

STREET FOOD CONSUMPTION TREND: A CASE STUDY OF VIETNAMESE GEN Z

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Abstract

Street food is very popular in Vietnam. In the big cities such as Hanoi, Hue, Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City, Phu Quoc, etc., many street food dishes have become familiar. This study systematically addresses the fundamental issues of street food consumption and the trends among Vietnamese youth, particularly Gen Z. Survey results show that most young people are familiar with street food. The most common places they choose to enjoy street food are sidewalk stalls and food carts. In terms of frequency, 44% of young people said they only occasionally enjoy street food. Most of them indulge in street food during their free time, often with friends. The survey also reveals that young people agree that street food is diverse, delicious, reasonably priced, and convenient to buy. Although there are concerns about hygiene quality, many still enjoy street food. The most loved dishes are skewers (grilled meatballs, fried fermented pork rolls, etc.), and grilling remains the most favored method of street food preparation. Notably, Vietnamese street food is preferred over the cuisine of other countries. Young people consider street food a fun experience. From these findings, the research team provides some discussions with street food businesses to better meet the consumption trends of young people and achieve success in the highly competitive street food industry.

Keywords: Street Food Consumption Trend, Gen Z, Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, there are many types of street food, from food vendors selling on the streets, in markets, or in informal local markets, to entertainment areas, fairs, exhibitions, and both large and small fast-food stores. We can find street food everywhere. Especially near the gates of elementary, middle, high schools, and universities, it's even easier to encounter these dishes. Most students associate street food with fond memories of enjoying it together after long, tiring school days or during their free time.

Street food consists of food and drinks that have been prepared or are ready to be made and served on demand. These items are sold on sidewalks in busy streets, neighborhoods, or public places near tourist spots, entertainment areas, outdoor dining streets, schools, companies, and more. Most street food carries the distinct flavors of the local region, sold in small shops, mobile stalls, temporary kiosks, or on pushcarts. Over time, as urban life developed, street food has become popular due to its convenience, speed, and competitive pricing with high consumption rates. (Ha Le, 2022)

With Vietnam's geographical span across three regions – North, Central, and South – each region has its unique dishes that carry the local flavors. Thus, Vietnamese street food in urban areas is diverse and rich, combining the flavors of all three regions. (Ha Le, 2022)

Unlike in the past, where street food primarily served local customers, it has now become a crucial element for promoting culinary tourism, and most tourists cannot miss the delicious dishes at the places they visit. However, alongside these positive developments, street food now carries concerns about food quality and hygiene. Recently, there have been cases of food poisoning in various localities, despite the efforts of authorities and the health sector to regularly monitor this issue. (Thanh Thuc, 2024)

To explore the street food consumption trends among Vietnamese Gen Z, the research team reviewed general trends in Gen Z's food consumption through desk research and conducted sociological surveys to collect data and information on Gen Z's street food consumption in Vietnam.

2. OVERVIEW OF STREET FOOD CONSUMPTION TRENDS AMONG VIETNAMESE GEN Z

2.1. Some Information Regarding Vietnamese Street Food

Culinary Arts

Culinary arts, literally meaning food and drink – where “âm” refers to drinking and “thực” refers to eating – is a special system of traditional concepts and practices of cooking, the art of the kitchen, and food preparation, often associated with a particular culture. It is often named after the region or culture in which it originates. A dish is mainly influenced by locally available ingredients or through trade and exchange. Foods with religious significance also have a major impact on cuisine. Broadly, culinary arts represent a culture of eating and drinking that has become a tradition and habit of a particular people. It encompasses not only “material culture” but also “spiritual culture.” (wikipedia.org)

Cuisine is usually named after the region or culture where it originates. A dish is largely influenced by local ingredients or those obtained through trade. When talking about cuisine, it refers to a world of flavors, creativity, and uniqueness that evoke a wide range of emotions beyond just feeling full. (vietwebgroup.vn, 2024)

Vietnamese Street Food

In Vietnam, the habit of consuming street food has a long-standing history and is a unique cultural feature of the Vietnamese people. Street food originated from family meals through the creativity of mothers and gradually became available for the community. Over time, street food has become increasingly diverse and creative, thanks to a robust group of home chefs across the country who constantly innovate and prepare unique new dishes not only for their families but also for street food lovers. Most street food is sold at temporary stalls on sidewalks, or from mobile stalls, baskets, or carts that line the streets. (Dieu Phi, 2023)

Vietnamese street food, in general, does not adhere to strict rules or fixed recipes, as each “street artist” or chef has their own unique secret that makes their dish special. Sometimes, that recipe is their life’s work. It’s not just food; it’s also about stories, beauty, and the characteristics of Vietnamese labor and people. (Ha Le, 2022)

