

# Critical Success Factor of Sustainable Food Truck Entrepreneurship: A Systematic Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Nurul Zuhrin Mohd Khalid, Rosmini Omar

Azman Hashim International Business School

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

54100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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## **Article History:**

**Received:** 12-11-2024

**Revised:** 10-12-2024

**Accepted:** 19-12-2024

## **Abstract:**

The food truck industry has experienced significant growth in recent years, attracting entrepreneurs and diners alike, driven by its low startup costs, flexibility, and ability to cater to diverse culinary preferences. This surge in popularity has transformed urban landscapes, offering a dynamic and accessible dining experience that appeals to a broad spectrum of consumers. The allure of food trucks lies in their capacity to bring innovative and high-quality cuisine directly to the streets, fostering a vibrant and engaging food culture. However, the factors contributing to the long-term success of food truck businesses remain underexplored. This study uses a systematic literature review (SLR) to synthesize findings from 47 articles on food truck entrepreneurship, employing the PRISMA methodology to identify critical success factors (CSFs) across six key themes: human resources, products, location, marketing, finance, and operations. Human resources emerge as a crucial aspect, highlighting the importance of skilled and motivated staff, knowledgeable and experienced owner/managers, and effective communication and teamwork. Product-related factors, such as food quality, menu innovation, and pricing, are also critical for attracting and retaining customers. Location is a key determinant of success, with proximity to target customers, accessibility, and community fit being important considerations. Marketing, encompassing social media, branding, and customer relations, is essential for reaching target audiences and building a strong brand reputation. Sound financial management, including planning, funding access, and budgeting, is crucial for sustainability and growth. Finally, efficient operations, including technology adoption, inventory management, and adherence to food safety and legal standards, ensure smooth workflow and customer satisfaction. This comprehensive analysis provides valuable insights for current and prospective food truck entrepreneurs, supporting informed decision-making and contributing to the sustainable growth of the food truck industry. Future research directions include exploring hybrid business models, community building, sustainability initiatives, technology integration, global expansion, and strategic partnerships.

**Keywords-** Food Trucks, Entrepreneurship, Critical Success Factors (CSF), Systematic Literature Review (SLR), PRISMA.

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## 1. Introduction

The global food truck industry has witnessed remarkable growth in recent years, evolving from a niche market to a significant player in the food service sector. Valued at approximately \$4.4 billion in 2023, the industry is projected to reach \$7 billion by 2032, demonstrating a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of nearly 6% (Zion Market Research, 2024). This expansion is driven by factors such as changing consumer preferences for unique dining experiences, the desire for diverse culinary offerings, and the lower overhead costs associated with food truck operations compared to traditional brick-and-mortar restaurants (Mordor Intelligence, 2024). This growth is further fuelled by emerging trends such as the increasing popularity of food truck parks, the rise of online ordering and delivery services, and the adoption of innovative technologies to enhance customer experience (Han et al., 2023).

While the initial appeal of food trucks often lies in their novelty and culinary innovation, the long-term viability of these ventures depends on their ability to establish sustainable business models. Sustainability in this context encompasses a multifaceted approach, considering not only environmental practices but also the economic, social, and operational factors that contribute to the long-term profitability, growth, and resilience of food truck businesses (Ab Karim et al., 2022). Recent research has highlighted the importance of factors such as strategic marketing, effective cost management, and building strong customer relationships in ensuring the sustainability of food truck businesses (Lee & Jung, 2023; Kim & Morrish, 2023). This necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the antecedents that influence the sustained success of these entrepreneurial endeavours.

Despite the growing body of research on food trucks, there remains a gap in the literature regarding a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to the long-term sustainability of these businesses. While individual studies have explored specific aspects, such as marketing strategies (Smith & Jones, 2022) or customer satisfaction (Brown et al., 2021), a holistic analysis of the antecedents of sustainable food truck entrepreneurship is lacking. This gap is particularly evident in the context of developing economies like Malaysia, where the food truck industry is rapidly evolving and faces unique challenges.

This systematic literature review (SLR) aims to address this gap by identifying and analyzing the key antecedents that influence the sustainability of food truck entrepreneurship. Drawing upon existing research in small business management, entrepreneurship, hospitality, and marketing, this review will examine the critical factors that enable food truck businesses to thrive in a competitive marketplace. By synthesizing the findings of diverse studies, this SLR seeks to provide valuable insights for aspiring and established food truck entrepreneurs, policymakers, and researchers interested in fostering a vibrant and sustainable food truck industry.

