

Original Research Article

Profitable, Resilient, and Supported: Revealing the Fulfillments, Challenges, and Coping Mechanisms of Balut Vendors

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Article No: 001 | **Accepted:** 04 September 2026 | **Published:** 10 October 2026

Abstract: This study explored the lived experiences of balut (duck egg) vendors in the First District of Iloilo, focusing on the benefits, challenges, family support, and customer relationships associated with their livelihood. Guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach and semi-structured interviews with five balut vendors selected through snowball sampling. The data were transcribed, translated, and analyzed using inductive reflexive thematic analysis. Four major themes emerged: (1) perceiving self-employment as beneficial, (2) sustaining livelihood despite challenges, (3) strengthening family support, and (4) maintaining customer rapport. The findings showed that vendors value independence, flexible work, personal satisfaction, and the ability to support their families. Despite rising costs, unstable demand, and unfavorable weather conditions, they demonstrated resilience through financial management, patience, and adaptation. Family encouragement and involvement further strengthened their livelihood, while maintaining product quality and addressing customer concerns helped build customer trust. Overall, balut vending serves as both a source of income and a meaningful livelihood that provides independence, family support, and personal fulfillment. The study recommends further research involving more female vendors and participants from other areas, as well as quantitative studies examining economic difficulties, health and safety risks, coping strategies, social relationships, and government policies affecting balut vendors.

Keywords: Balut Vendors, Customer Relations, Family Support, Lived Experiences, Self-Employment, Street Vending

1. Introduction

Street vending continues to be one of the easiest ways of earning a living among many Filipinos, especially those who are members of the informal sector. The practice is integral to economic development not only at a national level but also in the local setting in generating employment for micro-vendors, providing people with means of survival despite few formal jobs, lack of government intervention, and varying market dynamics (Ndaba, 2025). Among the various kinds of products offered by street vendors, balut stands out not just as an indigenous product but as a representation of the Filipino culture in its astronomy (Kedla et al., 2025).

Street vending can act as a means for many people to become entrepreneurs in order to make a living, provide for their families, and have a better standard of living (Java, 2024). Not only does it enable them to generate some form of income, but it has also been acknowledged as a way through which they can achieve economic stability and social mobility in spite of the risks and problems they face due to being informal workers (Anja & Zhang, 2023). Yet, the success of this type of entrepreneurship is largely dependent on more than just economic factors.

Even though previous studies clearly show the contribution made by these vendors, there is not enough academic literature focusing on the street vending phenomenon from the perspective of economics, tourism, and livelihoods (Ndaba, 2025; Kedla et al., 2025; Java, 2024; Anja & Zhang, 2023). On the other hand, very little attention has been paid to the life experience of balut vendors and how they view self-employment, overcome difficulties in earning a living, build a family support system, and create a relationship with their clients.

In order to fill this gap, this research will delve into the experiences of balut vendors through understanding how they view their self-employment, cope with the difficulties involved in supporting themselves, get help from their families, and establish good relationships with their customers. This research hopes to make a contribution to the existing literature on informal entrepreneurship and street food vending, and provide information useful for programs that aim to improve the lives of balut vendors.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

Qualitative research design was used in this study to investigate the reality and unique experiences of balut vendors (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). The qualitative research design enables the researchers to approach the study with a phenomenological perspective in order to examine the experiences and characteristics of the aforementioned vendors to add knowledge to the neglected field study (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). The study is based on the Theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen (1991), which can effectively relate to the study of the lives of balut vendors in the sense that their daily choices and actions can be seen in relation to their personal beliefs and attitudes, social expectations, and perceived behavioral control towards their work. According to the theory, behaviors are based on

intentions and are influenced by three factors: (1) Attitude Towards Behavior, (2) Subjective Norms, and (3) Perceived Behavioral Control.