Vietnam can truly be called a “paradise of street food,” boasting thousands of delicious and enticing dishes with diverse preparation methods and unique flavors. Thanks to the culture of street-side commerce, visitors to Vietnam can find local food on almost every street, whether in rural or urban areas, in the lowlands or in the remote mountains. Wherever they go, tourists can easily satisfy their hunger with the culinary gems of Vietnam. (Điều Phi, 2023)

Box 1: Hanoi Street Food

Street food is also an essential experience for tourists visiting the capital city of Hanoi. Hanoi’s culinary tourism has captivated the majority of both domestic and international visitors, including many diplomats, heads of state, and world-renowned culinary experts.

In May 2016, U.S. President Barack Obama made an official visit to Vietnam and had the opportunity to enjoy Hanoi street food. This was a way to express respect and sincerity in the friendship between the two nations. Street food serves as a symbol of warmth, sincerity, and true closeness, reflecting mutual respect on an equal footing.

Source: Vu The Long (2024)

2.2. Generation Z

Generation Z, or Gen Z, refers to individuals born between 1995 and 2012 (some say from 1997 to 2015). The most widely accepted age range is from 1997 to 2012. Most of Gen Z are the children of Generation X (born between 1965 and 1979), following Millennials (Generation Y), and preceding Generation Alpha (α). Born during the era of technological and Internet expansion, Gen Z is also known by various names: iGeneration, Homeland Generation, Net Gen, Digital Natives, Neo-Digital Natives, Pluralist Generation, Internet Generation, Centennials, Later Millennials, Zoomers, Gen Wii, and Gen-Tech. Globally, Generation Z consists of approximately 2.6 billion people, accounting for about a quarter of the world’s population. In Vietnam, Gen Z makes up about 25% of the national workforce, equating to roughly 15 million people. (AIA, 2023)

According to Gento.vn (2020), Gen Z exhibits the following notable traits:

- One of Gen Z’s defining characteristics is their early exposure to and use of technology. For them, being comfortable with technology, mobile devices, the Internet, and social media platforms like Facebook, Google, YouTube, Instagram, and others is natural.
- Gen Z can quickly gather and use information with little effort. However, unlike Generation Y, which often required deep technical knowledge, Gen Z doesn’t necessarily need in-depth technical skills to navigate technology.
- Although Gen Z represents a small percentage of the total population, their influence, particularly on family shopping decisions, is undeniable. This is because they have access to diverse information and can identify which products best suit their needs and their family’s needs.

- They tend to evaluate everything practically, rather than relying on celebrity endorsements. Through e-commerce platforms, Gen Z can read reviews, assess quality, and evaluate sellers to make informed purchasing decisions.
- A significant change in Gen Z's shopping habits is their willingness to pay more for high-quality products with long-term value. As a result, businesses are focusing on meeting the needs of potential Gen Z customers by offering smart and convenient products that match their tastes and preferences.
- Today, it is common to see young Gen Z individuals freely expressing their personal opinions. They dare to challenge and break old rules, creating their own path and emphasizing their uniqueness. Furthermore, they are open to sharing and confronting societal trends, fostering a more open and comfortable society.

2.3. Street Food Consumption Trends among Vietnamese Gen Z

A report on the food and beverage (F&B) market in Vietnam points out that in 2023, out of every three Vietnamese people, at least two follow street food trends. Among these, salted coffee ranked as the number one trending food in 2023. This was followed by soursop tea (19.5%), strong oolong tea (11.4%), chicken salad with mangosteen (10.7%), and hand-squeezed lemon tea (7.5%) ... (plo.vn, 2024) According to iPos.vn, Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) is gradually becoming the dominant consumer group in the market. Moreover, Gen Z customers are not only “willing to play” but also “willing to pay”. Driven by curiosity and a desire for new experiences, Gen Z customers always seek novelty, creativity, and are willing to spend money for these experiences. However, this generation is also recognized for its lack of brand loyalty. As such, capturing Gen Z's consumption trends and retaining them as customers is a key goal for many F&B brands today. (plo.vn, 2024)

Food trends are becoming increasingly popular among young people. These trends often emerge from viral images and short promotional clips of street snacks, attracting many interactions on social media platforms. As a result, it is easy to encounter unique and unusual foods becoming widespread across streets and alleys. Just a short walk can lead you to a small stall selling a variety of trendy snacks that spark curiosity in young customers. These foods, which are quick and cheap, offer a fresh experience that acts like a magnet, particularly for younger customers. With the rise of social media, these foods and drinks easily become the next big trend, motivating many young people to start their own businesses to earn extra income. (Ho Quoc Hung, 2024)