In Malaysia, the food truck industry is experiencing a period of rapid growth, fuelled by government initiatives aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and providing alternative avenues for food businesses (Ismail et al., 2023). The Malaysian Food Truck Association (MAFTA) estimates that there are over 50,000 active food trucks operating nationwide, with a significant concentration in urban areas like Kuala Lumpur and Penang (Food Truck in Malaysia, 2023). However, this burgeoning industry faces unique challenges. These include navigating regulatory complexities, securing suitable operating locations in a competitive landscape, and maintaining consistent quality and hygiene standards to meet consumer expectations (Arikiah, 2019). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the food service sector, forcing food truck businesses to adapt to new operating procedures, evolving consumer behaviours, and economic uncertainties (Metro News, 2018). Recent studies have explored the impact of the pandemic on Malaysian food truck businesses, highlighting the need for resilience, innovation, and digital transformation (Wong & Ng, 2023).

This review is particularly relevant in the Malaysian context as it seeks to identify the key factors that contribute to the sustainability of food truck businesses in this dynamic and evolving market. By understanding the antecedents of success, Malaysian food truck entrepreneurs can effectively navigate challenges, capitalize on emerging opportunities, and contribute to the continued growth of this vibrant industry. Ultimately, this SLR aims to provide a valuable resource for fostering a thriving and resilient food truck sector in Malaysia

## 2. Methodology

To ensure a robust and impartial examination of the critical success factors (CSFs) influencing food truck entrepreneurship and its sustainable development, this systematic literature review (SLR) employed a meticulously structured methodology. Adhering to the established principles of SLR, a research approach designed to identify, evaluate, and synthesize all pertinent scholarly work on a specific topic, this study transcended traditional literature reviews by adopting a transparent and systematic process. This involved the implementation of precisely defined search strategies, rigorous selection criteria, and comprehensive analytical frameworks, thereby bolstering the study's rigor and reliability while minimizing potential biases. Guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) statement (Liberati et al., 2009) and the methodological recommendations of Okoli (2015), the review further incorporated key advantages outlined by Sierra-Correa and Cantera Kintz (2015). These included: (1) the formulation of clear, focused research questions to facilitate systematic inquiry; (2) the establishment of explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure relevance and consistency; and (3) a comprehensive search across extensive scientific databases within a specified timeframe. Additionally, this SLR strengthened its methodological foundation by incorporating detailed protocol registration, a comprehensive quality assessment of included studies, and a thorough data extraction process. These elements ensured transparency, minimized the risk of selective reporting, and facilitated a comprehensive and objective overview of the current state of knowledge within the field. Moreover, the SLR employed sensitivity analyses to test the robustness of the findings and addressed potential publication bias, further solidifying the study's credibility and the reliability of its conclusions.

### 2.1 Search Strategy

#### 2.1.1 Databases

The search for relevant literature was conducted using prominent academic databases. Leading databases that in use including Scopus, Web of Science, Dimension and SciDirect. These databases were chosen for their extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings in the fields of business, management, entrepreneurship, and hospitality. On top of that, this study also taps on secondary databases including EconBiz, Emerald, Google Scholar and DOAJ. This selection ensured that the search encompassed a wide range of relevant scholarly work, increasing the likelihood of capturing all significant studies on the topic.

#### 2.1.2 Keywords

To ensure a thorough and nuanced exploration of the research question, a meticulously curated and expansive list of keywords was developed. This list aimed to encompass the full spectrum of concepts relevant to food truck entrepreneurship and sustainability. Recognizing the diverse terminology within the field, the keyword selection included a range of terms such as "food truck(s)," "mobile food vendor(s)," "snack truck(s)," and "catering truck(s)," effectively capturing the various business models. Furthermore, to address the core focus of the study, keywords like "sustainability," "success," "triumph," and "growth" were incorporated. The keywords were carefully selected to reflect the different facets of food truck sustainability, including economic, social, and operational aspects.

#### 2.1.3 Search Strings

To bolster the precision of the searches, the keywords combined with Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) were strategically employed, and keyword variations, including plurals and synonyms, were systematically included (Table 1). This comprehensive and strategically designed keyword list ensured a robust and exhaustive search across relevant databases, effectively capturing the breadth and depth of the existing literature on food truck entrepreneurship and sustainability. This allowed for a more focused and efficient search, retrieving only those articles that contained the relevant combinations of keywords.