2.2. Instrument

This study used a semi-structured researcher-made interview guide which consisted of three (3) components: (1) Attitude Towards Behavior, focusing on the individual attitudes and perceptions of the vendors 4on the advantages and disadvantages of selling balut; (2) Subjective Norms. Examining how social pressure from family members, clients, the community, and regulatory bodies affects their behaviors, and (3) Perceived Behavioral Control, determining their confidence in managing their needs in the long run. This technique is an ideal fit for the qualitative descriptive design since it provides researchers the freedom to conduct interviews using open-ended questions, thereby probing into the experiences of the respondents (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Pilot testing was done among one (1) balut vendor living in the First District of Iloilo who fulfills the criteria set by the study after the instrument was face and content validated. The snowball sampling method was adopted to identify informants, whereby the target population would facilitate the researchers to identify other possible informants. This is the best sampling strategy because it facilitates the easy identification of the exact group of individuals whose lived experience can effectively address the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.3. Informants

Five (5) balut vendors served as the informants of this study. They were selected based on the following criteria: (1) they are balut vendors selling within the municipalities of the First District of Iloilo; and (2) they have been engaged in balut selling.

The informants had varying years of experience in the balut vending business, ranging from three (3) to thirty (30) years. All of them sold balut along roadside areas within the municipalities of the First District of Iloilo. Specifically, three (3) of them were from Guimbal, one (1) was from Oton, and one (1) was from Tigbauan. With the use of snowball sampling, respondents with experience who could provide relevant perceptions into the study were identified.

Table 1. Informants of the Study

Informant	Sex	Vending Area	Years of Vending Experience
Akai	Female	Guimbal	30 years
Crisanto	Male	Oton	18 years
Boyet	Male	Tigbauan	5 years
Remi	Male	Guimbal	20 years
Renboy	Male	Guimbal	3 years

2.4. Data Collection Procedure

The study proceeded with the data collection process after obtaining approval from the Research Adviser. Prior to the conduct of the interviews, a formal letter was presented to the informants to secure their informed consent and confirm their voluntary participation in the study. The informants were informed of the purpose of the study, as well as the confidentiality and security of the information they would provide. Ethical standards were upheld throughout the research process to ensure the protection of the informants' rights and welfare. Upon obtaining the informants' consent, the interviews were conducted, with their responses documented through mobile phone audio recordings and note-taking to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the collected data.

2.5. Data Analysis Procedure

After the data collection was completed, all recorded interviews were transcribed word-for-word to ensure that the informants' responses were accurately captured. The transcripts were then translated from the informants' local dialect into English to make the data easier to analyze. The study used an inductive and reflexive thematic analysis following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), which helps identify and understand common patterns and themes in qualitative data. The analysis began with reading the transcripts several times to become familiar with the data, followed by creating initial codes from the informants' responses. Similar codes were then grouped into themes, which were reviewed, refined, and named based on the study's theoretical framework. Finally, the findings were presented in a narrative form. In order to make sure that the validity of the findings is established, data triangulation was done by validating the themes generated against the literature and field observation (Patton, 1991).

3. Findings

3.1 Perceiving Self-Employment as Beneficial

Balut vendors view their profession as a constructive way of self-employment since it gives freedom, a flexible work schedule, and a chance to take care of their families in their own accord. From their experiences, one can tell that their livelihood is not only economically advantageous but also satisfies their personal needs. This is evident in the following two subthemes: (1) managing livelihood independently, and (2) gaining personal satisfaction.

3.1.1. Managing Livelihood Independently

The balut vendors appreciate the sense of freedom they get from selling balut since it gives them a chance to run their business without an employer. Akai stated, "Yes, I like being my own boss and choosing my own time to work." Renboy added, "Selling balut is better because we do not have an employer. The profit is all ours, when compared to other jobs." Likewise, Remi shared, "It's been a long time now, more than 20 years. I started selling when I was around 15... At first, it was my sibling who suggested selling, and I liked it. Of course, every night you earn, it's not small, sometimes around a thousand."

These examples show that the right to determine their own employment and income gives the vendor the ability to perceive balut sales as self-employment.

