element for descriptive statistical analysis and a question set very much focused on a Likert Scale. Interviews were completed outdoors by respondents at Iconsiam in August 2022, as planned. The interviewees, eight in number, were a hugely strategic purposive sample of truck owners and some staff. It is to be noted that for such a phenomenologically-based qualitative study, Creswell (1998) suggested a cohort size of five interviewees, and Morse (1994) suggested cohorts of six individuals.

Demographic details of the participants are in Tables 3, 4 and 5 below:

Table 3
Demographics of Food Truck Owner and Would be Owner Respondents - Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	5	62.5	62.5	62.5
Male	3	37.5	37.5	100.0
Total	8	100.0	100.0	

Table 4
Demographics of Food Truck Owner and Would be Owner Respondents – Age

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
20-29	2	25.0	25.0	25.0
30-41	4	50.0	50.0	75.0
42-53	2	25.0	25.0	100.0
Total	8	100.0	100.0	

Table 5
Demographics of Food Truck Owner and Would be Owner Respondents – Highest Education

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
High School	4	50.0	50.0	50.0
Bachelor's Degree	4	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	8	100.0	100.0	

Demographic characteristics of the respondents described in Tables 3, 4 and 5 show that the majority (62.5%) of respondents were female. Half of the respondents were bachelor's degree holders (50%), and half had high school education (50%) for maximum educational attainment. The most frequently occurring age was between 30 and 41 years (50%).

To consider the formal interviews' Likert Scale question set on motivations, note that the question set included these propositions: To try something new, to have a hobby, to socialise, to make money, to begin a business that will become full-time and a main income source, to run a business that is NOW my main income source, to run a business that has hours of work I find good. Respondents were asked to respond as strongly agreeing with the proposition, somewhat agreeing, somewhat disagreeing, or strongly disagreeing.

Overall, nearly all answers to the Likert, irrespective of gender, age or highest level of educational attainment, were to either strongly agree or somewhat agree on the proposition. Clearly, making money was the strongest motivator, with 100% of respondents strongly agreeing that it was a motivation. Next, in rank order, came trying something new, which was agreed upon by 87.5% of respondents. For each of me to begin a business that will become full-time and my main source of income, to run a business that is now my main income source and to run a business that has hours of work, I find a good 75% strongly agreed. To be noted, when running a business that has hours of work that are found to be good, one respondent strongly disagreed with the proposition. On socialising, 62.5% strongly agreed on the proposition. On having a hobby, 75% of respondents somewhat agreed, and one respondent somewhat disagreed. This disagreement was one of only two disagreements throughout, the other relating to hours of work for trucks being already mentioned.

Note that the questions around beginning a business that will become full-time and my main source of income and running a business that is now my main income source were not mutually exclusive, particularly during the COVID period. People were grabbing at whatever they could do for employment, be that main or only or part of a portfolio. Some had thoughts of an element growing and becoming a full-time commitment to a sustainable business, and others saw a temporary commitment now for survival. Often, a current main source of income during COVID referred to a very low income, to survivability, and not to great current business success. An example of this last point was a hamburger truck owner. He had a successful catering business for events (mostly weddings). With COVID-19, the wedding market collapsed, and burgers, about which he previously knew nothing, became his survival mechanism, his statement of resilience.

As mentioned, the formal interviews contained a question set beyond the Likert question. These questions were designed to prompt further thought and enable respondents to make individualised comments that were unshaped, as opposed to the more prescriptive Likert. The answers to these questions (see above under Methodology) would develop into themes in aggregation. The questioning sought mainly to discover personal likes and dislikes about running a food truck.

The greatest theme that emerged was a dislike of Bangkok's weather, alternately too hot or too wet. This made working in trucks uncomfortable, limited customer attendance and caused lingering, which could mean the difference between buying a drink or a meal. A learning theme emerged both in answering that the vendor wished to learn more about running food truck businesses and also in the sense of on the job, on the day, learning as an attractant, as one participant put it, "have something new to be learning every day". A customer care theme emerged with a number of respondents pointing out that customers could be annoying and difficult to communicate with, useful, honest information that could feed back to the learning for truckers theme. A lot of commentary amounted to specifying within Likert's socialising theme as having fun meeting new people, sometimes making new friends. In both cases, the references were about customers and could have relevance to marketing to those customers, for instance, fun loyalty schemes and marketing as a topic for the truck vendors to learn about. Naturally, when truck owners and staff were given free rein to say whatever they wished, there were many outliers. For instance, one participant was motivated by a love of cooking, and another was de-motivated by rising fuel costs.