**Table 1**

The search string used for the systematic review process

Category	Databases	Keywords used
Leading Database	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ( ( "food truck*" OR "mobile food vendor*" OR "catering truck*" OR "lunch truck*" OR "snack truck*" ) AND ( success* OR triumph* OR "success factor*" ) )
	Web of Science	ALL=("food truck" OR "mobile food vendor" OR "lunch truck" OR "snack truck" OR "catering truck" AND success)
	Dimension	("food truck" OR "food trucks" OR "mobile food vendor" OR "mobile food vendors" OR "lunch truck" OR "snack truck" OR "catering truck") AND ( success )
	SciDirect	("food truck" OR "food trucks" OR "mobile food vendor" OR "mobile food vendors" OR "lunch truck" OR "snack truck" OR "catering truck") AND ( success )
Supporting Database	EconBiz	"food truck" OR "food trucks" OR "mobile food vendor" OR "mobile food vendors" OR "lunch truck" OR "snack truck" OR "catering truck" AND success
	Emerald	"food truck" OR "food trucks" OR "mobile food vendor" OR "mobile food vendors" OR "lunch truck" OR "snack truck" OR "catering truck" AND success
	Google Scholar	("food truck" OR "food trucks" OR "mobile food vendor" OR "mobile food vendors" OR "lunch truck" OR "snack truck" OR "catering truck") AND ( success )
	DOAJ	"food truck" OR "food trucks" OR "mobile food vendor" OR "mobile food vendors"

**2.1.4 Inclusion Criteria**

Studies selected for inclusion in this review adhered to specific criteria designed to ensure relevance, quality, and accessibility (Table 2). These criteria included a publication date between 2014 and 2024 to capture contemporary trends and innovations in the food truck industry. Furthermore, studies needed to focus explicitly on the sustainability of food truck businesses, encompassing a holistic understanding of economic viability, social responsibility, and environmental considerations. To provide robust evidence, included studies employed empirical research methods, such as qualitative approaches (e.g., case studies, interviews), quantitative approaches (e.g., surveys, statistical analyses), or mixed methods approaches. Additionally, only studies published in peer-reviewed journals as research articles or those with early access were considered to ensure quality and credibility. To further ensure quality, studies with robust methodological designs, including clear research questions, appropriate data collection and analysis techniques, and well-defined sampling strategies, were prioritized. Finally, open access availability was prioritized to promote wider accessibility and knowledge dissemination.

**2.1.5 Exclusion Criteria**

Several criteria guided the exclusion of studies from this review to maintain focus and rigor (Table 2). Studies were excluded if they lacked direct relevance to the research question, focusing on unrelated topics or lacking a clear connection to food truck entrepreneurship. Purely theoretical papers without empirical data or real-world application were also excluded, ensuring the review prioritized evidence-based research. Additionally, studies that narrowly focused on only one aspect of sustainability (e.g., environmental) without considering the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental dimensions were excluded, as this review adopted a holistic perspective. Furthermore, non-English publications and those without English abstracts were excluded.

due to resource constraints. Finally, various publication formats, such as systematic reviews, book chapters, and conference proceedings, were excluded to maintain a focus on original research articles published in peer-reviewed journals, and studies with limited access were also excluded to ensure readily available research.

**Table 2**

The inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criterion	Eligibility	Exclusion
Literature Type	Journal (Research Articles) Early Access	Journals (Systematic Review) Book Series Book Chapters Book Review Edited Book Conference Proceeding Proceeding Papers Poetry Editorial Material Meeting Abstract Preprint Monograph Short Communications Discussion Correspondence Case Reports
Language	English	Non-English
Timeline		
Indexes	2014-2024	<2014
Access	Open Access Open Archive Gold Gold-Hybrid Free to Read	Green Green Bronze
Keyword	Food Trucks Lunch Trucks Catering Trucks Mobile Food Vendor Success	Food Cart Street Food Stall Brick & Mortar Restaurant Diner

**2.2 Study Selection**

**2.2.1 Initial Screening**

The initial search across the selected databases yielded 1783 results. Total of 16 duplicate entries were identified and removed to avoid redundancy. The titles and abstracts of the remaining articles were then screened to identify potentially relevant studies based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. This initial screening process helped to narrow down the pool of potentially relevant articles, ensuring a focus on pertinent research.

### **2.2.2 Full-Text Review**

Full texts of the articles that passed the initial screening were retrieved and assessed in detail against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. This involved a thorough reading of each article to determine its relevance and suitability for inclusion in the review, and a verification of the study's empirical contributions.