Box 2: Street food trends frequently changing

A report on the food and beverage (F&B) market in Vietnam reveals that one of the most regrettable short-lived street food trends in 2023 was “coin cakes.” To launch this dish, investors spent a considerable amount on production equipment (4-6 million VND per machine) and imported expensive ingredients such as mozzarella cheese. However, the trend did not last long. (plo.vn, 2024)

The F&B business is becoming increasingly competitive, requiring entrepreneurs to constantly stay updated on trends and adapt quickly to keep up with market demands and customers' desire for new experiences. This is a strength of young entrepreneurs, who are able to keep up with food trends popularized on social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok... (Ho Quoc Hung, 2024)

3. RESEARCH METHODS

Desk Research Method

The research team used a desk research method to systematize fundamental issues regarding cuisine, street food, and the consumption trends of Vietnamese youth with street food. Data for the article was collected from both domestic and international books, scientific journals, and from various articles on media platforms.

Sociological Survey Method

The research team developed a survey to conduct a sociological investigation, aiming to clarify the street food consumption trends of Vietnamese Gen Z youth. The survey included general information about the respondents, such as their occupation, gender, age, area of residence, income, or allowance from parents and family members.

The main content of the survey focused on street food consumption trends among Gen Z, gathering information on where they enjoy street food, the frequency of consumption, who they usually enjoy it with, the times they prefer to eat street food, the information channels they use to learn about street food, how much they are willing to spend, and the origins of their favorite street food.

The data collection was conducted using two methods: convenience sampling and the “snowball” method—where new respondents are identified through recommendations from previously surveyed individuals. The survey was created on Google Drive and tested on 10 Gen Z youth who regularly consume street food to finalize the questionnaire.

Once completed, the survey was distributed to Vietnamese Gen Z youth through a survey link (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd2DxYxYc6DIR34vXQSHMFjzIQgkN-1RM4n-IZVHKXT3_raHw/viewform) via social media platforms like Facebook, Zalo, and Email. A total of 225 valid survey responses were collected and included in the analysis.

Data Analysis and Processing Method

The survey data was compiled and statistically analyzed using Excel software. The method of synthesis and comparison was used to analyze, summarize, and compare the content covered in the survey.

For the questions, the research team used a Likert scale with five levels:

1. Strongly disagree / Strongly dislike
2. Disagree / Dislike
3. Neutral / No opinion
4. Agree / Like
5. Strongly agree / Strongly like

The research team calculated the distance value and average value for each factor to determine where the average score falls within the response range.

- Distance value = (Maximum - Minimum) / n = (5 - 1) / 5 = 0.8
- The evaluation thresholds based on the average score are as follows:
- 1.00 - 1.80: Strongly disagree / Strongly dislike
- 1.81 - 2.60: Disagree / Dislike
- 2.61 - 3.40: Neutral / No opinion
- 3.41 - 4.20: Agree / Like
- 4.21 - 5.00: Strongly agree / Strongly like

From the information collected and the survey results, the research team offered some discussions and recommendations for street food business operators to better meet customer demand.

4. STREET FOOD CONSUMPTION TRENDS OF GEN Z IN VIETNAM: BASED ON SURVEY RESULTS

4.1. Description of Survey Participants

A total of 225 Vietnamese Gen Z youth participated in the survey, including 36 males (16%) and 189 females (84%). In terms of age, 54 respondents were aged 16-18 years (24%) and 170 were aged 18-30 years (76%). Regarding awareness of street food, out of 225 participants, 221 (98.2%) were familiar with street food, with only 4 out of 225 (1.8%) not knowing about street food.

Table 1: Description of Survey Participants

Gender			Age			Awareness of Street Food		
	Number of People	Percentage (%)		Number of People	Percentage (%)		Number of People	Percentage (%)
Male	36	16	16-18 years old	54	24	Aware	221	98.2
Female	189	84	18-30 years old	170	76	Unaware	4	1.8

Source: Survey results

4.2. Street Food Consumption Trends of Vietnamese Gen Z

The places where young people most frequently choose to enjoy street food are sidewalk stalls and food carts, with 182 out of 225 respondents selecting this option (82.4%). This is followed by fast food restaurants, with 148 out of 225 responses (67%), the gates of schools with 130 out of 225 choices (58.8%), and supermarkets or shopping malls with 127 out of 225 selections (57.5%). Lastly, 75 out of 225 respondents (33.9%) chose local traditional markets.