4.2 Informal Discussion

Informal conversations were had with many of the vendors at Iconsiam, and some of the formal interviews developed into informal discussions. That last was encouraged. Of its nature, the informal discussion has random elements, but the researchers would guide the discussion toward relevance.

In a particular case, this was especially true in informal discussions with cannabis truck owners, and their staff always guided toward the motivations to start and continue in the cannabis business, albeit more directed toward start-up as the cannabis businesses were so new. In fact, responses differed between entrepreneurs and staff. Entrepreneurs were inclined toward "money", in whatever specific context, as important in their entry to the business with every intention of staying in the new cannabis business. For instance, mentioned was "high profit margins", or another participant simply said, "because it was there to be done", meaning that an opportunity had arisen.

There was an awareness that the industry is still legally in flux in Thailand, so there was much discussion on navigating that, being compliant, and perhaps becoming involved in developing compliance regimes. What was not questioned is that controls will be introduced and maybe soon. Elements have already become criminalised again, with the classification of cannabis flowers as not dried flowers but herbs (Wipatayotin, 2022).

Staff saw legality as concerning everyday relationships with the police and what fines or "fines" might be applied. Staff personal motivations revolved around finding cannabis interesting to research and present to customers in a simplified way. Entrepreneurs, of course, agree that knowledge and imparting knowledge are important in making a sale.

In all cases, discussions with the cannabis truckers were on the street in either Thonglor or Sukhumvit Soi 11, Bangkok. In two cases, the researcher was invited to the truck owner's shop for deeper discussion after meeting in either location. An in-depth discussion was held with six cannabis truck owners and their staff.

With the vendors at Iconsiam and with other stakeholders, such as the academics, the discussion was wide and varied, moving on significantly from material yielded from the formal interviews. Participants brought forward the whole topic of the importance of city planning clarity in an informal discussion. It was clearly considered more important than post-COVID-19 recovery, inflation or supply chain disruption.

4.3 Contextual Observation

Contextual observations were very much in line with the detailed discussion about socialising. The truck vendors were seen to maintain polite, interested, friendly and informative conversations with their customers and others. Friendships could be easily emergent with customers. The cannabis truckers had a particularly difficult job in that they had to make very rapid assessments of the customers' level of knowledge of the topic so as to neither patronise clients nor make a presentation too advanced for customer understanding. The discussion revealed that the cannabis truckers spend large amounts of time considering how to present the topic to different customer types and found that a particularly interesting aspect of their work. That showed through in very appropriate information-giving and regular sales with no over-selling.

5. Discussion

This study was conducted to address the background of global uncertainty, which is increasing environmental concern, particularly over energy, a war in Ukraine, a major agricultural produce supplier, especially of grain, and globally rising inflation, as all these factors interacted. The research was also undertaken during the COVID-19 period and immediately post-COVID. All factors did not suggest a global mood of optimism.

Bangkok was the focus of this study. It considered street food there, specifically truck food and truck owner and prospective owner motivations against the global backdrop but also specific local pressures. No attempt should be made to generalise from this case study, though truths may be found in elements of transferability, e.g., in Accra and Ghana (Spire & Choplin, 2018). Local pressures include what is the future vision for the city, a place of character or a sanitised place, highly controlled in the image of latter-day Singapore. Considerations are prominently aesthetic, but there are detail realities, namely those of character versus safety. That might concern road safety, but a major topic is food safety, the safety of street food, and food trucks included. In the Singapore case, there has been a move toward hawker centres, and they are a matter of debate in Bangkok.