### **2.2.3 Quality Assessment**

The quality of the included studies was assessed using a standardized checklist. This checklist considered factors such as the research design, sample size, data collection methods, data analysis techniques employed in each study, and the rigor of the findings. This assessment helped to ensure that the review included only high-quality studies with robust methodologies and minimized bias from low-quality research.

## **2.3 Data Extraction**

### **2.3.1 Data Extraction Table**

A standardized data extraction table was developed to collect relevant information from each study systematically. This form included fields for recording author(s), year of publication, research design, sample size, key findings, implications for food truck sustainability, and details on methodological rigor. The standardized form ensured consistency in data extraction across all studies, and allowed for comparative analysis.

### **2.3.2 Data Extraction Process**

Researchers independently extracted data from the included studies using the standardized form. This independent extraction helped to minimize bias and ensure the accuracy of the data. Any discrepancies between the two researchers were resolved through discussion and consensus, ensuring the reliability of the extracted data, and enhancing the validity of the review.

## **2.4 Data Analysis**

### **2.4.1 Thematic analysis**

The extracted data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved a careful and iterative process of reading and re-reading the extracted data to identify key themes, patterns, and trends related to the antecedents of food truck business sustainability. Thematic analysis allowed for a rich and nuanced understanding of the factors influencing food truck success and facilitated the identification of emerging themes.

### **2.4.2 Synthesis of findings**

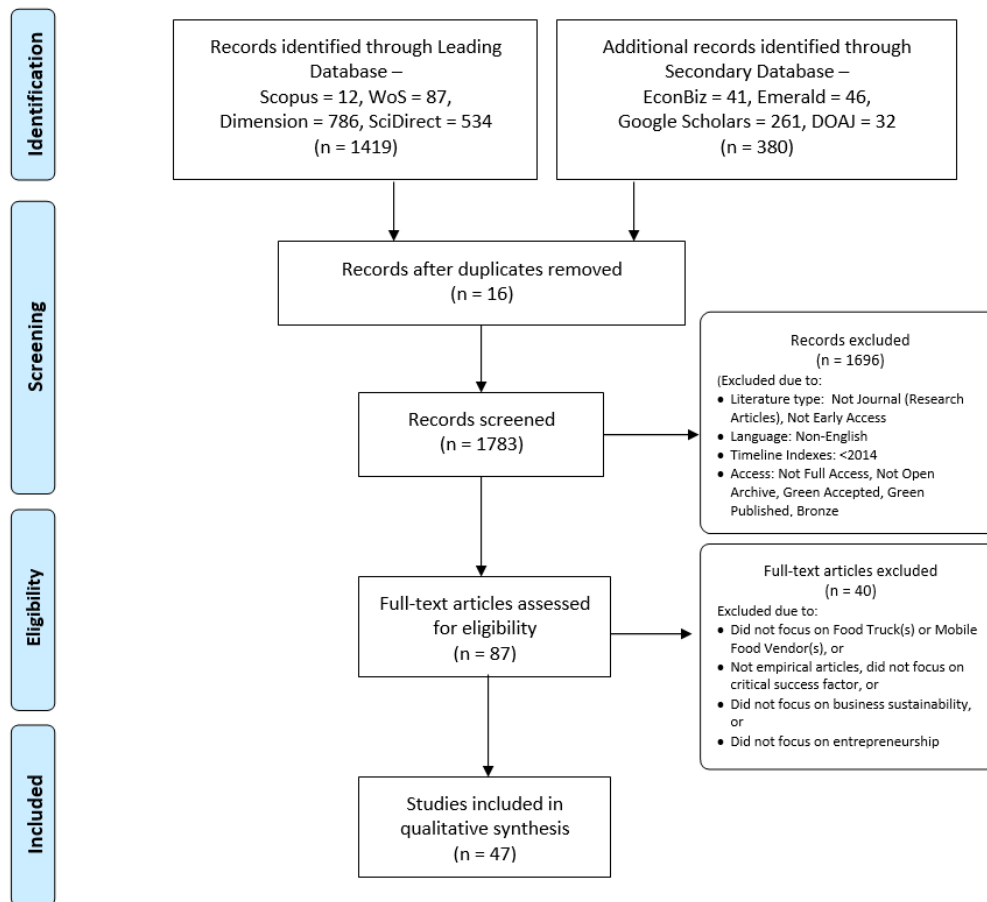
The findings from the thematic analysis were synthesized to provide a comprehensive overview of the factors influencing food truck sustainability. This involved integrating the findings from individual studies to create a coherent and integrated narrative about the key antecedents of success and highlighting the interrelationships between various factors.