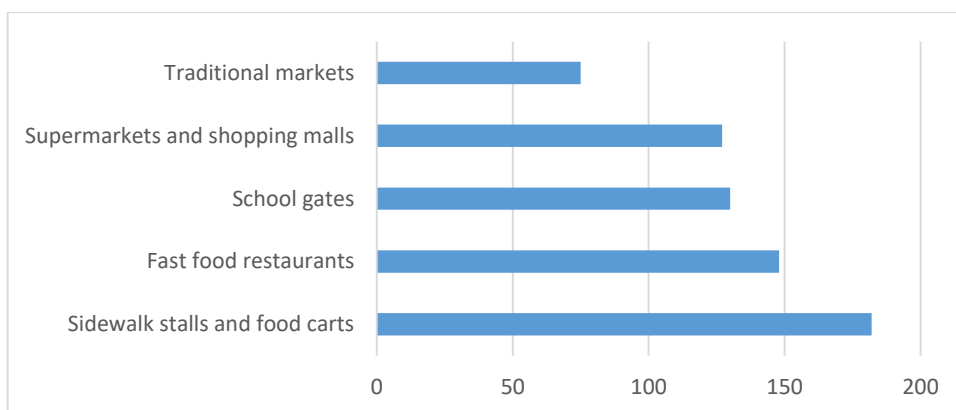


Figure 1: Places where Young People Typically Enjoy Street Food

Source: Survey Results

Regarding the frequency of consuming street food, 44% of the young respondents said they only occasionally enjoy street food (once in a while), 19% consume it twice a week, 15% consume it once a week, 12% consume it three times a week, and 10% consume it more than three times a week.

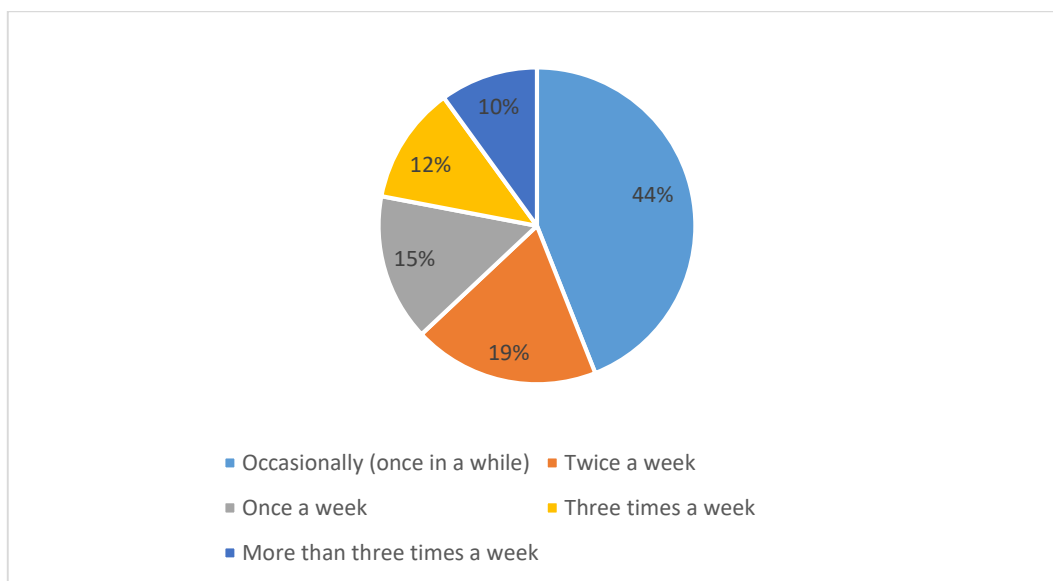


Figure 2: Frequency of street food consumption

Source: Survey Results

Most young people enjoy street food with friends, with 202 respondents selecting this option. Following this, 70 respondents said they enjoy street food with family, and 64 respondents prefer to enjoy street food alone.