3.1.2. Gaining Personal Satisfaction

Apart from gaining financial freedom, balut vendors find contentment in their source of income since it allows them not only to take care of themselves but also to enjoy doing what they are doing. As expressed by Renboy, “Yes. I just love the act of selling itself.” According to Akai, “I’m able to pay for the needs of my children and even give them allowance.” As mentioned by Remi, “Everything is alright. You won’t be selling anymore if you’re losing. I love it as well and it gives you the freedom to roam around.” The same sentiment was conveyed by Boyet, saying, “It is all worth it. You don’t lose, you still earn.” The above narratives show that there is more to selling balut than mere economic benefit and a sense of achievement that comes along with it.

3.2. Sustaining Livelihood Despite Challenges

Despite encountering different obstacles in terms of economics and the environment, balut sellers manage to maintain their means of living. Although they encounter unstable sales, high expenses, and bad weather, they persist in selling their balut because it is an income that never fails to provide for their needs. It reflects resilience, patience, and adaptability as embodied in three subthemes, mainly: (1) earning a consistent daily income, (2) coping with rising costs and low demand, and (3) navigating environmental conditions.

3.2.1. Earning Consistent Daily Income

The sale of balut gives the sellers a consistent source of income every day that allows them to earn money for their family, regardless of their low income levels. Akai stated, “Yes, because it gives small profits, it is enough for our food requirement.” Meanwhile, Crisanto said, “That’s much better than not having any job at all.” For his part, Boyet asserted, “That is worth it. You will not incur losses; you earn income.” As Akai said, “I’m able to cover my children’s necessities and daily allowance,” whereas Boyet pointed out, “There are many contributions since income can take care of our living expenses.” The examples above show that balut vendors do not value their work for the amount of money it earns them but for their ability to support themselves and their families through it.

3.2.2. Coping with Rising Costs and Low Demand

The balut sellers deal with other economic problems, like rising costs of doing business and low sales days. When the prices rise, this results in complaints from the customers, while on low sales days, the vendors have to be very cautious with their earnings as well as their domestic expenditure. Renboy revealed, “There are customers who complain of the rising price of balut, but I could not really do anything because we are just trying to gain profit.” Akai stated, “I try to control my earnings because there are days where I earn a lot of money.” Crisanto noted, “We continue selling since it is normal that there are days that we earn no profit.” Boyet added, “All you need is patience because this

is the only way of earning money.” Such instances clearly show how financial discipline and determination help balut vendors maintain their livelihood amidst economic uncertainties.

3.2.3. Navigating Environmental Conditions

Environmental factors also affect the daily life of balut sellers through their influence on customer traffic and business prospects. Rainfall, strong storms, and seasonal events directly impact customer traffic, causing sellers to modify their sales schedule in line with their environment. As Crisanto put it, “It’s always the rain that affects the sales, less buyers and low profit, and elaborated, strong storms and high price of the balut when I’ll buy it.” Similarly, Boyet stated, “During festivals, such as Disyembre sa Guimbal or Bantayan, there are many buyers. But if it is stormy, it surely impacts the sales, so we just take a day off to sell.” Remi said, “It’s just like any other business, still, hit or miss. Sales increase during festivals.” These incidents show how balut sellers continually respond to the changes in their environment as well as seasons, seizing any opportunity and temporary modification and the way they conduct business in case of bad weather conditions.

3.3. Strengthening Family Support

Family backing is significant for the livelihood of balut sellers in giving encouragement, motivation, and assistance in conducting the business. The experiences of balut sellers show that the involvement of family does not only involve emotional support but also direct help in maintaining the livelihood. The experience has been manifested in two sub-themes, namely, (1) receiving family encouragement and (2) sharing household support.

3.3.1. Receiving Family Encouragement

The appreciation of the family members encourages balut peddlers to persist in doing their job regardless of the pressure of their trade. Akai said, “They are proud of me. They are actually the ones who motivated me to sell.” Renboy stated, “They are proud of me since it helps me educate my child.” Remi continued, “No problem. They appreciate me. Even better, they are happy for me since this is how I earn my money.” Their stories prove that the appreciation they get from their families motivate them to continue selling.