### **2.4.3 Identification of gaps**

The review also aimed to identify any gaps or inconsistencies in the existing literature. This involved critically evaluating the existing research to identify areas where further research is needed to enhance our understanding of food truck sustainability. The identification of gaps helped to highlight areas for future research and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this field and allows for the determination of areas where further empirical investigation is needed.

## **2.5 Reporting**

The findings of this SLR will be reported in a clear and concise manner, following the PRISMA guidelines (Figure 1). Tables and figures will be used to summarize the characteristics of the included studies and the key findings. This will help to present the information in a clear and accessible way, facilitating the understanding and interpretation of the review's findings, and ensuring transparent reporting of the study's methodology and results.



**Figure 1** The flow diagram of the study (Adapted from Moher et al., 2009.)

### 3. Results

This comprehensive review unearthed six key themes, encompassing a rich tapestry of 46 sub-themes, all contributing to the critical success factors (CSFs) for entrepreneurial triumph in the food truck industry. These overarching themes—human resources, products, location, marketing, finance, and operations—form the bedrock upon which thriving food truck businesses are built. To illustrate the breadth and depth of these themes, human resources encompasses ten sub-themes, including staff training, motivation, and teamwork; products also boasts ten, covering menu innovation, quality ingredients, and pricing strategies; location has five, such as proximity to target markets, accessibility, and competition; marketing includes eight, encompassing social media engagement, branding, and customer loyalty programs; finance covers six, including financial planning, access to capital, and cost management; and operations comprises seven, involving efficient workflows, technology adoption, and regulatory compliance, as detailed in Table 3.



of this field, with a significant portion of the research published in recent years. Five articles were published in 2024, followed by two in 2023, five in 2022, three in 2021, nine in 2020, twelve in 2019, two each in 2018 and 2017, and finally, one in 2016 and three in 2014, demonstrating the growing interest and evolving nature of food truck entrepreneurship. This rich and diverse collection of studies provides a comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the factors driving success in the global food truck industry.

### **3.1 Sustainability of Food Truck Entrepreneurship**

#### **3.1.1 Human Resources**

Human resources are the backbone of any successful food truck business. As the analysis of the articles shows, having a team with the right skills, attitudes, and experience is essential for providing high-quality food and excellent customer service, adapting to challenges, and maintaining a positive and productive work environment. Culinary Skills refer to the specific culinary skills and knowledge required to prepare and serve high-quality food, including recipe development, cooking techniques, and presentation skills. Chefs or cooks must possess strong culinary skills to create high-quality, tasty food that meets customer expectations. This includes menu development, efficient food preparation, and consistent execution (Truong, 2019). The articles also suggested that friendly, efficient, and helpful customer service is crucial for creating a positive dining experience and fostering customer loyalty (Truong, 2019). This includes taking orders accurately, addressing customer inquiries promptly, and resolving issues effectively. Another trait that is important is adaptability which the food truck industry demands flexibility and adaptability to changing circumstances, such as weather, location availability, and customer preferences (Truong, 2019). The employees must be willing to adjust their approach to accommodate these changes (Saleh, 2023). In many food truck settings, employees need to work effectively as a team to ensure smooth operations and efficient service (Saleh, 2023). Strong teamwork among staff is essential for smooth operations, efficient service, and a positive work environment (Truong, 2019). Moreover, language skills also essential as effective communication with customers and stakeholders is vital. Depending on the location and target market, multilingual staff can be advantageous.

Under the same theme, staff motivation & morale, owner/manager knowledge, owner/manager experience, owner/manager vision being the next sub themes emphasizes the importance of skilled staff and management. Staff motivation & morale shows motivated and engaged staff are more likely to provide excellent customer service and contribute to a positive brand image. It also suggests that providing training and development opportunities can enhance staff skills and improve employee satisfaction. Articles highlight owner/manager Knowledge emphasizing that owners and managers should possess a comprehensive understanding of the food truck industry, including food safety regulations, business operations, and financial management. Owner/manager experience is crucial as experience in the food service industry can provide valuable insights and skills for managing a food truck business effectively. Articles also mention that clear vision and strategic planning are essential for guiding the food truck business towards long-term success. It includes defining the target market, developing a unique selling proposition, and setting achievable goals. Owner/Manager Vision is a need as a clear vision and business plan are crucial for guiding the food truck's direction and making informed decisions. Investing in training and development for staff enhances their skills and knowledge, leading to improved performance and customer satisfaction. Lastly, open and effective communication among all staff members is essential for coordinated operations and efficient problem-solving.