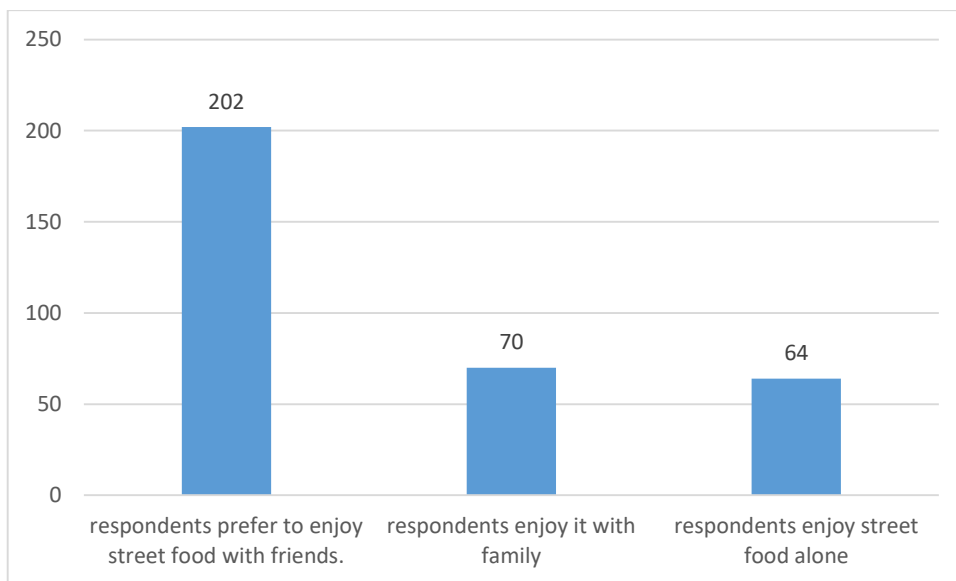


Figure 3: Companions with whom Gen Z typically enjoys street food

Source: Survey Results

The time when Gen Z youth enjoy street food shows that 60% of respondents said they consume it during their free time. Additionally, 1% choose the morning, 3% choose lunchtime, 9% choose the afternoon, and 27% prefer the evening.

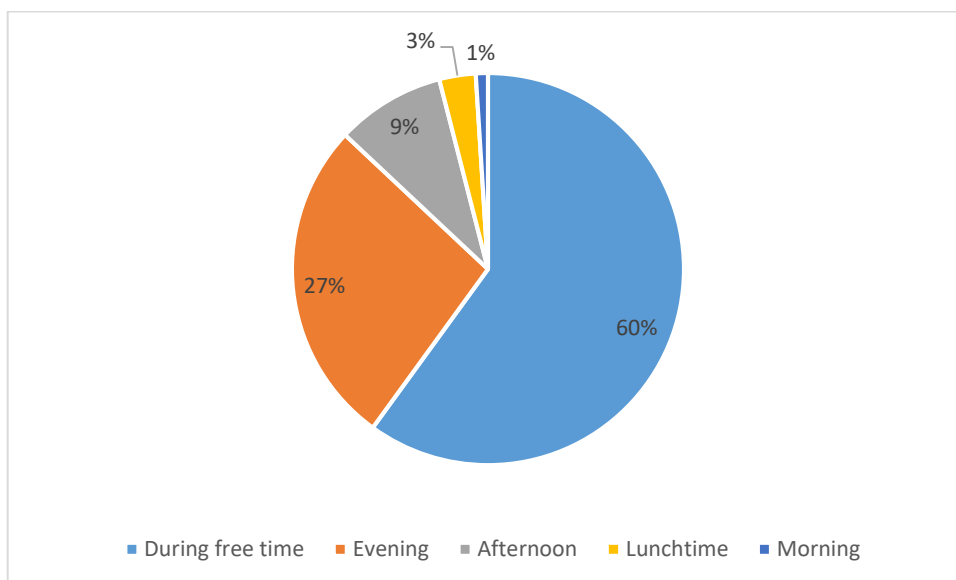


Figure 4: Time of Day Gen Z Enjoys Street Food

Source: Survey results

The survey results on respondents' views towards street food show that young people support the view that street food is diverse, with an average score of 4.02, the highest. Next, respondents agreed that street food is delicious, with an average score of 3.9. Street food is considered affordable, and respondents agreed with this view, with an average score of 3.85 in the "agree" range.

Additionally, the views that street food stalls are conveniently located everywhere; that although street food does not always guarantee hygiene, young people still frequently consume it; and that respondents choose street food because the vendors are friendly, all received average scores in the "agree" range, with respective average scores of 3.79, 3.63, and 3.46.

Table 2: Respondents' Views on Street Food

Content	1	2	3	4	5	Average Score	Assessment Range
Although street food does not always ensure hygiene, you still frequently enjoy street food	4	20	66	94	37	3.63	Agree
You choose street food because the price is cheap	4	11	44	117	45	3.85	Agree
You choose street food because you find it delicious	2	6	49	118	46	3.90	Agree
You choose street food because you find it diverse	3	6	32	122	58	4.02	Agree
You choose street food because food stalls are conveniently located everywhere	1	13	55	114	38	3.79	Agree
You choose street food because the vendors are very friendly	3	27	85	77	29	3.46	Agree

In which:

1. Strongly disagree;
2. Disagree;
3. Neutral;
4. Agree;
5. Strongly agree

Source: Survey results

Regarding the channels used to discover good or special street food stalls, 147 respondents learned through word of mouth, 142 obtained information via TikTok, 139 mentioned that they passed by the stalls and decided to try, 110 obtained information on Facebook, and only 10 respondents got information from flyers. This shows that the main channels for young people to discover street food are through personal recommendations, the convenience of the location, and the role of social media in promoting products.