3.3.2. Sharing Household Support

In addition to this efforts, balut vending is supported by the inclusion of their family members, who contribute in taking up duties and passing down the livelihood to succeeding generations. According to Chrisanto, “Because my family sells as well.” According to Renboy, “Ever since, my family sells balut. Even my wife and sister-in-law sells. We have our own posts for seeling.” Meanwhile, Boyet said, “In the beginning, I used to accompany my uncle and get experience. And once I got used to it, I did it all alone.” These examples demonstrate how the involvement of families helps not only learn the livelihood but maintain its continuity over the years.

3.4. Maintaining Customer Rapport

Establishing good relationships with their customers becomes one of the daily experiences of the balut sellers. They understand that establishing the trust of the customers plays a big part in the sustainability of their business. This experience is highlighted in two subthemes, which are (1) ensuring product quality and (2) understanding customers' health-related concerns.

3.4.1. Ensuring Product Quality

Customer trust is kept through the provision of quality products and the replacement of any faulty products. Akai pointed out, "They usually ask if the balut is still warm and if the embryo is small." Remi said, "There are some. For instance, they will ask whether the balut is still fresh or is it already old." In case of any problems, Remi added, "In case of any problem, we change it, there is nothing wrong about returns." Boyet also noted, "If there are any spoiled items, they will be changed. They are returned and changed." Remi pointed out, "They just say it is tasty, because if it is not, they will not return."

3.4.2. Understanding Customers' Health-Related Concerns

The vendors of baluts also deal with the costumers who are concerned about their health, the cost of the products, and problematic interactions. As Chrisanto mentioned, "There are some cost of the products, and problematic interactions. As Chrisanto mentioned, "There are some who complain that if you always eat balut you can have high blood." Renboy also explained, "Costumers complain about the increasing cost of balut, but there is nothing much I could do because we are just after the profit." Boyet pointed out that, "There are times that some get agressive, but I do not mind because I just ignored them...There are drunk costumers sometimes also." From these statements, it is clear that dealing with costumer problems with calmness makes it possible for them to have a good relation with costumers.