#### **3.1.2 Products**

The product is the heart of any food truck business. The analysis of the articles highlights the importance of offering high-quality food, innovative menus, and a variety of options to cater to different tastes and preferences. Pricing and value are also critical considerations, as customers are looking for affordable and high-quality food experiences. Loots et al. (2024) mentions consistent and attractive product offerings as crucial for success. High-quality ingredients and consistent preparation are paramount for customer satisfaction and building a strong reputation (Saleh, 2023; Truong, 2019). Food Quality refers to the quality of the food, including taste, freshness, and presentation. Truong (2019) discusses product suitability and the use of food trucks as testing grounds for new products. On the same note, innovative menu development is crucial for attracting and retaining customers. Menu Innovation refers to a creative and diverse menu. It can attract a wider customer base and differentiate a

food truck from competitors (Saleh, 2023 and Shin et al., 2019). On top of that, competitive and reasonable pricing is vital. Consider factors like ingredient costs, overhead, and perceived value (Shin et al., 2019), also brings up the factor which is market demand. Other than that, customer also is looking for healthy options. Offering healthy menu choices can appeal to health-conscious consumers and expand market reach. On the other hand, providing a variety of beverage options complements the food and enhances the customer experience besides desserts as sweet treats can increase sales and customer satisfaction. Nevertheless, serving unique or ethnic foods and fusion foods is a plus point. Specializing in a specific cuisine or offering unique dishes can create a niche market and attract adventurous diners. (Saleh, 2023) whilst blending different culinary traditions can result in innovative and appealing menu items. Menu offerings should cater to various dietary needs and preferences, including vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free options. Customers seek good value for their money. Balance quality ingredients and portion sizes with reasonable prices.

### 3.1.3 Location

Location is a critical factor for any food truck business, as it directly affects customer access and visibility. The analysis of the articles suggests that food truck entrepreneurs need to consider proximity to their target customers, accessibility, and the level of competition in the area. Additionally, the food truck concept should fit with the local community and its culture. Selecting the right location is critical for the success of a food truck business. Proximity to a strong customer base in high-traffic areas is essential for maximizing sales (Saleh, 2023). Easy accessibility and convenient parking for customers are also crucial factors to consider (Loots et al., 2024). When choosing a location, it is important to analyze the existing food truck landscape and identify opportunities to differentiate the business (Saleh, 2023). Additionally, the demographics and preferences of the local community should be considered when selecting a location and developing the menu. Other important location factors include securing the necessary permits and regulations, as well as considering event opportunities that could provide additional exposure and sales (Loots et al., 2024; Truong, 2019).

### 3.1.4 Marketing

Marketing is essential for any food truck business to reach its target customers and build a strong brand reputation. The analysis of the articles suggests that food truck entrepreneurs need to utilize a variety of marketing channels, including social media, traditional marketing, and public relations. Building strong customer relationships and conducting market research are also critical for success. Effective marketing is crucial for the success of a food truck business. (Loots et al., 2024) emphasizes the vital role of branding and social media marketing, particularly for visibility and survival during challenging times. Active engagement on social media platforms is crucial for promoting the food truck, announcing locations, and building a community. (Shin et al., 2019) A strong brand identity, including a memorable name, logo, and visual style, helps differentiate the food truck and create brand recognition. (2019) Additionally, a website or mobile app can provide information about the menu, location, and ordering options. Targeted advertising can reach specific customer segments and increase brand awareness, while building relationships with local media and influencers can generate positive publicity. Promotions, such as special offers and discounts, can attract new customers and encourage repeat business. Furthermore, fostering strong customer relationships through personalized interactions and feedback mechanisms can cultivate loyalty. Lastly, understanding customer preferences and market trends through market research can inform menu development and marketing strategies. Other marketing factors to consider include partnerships with local businesses, event participation, and loyalty programs.

### 3.1.5 Finance

Sound financial management is crucial for the sustainability and growth of any food truck business. The analysis of the articles indicates that food truck entrepreneurs need to engage in careful financial planning, secure funding, manage their budgets effectively, and make informed investment decisions. Profitability is the goal, and achieving it requires careful monitoring of revenue and expenses. Truong (2019) highlights the importance of financial resources and discusses the financial aspects of success. Loots et.al, (2024) mentions the importance of managerial and financial skills, including budgeting, cost forecasting, and cash flow management. Developing a comprehensive financial plan is essential, as it should include start-up costs, operating expenses, pricing strategy, and projected revenue (Truong, 2019). Securing necessary funding through personal investment, loans, or grants

is also crucial (Truong, 2019). Establishing a realistic budget and carefully tracking expenses is key to maintaining financial control. Strategically investing in equipment, marketing, and staff training can contribute to the business's profitability. Additionally, analyzing pricing and cost structures to ensure profitability is vital. Other important financial factors to consider include cash flow management, payment processing, and tax obligations.