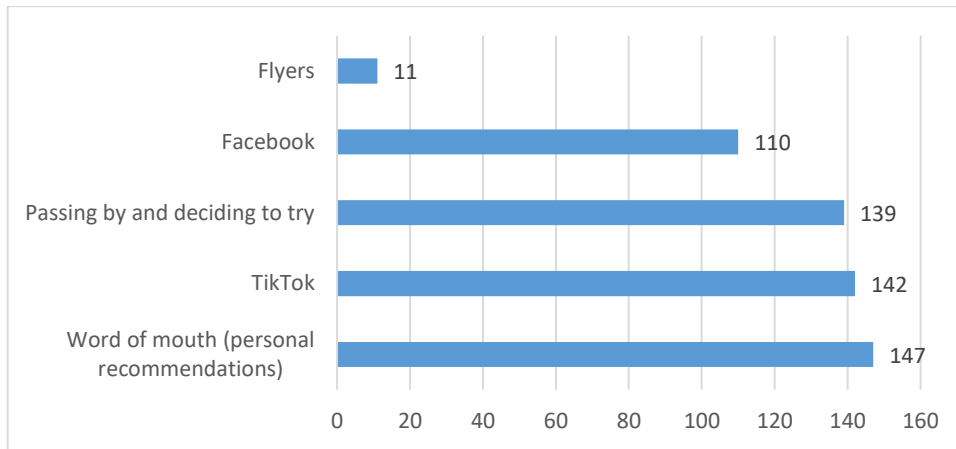


Figure 5: Channels for finding good or special street food stalls

Source: Survey results

The amount of money respondents are willing to spend on street food per week is between 50,000-100,000 VND, with 45% selecting this range. Next, 33% of respondents are willing to spend less than 50,000 VND. Only 11% chose the range of 100,000-150,000 VND, 7% selected the range of 150,000-200,000 VND, and 4% are willing to spend more than 200,000 VND.

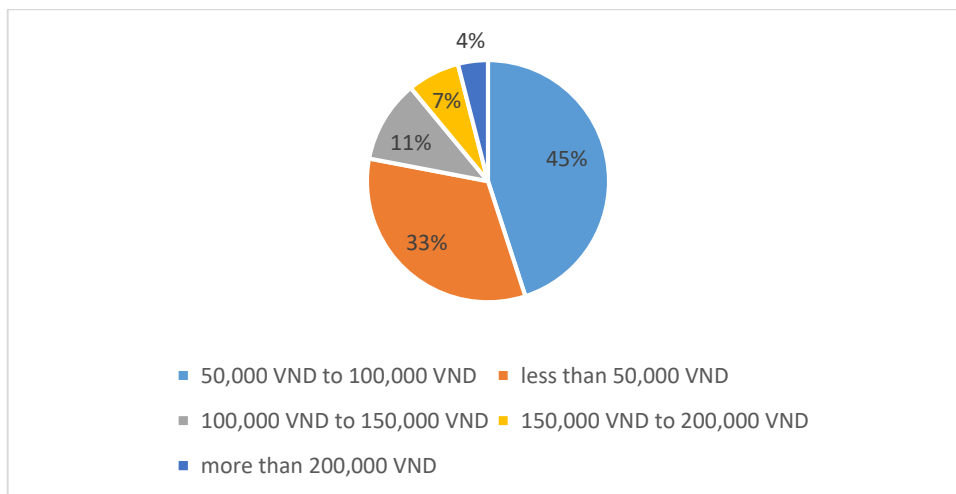


Figure 6: Amount willing to spend on street food per week

Source: Survey results

The reasons why young people return to street food stalls, with the highest number of selections, are due to reasonable prices (174 selections), followed by delicious food (168 selections). 83 respondents chose unique, diverse dishes, 74 selected the convenience of the location, and 60 respondents chose tidy, airy dining spaces.