Against so many difficulties, the truck food vendors and would-be vendors who talked with, interviewed and observed remained well-motivated. Only one participant felt “the industry is finished”. That said, de-motivators were mentioned, sometimes relating to the global picture, such as the inflated cost of fuelling a truck. However, uncertainties mostly arose out of what view of the city’s development would emerge triumphantly going forward and what rules and regulations might ensue. For cannabis and the cannabis-orientated trucks, the question is a national one over what legislation finally emerges and with what compliance needs. Localised is the future of W Market Bangkok, in fact, generally of W District (Ruiz & Itthipongmaetee, 2022). Many food vendors’ livelihoods are at risk, including trucks.

Bangkok informal sector workers participating in this paper displayed the kinds of resilient behaviour familiar across many countries (e.g. d’Errico et al., 2018). However, there is an additional behaviour that Thai people can express, including in the research described in this paper: everyday fatalism (Walsh & Lovichakornitkul, 2022). Most Thai people follow Buddhist philosophy to at least some extent, but their understanding is often limited. This is shown in their attitude towards adversity, which is often mute acceptance and waiting until things improve; however, much of Buddhist philosophy does not actually preach this. Of course, those respondents with access to more resources, including knowledge and social capital, are better able to create alternative responses to adversity and have more agency to change their situation. One form of agency is provided by mobility (Büscher & Urry, 2009), and the presence of a truck, whether tied to a contract in a single location or not, represents such a form of mobility and, hence, agency. Participants, therefore, had means to supplement their resilience and less need to worry about difficult conditions.

6. Conclusions

Conclusions are difficult as so much of relevance is in flux. In city planning, the range is from such specifics as W District, Bangkok, up to the overall plan for Bangkok, assuming that detailed planning is needed beyond the 20-year Development Plan. Outcomes in the broader economy and public health environments are equally unclear, such things as COVID, inflation, and tourism recovery included. However, these do not preclude making these recommendations out of the present study:

- Food handling and food safety must be improved on food stalls, including food trucks.
- There needs to be regulation around food handling and safety to ensure improvement.
- There must be free training offers for all these vendors so that they are able to comply.
- In cannabis as a specific, there must be legal clarification of what is and what is not legal.
- In all matters so far mentioned, there must be close liaison between the Government, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and representatives of the relevant vendors and, prior to that, the development of fora for discussion to agreed agendas and, hopefully, with agreed outcomes.
- Notwithstanding extolling a consensual approach, not top-down, between all stakeholders in Bangkok city planning, the researchers see the publication of an outline plan for Bangkok and its zoning as a necessary lead-in action to be completed earliest by Bangkok Metropolitan Administration.

Out of the study also come simple findings to the research question on owner and prospective owner motivations. The conclusion here is that these are people who:

- Want to make money.
- Are keen to try something new.
- Wish to have a future where food trucks are their full-time work and main income source.
- Very much enjoy their work.
- Enjoy socialising, especially with customers.

- Enjoy the hours of work in their industry.
- Want to pursue educational opportunities for the industry around such topics as food safety and business processes.

Overall, the truckers are optimistic and very much stakeholders in their industry. It is believed they would happily be involved with other stakeholders in mapping a future for the food truck industry and for all street-food enterprises in Bangkok. Likely, that would extend to Bangkok city planning more generally.

A key point of the current study was that it was specifically undertaken in abnormal times that challenged the motivation and resilience of those in the food truck industry. Future research must be conducted during normalised times. This research occurred during the COVID-19 period and its immediate aftermath. For a number of years, food trucks have been moving from multi-stop night tours to being events-based. Events were hit hard, often large events cancelled, through COVID distancing requirements. With such a high percentage of the workforce engaged in informal work, employment termination could be immediate. There was no welfare net, including COVID-related payments, available to those in the informal economy. Then followed a war, global inflation, global supply chain issues, energy and food included. Of particular concern in Bangkok is that low-cost migrant labourers have not returned. The Thai economy is heavily dependent on overseas tourists. They must also return.

A particular shortcoming of this study was that customers were not considered or consulted as stakeholders. Future researchers might consider further study of food truck customers in Thailand, particularly through the recent advent of cannabis trucks.

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