### 3.1.6 Operations

Efficient operations are essential for any food truck business to provide timely service, manage costs, and ensure customer satisfaction. The analysis of the articles shows that food truck entrepreneurs need to focus on various operational aspects, including efficiency, technology adoption, inventory management, food safety, hygiene, and legal compliance. Loots et al. indirectly referenced operational considerations, such as the importance of clean equipment and logistical planning for participating in markets and festivals (Saleh, 2023). Truong outlined the elements of a well-prepared operational plan, encompassing facilities, management systems, and stock control (Truong, 2019). Saleh emphasized the significance of planning and processes for successful food truck operations, particularly in the areas of food safety and hygiene compliance (Saleh, 2023). Efficiency, defined as streamlined operations from food preparation to order fulfillment, is essential for minimizing costs and maximizing profits (Saleh, 2023). The adoption of technology, such as point-of-sale systems and online ordering platforms, can enhance operational efficiency and improve the customer experience (Saleh, 2023; Truong, 2019). Effective inventory management is also crucial, as it minimizes waste and ensures the freshness and availability of ingredients (Saleh, 2023). Strict adherence to food safety regulations and best practices is critical for protecting customer health and maintaining a positive reputation (Saleh, 2023). Maintaining a clean and sanitary food truck environment is essential for customer confidence and regulatory compliance (Saleh, 2023). Food truck operators must also obtain all necessary permits and licenses and comply with relevant regulations to ensure legal compliance (Saleh, 2023). Additionally, other operational factors to consider include waste management, equipment maintenance, and contingency planning.

## 4. Discussion

This systematic literature review (SLR) meticulously identified and analyzed the key factors influencing the sustainability of food truck entrepreneurship, drawing upon a rich pool of 47 articles spanning diverse fields such as small business management, entrepreneurship, hospitality, and marketing. The findings not only confirm and extend existing knowledge about critical success factors (CSFs) for food truck entrepreneurship but also provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their intricate interrelationships. Moreover, this analysis reveals fresh insights, particularly relevant in the context of developing economies like Malaysia, where the food truck industry is rapidly evolving and faces unique challenges.

The research illuminates the crucial role of human resources in food truck success, presenting a nuanced perspective with both supporting evidence and potential challenges. To begin, culinary skills are undeniably vital. Chefs and cooks must possess strong culinary skills to create high-quality, tasty food that meets customer expectations, encompassing expertise in menu development, efficient food preparation, and consistent execution (Truong, 2019). However, the research also cautions that even experienced chefs and cooks may not necessarily possess the entrepreneurial mindset and business acumen required to thrive in the competitive food truck industry (Truong, 2019). In addition, excellent customer service is indispensable for creating a positive dining experience and fostering customer loyalty (Truong, 2019). Yet, maintaining consistently excellent customer service can be challenging, especially with high staff turnover and the demanding nature of operating a mobile business (Truong, 2019). Furthermore, adaptability is essential for navigating the dynamic circumstances inherent to the food truck industry, including weather, location availability, and evolving customer preferences (Truong, 2019). However, the independent nature of food truck operators can sometimes hinder adaptability and teamwork, as individual priorities may overshadow collaborative efforts (Truong, 2019). Finally, strong leadership, characterized by knowledge, experience, and vision, is crucial for guiding the business towards success. While prior experience in the food industry can be beneficial, it doesn't guarantee success in the unique context of food truck entrepreneurship (Truong, 2019). Similarly, passion and commitment, though important, may not be enough to overcome the complexities of managing a mobile food business, from regulatory compliance to strategic marketing (Truong, 2019). In conclusion, while the research identifies culinary expertise, customer service,

adaptability, and strong leadership as key ingredients for food truck success, it also acknowledges the potential downsides and challenges associated with each. Therefore, a balanced approach that combines these strengths with entrepreneurial acumen, operational efficiency, and a willingness to adapt and collaborate is essential for navigating the complexities of the food truck industry and achieving sustainable success.