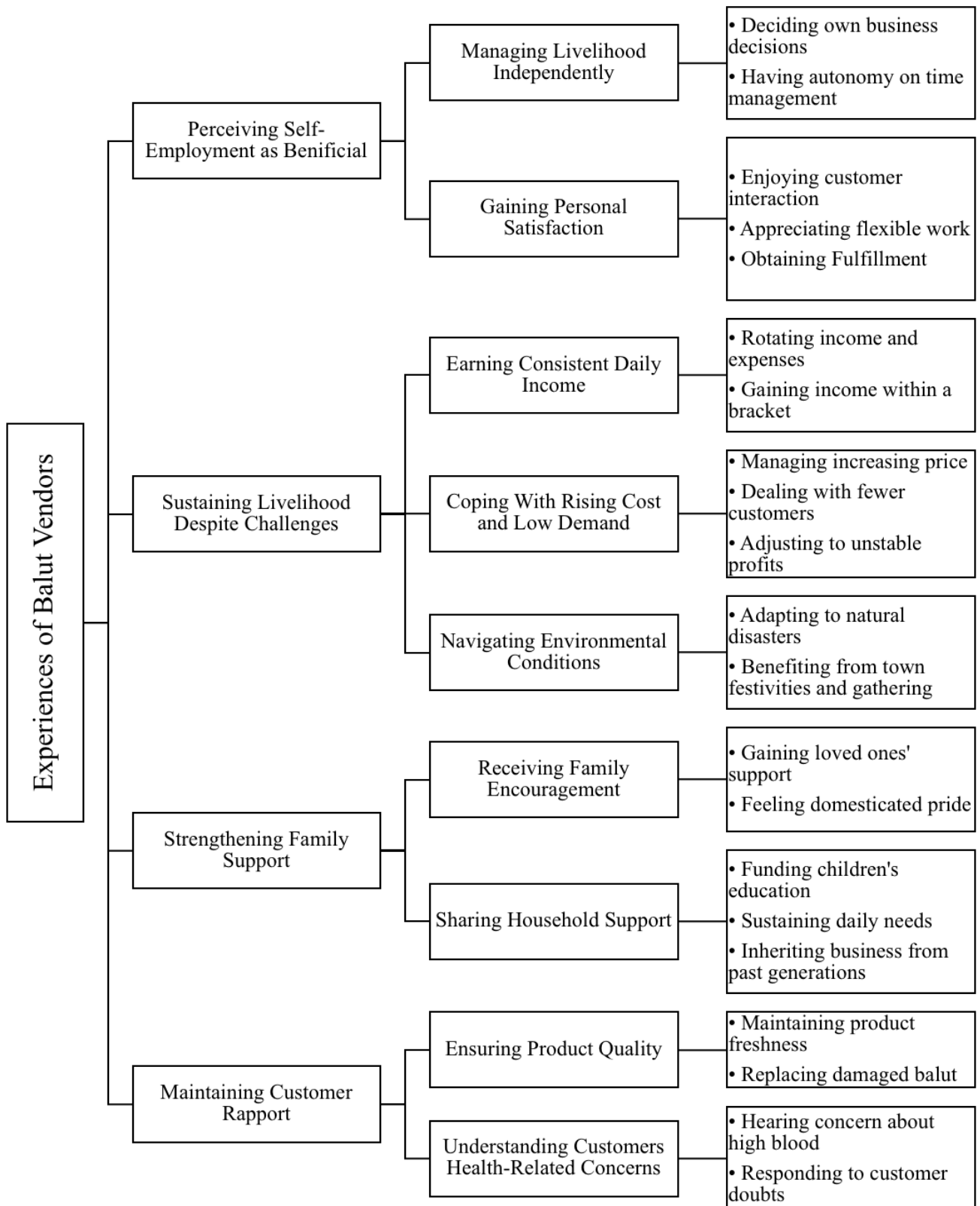


Figure 1. Thematic Map of the Lived Experiences of Balut (Duck Egg) Vendors

4. Discussion

The study was anchored on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and focused on the experiences of balut vendors. Four (4) main themes were discovered mainly: (1) Perceiving Self-Employment as Beneficial, (2) Sustaining Livelihood Despite Challenges, (3) Strengthening Family Support, and (4) Maintaining Customer Rapport.

These themes were further specified into nine (9) sub-themes, supported by twenty-one (21) categories:

(1) Managing livelihood independently includes deciding own business decisions and having autonomy on time management. (2) Gaining personal satisfaction categorizes into enjoying customer interaction, appreciating flexible work, and obtaining fulfillment. (3) Earning consistent daily income includes rotating income and expenses and gaining income within a bracket. (4) Coping with rising cost and low demand involves managing increasing price, dealing with fewer customers, and adjusting to unstable profits. (5) Navigating environmental conditions includes adapting to natural disasters and benefiting from town festivities and gatherings. (6) Receiving family encouragement consists gaining loved ones' support and feeling domestic pride. (7) Sharing household support, which explores funding children's education, sustaining daily needs, and inheriting business from past generations. (8) Ensuring product quality categorizes into maintaining product freshness and replacing damaged balut. (9) Understanding customers' health-related concerns comprises hearing concerns about high blood and responding to customer doubts.

Balut vendors perceive self-employment as beneficial because it gives them the freedom to make independent business decisions and manage their own work schedules without relying on an employer. This independence allows them to respond to daily challenges while maintaining control over their earnings and business operations (Abdullah et al., 2023). These experiences reflect the entrepreneurial nature of informal vending, where individuals function as independent micro-entrepreneurs with authority over their enterprises (Romero et al., 2024). Likewise, the flexibility described by the balut vendors shows how self-employment enables workers to organize their schedules according to their personal needs and responsibilities without compromising their livelihood (Cueto, 2024; Bernal-Torres et al., 2020).