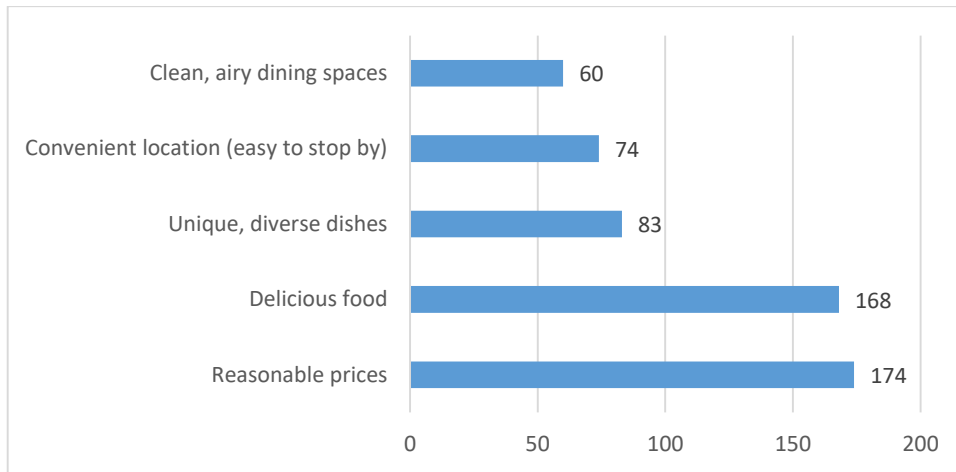


Figure 7: Reasons why young people return to street food stalls

Source: Survey results

The street foods that young people favor the most are mostly skewers (grilled meatballs, fried fermented pork rolls, etc.), followed by baked goods (banh mi, grilled rice paper).

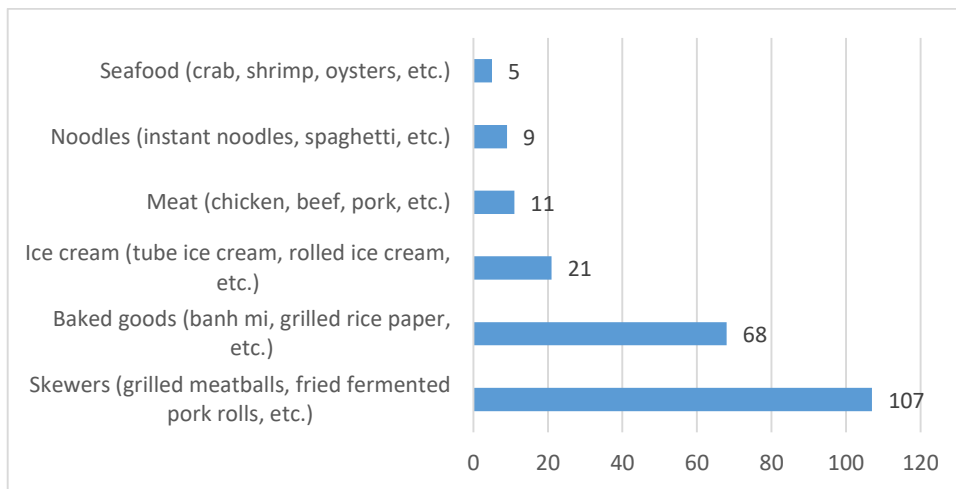


Figure 8: Favorite street foods among young people

Source: Survey results

The survey results on preferred methods of preparing street food show that all three methods—grilling; frying, stir-frying; and boiling, steaming—were rated as “liked” by respondents. The highest average score was for grilled street food, followed by fried and stir-fried, and lastly, boiled and steamed.

Table 3: Preferred Methods of Preparing Street Food

Method	1. Strongly Dislike	2. Dislike	3. Neutral	4. Like	5. Strongly Like	Average Score	Assessment Range
Grilling	1	1	42	113	64	4.08	Like
Frying, Stir-frying	2	9	57	101	52	3.87	Like
Boiling, Steaming	7	18	101	61	34	3.44	Like

Source: Survey results

Regarding the favorite street food from different countries, Vietnamese cuisine is rated in the “strongly like” range. Korean cuisine is the second most liked, followed by Chinese, Thai, and Japanese cuisines. African and Euro-American cuisines received neutral responses, indicating that respondents have a moderate attitude towards these cuisines.

Table 4: Favorite street food from different countries

Country	1. Strongly Dislike	2. Dislike	3. Neutral	4. Like	5. Strongly Like	Average Score	Assessment Range
Vietnam	1	1	15	66	138	4.53	Strongly Like
Thailand	3	18	97	74	29	3.49	Like
Korea	2	4	46	108	61	4.00	Like
China	6	18	74	86	37	3.59	Like
Japan	6	17	95	76	27	3.46	Like
Africa	28	47	99	34	13	2.81	Neutral
Euro-America	14	29	108	54	16	3.13	Neutral

Source: Survey results

When enjoying street food, the most frequently selected type of establishment is one that offers both food and drinks, with 203 selections. This highlights an important note for street food vendors: the menu should include both food and beverages to meet the convenience and needs of customers.