Personal satisfaction is derived by balut vendors from their livelihood because selling balut not only provides a stable source of income but also gives them opportunities to interact with customers, travel, and fulfill personal responsibilities. Besides earning a living, vending becomes a meaningful activity that brings a sense of purpose through regular social interaction and community engagement (Cueto, 2024). Hospitality and positive customer relationships have also been recognized as important factors that contribute to both vendors' personal fulfillment and business success (Dano et al., 2025). Likewise, the flexibility of street vending allows vendors to adjust their operations based on changing personal and business needs by deciding when and where to sell according to customer traffic and accessibility (Santos et al., 2020). This adaptability is due to the fact

that street vending is an entrepreneurial venture that not only ensures individual welfare but also personal fulfillment (Giraldo et al., 2020).

Street vendors manage their small businesses through operational agility and cost control, but also through social relationships. Analyzing the vendor's strategies to generate a regular daily income, from the accountings provided by the vendors it becomes clear that running a business boil down to strict financial discipline and realistic estimates. In terms of rotating income and expenditures, the participants described a never-ending circle, where each day every peso earned is directly used for purchasing tomorrow's goods and feeding the family (Sulaeman & Rosi, 2022). Since formal credits are not available, this approach helps vendors keep the business going debt-free. But while doing that, vendors also have no opportunity to save any money, which means that any day of lower revenues could interrupt the circle immediately. However, under the strategy of gaining income in the bracket, vendors explained how their daily incomes in the end become stable earnings, regulated by initial capital, location, and total amount of sales hours (Rahmadi & Sitorus, 2020). Though daily income may be variable, knowledge of the bracket gives vendors some predictability and allows them to manage household expenses.

Concerning handling increased costs and reduced customers, the results demonstrate the creativity with which vendors have to act. As far as handling increasing prices is concerned, vendors acknowledged that they do not increase prices to customers because their loyal clients will leave them (Santos & Cruz, 2021). Thus, vendors choose to accept small cost increases themselves or change portion sizes and lose a little bit of profit instead of alienating the clients. Dealing with less customers, vendors will not tolerate idle stalls but will shift their carts to locations near transit stations, schools, or night markets to actively look for crowds (Prasetyo & Widodo, 2023). However, vendors are unable to remain flexible in situations involving weather issues. Rainy and hot weather drive customers away from buying and spoil the stock of perishables, lowering daily income and making vendors purchase tarpulins, umbrellas, or additional ice at their expense (Dialogue Earth, 2024). Therefore, in coping with fluctuating incomes, traders manage by constantly changing size of their budget, increasing or decreasing it (Del Monte & Tan, 2024). If there is an off day, they quickly reduce their next day's stock procurement, rely on supplier credit (pautang), and decrease household expenses until they start making sales again.

The challenge of navigating through environmental challenges demands that vendors always have to weigh environmental risks against local economic opportunities. When serious natural calamities such as typhoons and flooding occur, street vending activities come to a standstill, damaging goods and equipment. Formal disaster assistance and insurance coverage is never available for informal sector workers; hence, the vendor's social network comes in handy in rebuilding operations to restart business activity once the environmental conditions become favorable again (Ballesteros & Ebron, 2021). In contrast, celebrations within towns and communities play a huge role in terms of financial lifeline to attract a lot of people (Harahap & Siregar, 2022). Vendors set up shop in areas with dense population such as transport terminals and town plazas to increase working hours and stocks. Aside from acting as an important buffer during leaner months, the act of selling

regional street foods during such festivals helps in the preservation of regional culinary culture (Rodriguez & Pedroso, 2024) and enhances culinary tourism in the region (Kedla et al., 2025). In essence, the street vendor survives in the environment through resilience in times of disasters and economic positioning during local festivals.

Motivation received through encouragement from the family becomes another crucial motivating factor for balut vendors. The encouragement from their family members keeps vendors determined to continue with their business irrespective of any obstacles they face. The encouragement from family members increases self-confidence of vendors that help them make important business decisions even in tough times (Arif et al., 2023). Similarly, Leung et al. (2020) highlighted that encouragement from the family keeps vendors away from stress and creates a feeling of achievement and satisfaction among them. Consequently, vendors feel proud of their occupation since it provides their family members with all necessities. This finding is in line with Java (2024), who noted that the vendors considered their earnings as the means of fulfilling their family aspirations.

Encouragement from family serves as an important source of motivation that strengthens balut vendors' commitment to their livelihood. With the support of their families, vendors remain determined to sustain their business despite challenges. Family support enhances vendors' self-confidence, enabling them to make critical business decisions during difficult situations (Arif et al., 2023). Likewise, Leung et al. (2020) emphasized that family encouragement reduces vendors' stress while fostering a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. As a result, vendors develop pride in their livelihood because it enables them to provide for their families. This is consistent with Java (2024), who reported that vendors viewed their hard-earned income as a way of fulfilling their family's dreams and aspirations.

Daily necessities such as household expenditures and schooling for their kids are met through balut vending; thus, balut vending becomes a viable livelihood. This is consistent with Derla et al. (2023) who said that the reason why vendors vend is because they aim to meet their needs. Likewise, Marwa (2022) revealed that the vendors spend their daily earnings on electricity and water bills, emergencies, and tuition fees for their children or siblings. Balut vending also becomes sustainable as vendors are able to vend within their family because they inherited the business from their families and relatives. They are taught the ropes of the business through observation and experience; thus, succeeding generations are able to take over the business. This is consistent with Java (2024) who stated that many vendors started off as assistants for their family's or relative's business prior to taking over, whereas Roa (2023) said that business knowledge is learned across generations.

One of the crucial strategies that ensures balut sellers can foster trust and develop long-term customer relations is keeping the product of high quality. Balut sellers maintain quality through the provision of fresh products and the replacement of damaged ones to foster customer trust and encourage purchase again. Such actions are in line with the food safety concepts proposed by Paloma and Israel (2025), which highlighted that maintenance of food freshness is very important for food safety and consumer trust. Moreover, sellers

demonstrate good food handling skills by keeping balut coolers when transporting it and keeping the products warm in portable steamers when selling. This is consistent with food safety recommendations for street food vendors (Tayco et al., 2025).

Buyers' concerns about health issues have been overcome by turning the consumers' worries into a way of creating trust among the buyers. Being constantly worried about having problems with high blood pressure (pataas ng presyon) is why vendors have to address buyers' concerns about dietary issues related to high levels of cholesterol and stroke, especially because of the negative attitude toward food products like balut as an agent for sudden high-pressure rises (Magat, 2019). Being faced with these issues, vendors do not see them as a lack of interest but recognize people's genuine concern for their well-being. In order to overcome the concerns and ensure daily sales, vendors make conversations, talk about the freshness of products, and offer other alternatives like penoy or young embryos (balut sa puti) (Haguisan, 2018).

However, despite having learned about the experiences of balut vendors from this research, there are still some limitations which should be considered in future research studies. The first one is that there were only five (5) balut vendors interviewed as the informants, and hence, the collected data could not represent the overall experiences and opinions of all balut vendors. Secondly, the research study adopted qualitative and subjective research methods. Future research may adopt quantitative research approaches as complementary research tools to get wider and more general results using statistical data. Thirdly, most of the informants used in this research were males; hence, it is recommended that future researchers should consider more female vendors. Fourth, the study was performed only in the First District of Iloilo; hence, future studies could also be conducted in other districts, cities, or provinces to see if there are differences in experiences in other places. Last, this study mainly looked at the behavior of the informants. Other areas of interest that future research could examine could be the economic difficulties, safety and health hazards, coping strategies, social relationships, and how government policies and regulations influence their livelihood. But despite the said weaknesses, the findings of this paper still present information that gives adequate knowledge about the experiences of balut vendors. In addition, the results of this study could form the basis of future studies on the topic of informal livelihoods and street vending in the Philippines.

5. Conclusions

Balut (duck egg) vendors possess several qualities that include independence, resilience, support from the family, and good customer relations. Not only is the selling of balut an avenue for balut vendors to earn income, but it is also a way through which they can experience satisfaction and responsibility to be able to take care of their families and, at the same time, overcome challenges. In spite of the financial, environmental, and other changes, vendors have been able to adapt to ensure continuity of their livelihood.

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