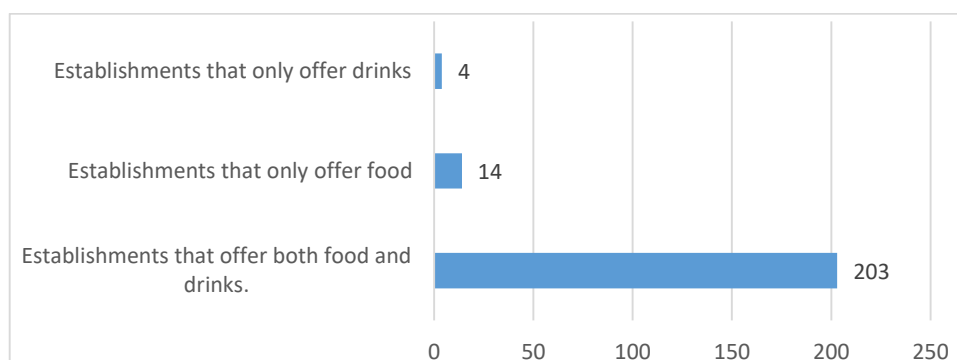


Figure 9: The most frequently chosen street food establishments

Source: Survey results

The survey results show that respondents agreed with the idea of continuing to enjoy street food and recommending it to their friends. Notably, the young respondents strongly agreed that enjoying street food is an interesting experience, indicating their enthusiasm and support for street food dishes.

Table 5: A Few opinions on street food

Opinion	1	2	3	4	5	Average Score	Assessment Range
You will continue to enjoy street food	1	4	26	122	68	4.14	Agree
You will recommend street food to your friends	1	3	29	126	62	4.11	Agree
Enjoying street food is an interesting experience	1	2	24	117	77	4.21	Strongly Agree

In which:

1. Strongly disagree;
2. Disagree;
3. Neutral;
4. Agree;
5. Strongly agree

Source: Survey results

5. SOME EXCHANGES AND DISCUSSIONS

The street food consumption trends of young people reflect a combination of convenience, rich experiences, and concern for health and the environment. Social media and technology also play a major role in driving and shaping these trends. To successfully run a street food business, vendors and food stalls need to pay attention to several trends:

Seeking Unique and Diverse Experiences: Young people are increasingly drawn to exploring dishes from different cultures, not just traditional Vietnamese cuisine but also Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Thai, and more. The variety in street food allows them to experience new flavors without having to visit luxury restaurants. Creative, colorful dishes or those prepared in special ways often attract young people. “Unusual” dishes are easily shared on social media and quickly become trends.

Increased Sharing on Social Media: “Food check-ins,” the need to take photos and share dishes on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, are becoming more common. Young people not only seek delicious food but also care about how “photogenic” the dish is to share with friends and the community. Influencers and food bloggers, who hold sway on social media, play an important role in introducing new street foods. Many young people tend to try dishes they have seen on these channels.

Combining Tradition and Modernity: Innovation based on traditional dishes—street foods like banh mi, pho, noodles, or sweet soups are being transformed with new ingredients or

presented in more modern ways to suit the tastes and preferences of young people. “Fusion” street food, which combines culinary styles from different cultures, such as Korean-style burgers, Japanese-style pho, or pizzas with local ingredients, is becoming popular.

Convenient, Quick Food Choices with Reasonable Prices: The busy modern life makes young people prefer quick, easy-to-carry foods. Street food items like skewers, banh mi, bubble tea, and grab-and-go drinks have become popular choices due to their ease of consumption on the move. Delivery services, and the use of food delivery apps like GrabFood, Baemin, and ShopeeFood, are becoming increasingly popular. Young people tend to enjoy street food at home or the office without having to go out.

Prioritizing Healthy and Safe Food: Although street food is often associated with fried and greasy items, these are still popular, but today’s youth are becoming more concerned with healthy eating. Foods with less oil, organic ingredients, or healthy preparation methods like steaming, boiling, and grilling are becoming trendy. Young people are becoming more discerning in choosing food stalls that ensure hygiene, have business licenses, and comply with food safety regulations.

6. CONCLUSION

The street food consumption trends of Vietnamese youth are evolving toward modern, diverse, and health-conscious practices. Social media and digital technology play a significant role in the development of street food, creating new, exciting, and convenient experiences. Modern youth value a comprehensive experience, not just good food but also the dining space, service style, and presentation. Many young people are willing to pay more for a unique and interesting culinary experience. Vendors should also consider that young people tend to use apps to find the best street food stalls based on reviews and recommendations from other users, making it easier for them to choose dishes that suit their tastes. At the same time, awareness of food safety and environmental concerns is becoming increasingly important in the decision-making process when selecting food.

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