Shifting the focus from human resources to the tangible offering, product-related factors are undeniably central to food truck success. This analysis emphasizes the crucial role of product-related factors, highlighting both the opportunities and potential challenges they present. To begin, high-quality ingredients and consistent food preparation are undeniably paramount for customer satisfaction and building a strong reputation (Truong, 2019). However, there's a caveat: overly complex or adventurous menu offerings may not always align with customer preferences, potentially limiting the customer base (Truong, 2019). Furthermore, a creative and diverse menu can attract a wider customer base and differentiate a food truck from competitors (Saleh, 2023; Shin et al., 2019). However, this can also increase operational complexity and may overwhelm some customers (Saleh, 2023; Shin et al., 2019). In addition, competitive and reasonable pricing is vital, considering factors like ingredient costs, overhead, and perceived value (Shin et al., 2019). Yet, pricing too low could undermine profitability, making it crucial to strike a balance between affordability and financial sustainability (Shin et al., 2019). Moreover, offering healthy menu choices can appeal to health-conscious consumers and expand market reach, but maintaining a balance with indulgent options is important to satisfy a broad customer base. Similarly, providing a variety of beverage options complements the food and enhances the customer experience, but these ancillary items may not significantly contribute to the bottom line. Likewise, sweet treats can increase sales and customer satisfaction, but they should be considered as complementary offerings rather than a primary focus. Finally, specializing in a specific cuisine or offering unique dishes can create a niche market and attract adventurous diners (Saleh, 2023). However, this specialization may also limit the overall customer base (Saleh, 2023). Blending different culinary traditions can result in innovative and appealing menu items, but it requires a deep understanding of flavor profiles and may not resonate with all customers. In conclusion, this analysis reveals that while product-related factors like high-quality ingredients, creative menus, and strategic pricing are crucial for food truck success, they also present potential challenges. A balanced approach that considers customer preferences, operational complexity, and financial sustainability is essential. Therefore, effectively managing product-related factors, by balancing quality, innovation, and value, emerges as a critical success factor for food trucks, driving customer satisfaction, brand differentiation, and ultimately, profitability.

Beyond the product itself, location is identified as a key determinant of food truck success, as it directly affects customer access and visibility. This analysis highlights the significant role of location, emphasizing both its potential benefits and inherent challenges. Selecting an optimal location is crucial, with high-traffic areas and a strong customer base being essential for maximizing sales (Saleh, 2023). However, high-traffic areas can also be highly competitive and saturated with other food vendors, requiring careful consideration of market positioning (Saleh, 2023). Furthermore, easy access and convenient parking for customers are important factors (Saleh, 2023). Yet, these factors can be difficult to control or change, especially in urban settings with limited space. Additionally, analyzing the existing food truck landscape and identifying opportunities to differentiate can be valuable, but it may not be the sole determinant of success (Saleh, 2023). Moreover, the demographics and preferences of the local community should be taken into account when selecting a location and developing the menu. However, these preferences can be difficult to predict and may change over time, requiring ongoing assessment and adaptation. Similarly, permits, regulations, and event opportunities should be carefully evaluated, as they can be complex and time-consuming to navigate and vary significantly across different jurisdictions. Finally, other important location factors to consider include the availability of utilities, such as electricity and water, as well as proximity to suppliers and other businesses. Food trucks can also positively influence local communities by contributing to environmental sustainability and social responsibility (Lichy et al., 2022). In conclusion, this analysis reveals that while location is a critical success factor for food trucks, it's not without its complexities. A balanced approach that considers customer accessibility, competition, local demographics, regulations, and operational logistics is essential. Therefore, strategic location selection, encompassing both market opportunities and operational feasibility, emerges as a key driver of food truck success, influencing customer reach, brand visibility, and ultimately, profitability.

To bridge the gap between the product and the customer, marketing is essential for reaching target customers and building a strong brand reputation. This analysis emphasizes the crucial role of marketing, highlighting both its potential benefits and challenges. Effective marketing is indeed vital, and staying connected on social media is essential for promotion, location updates, and community building (Truong, 2019; Shin et al., 2019). However, active engagement on social media can be time-consuming and may not always directly translate to increased sales, especially in competitive markets (Shin et al., 2019). Furthermore, establishing a strong brand identity, including a memorable name, logo, and visual style, is important for differentiation and recognition (Shin et al., 2019). However, the brand should not overshadow the quality and value of the food itself (Shin et al., 2019). Additionally, a website or mobile app can provide useful information about the menu, location, and ordering options, but these require ongoing maintenance and may not be a priority for all customers. Moreover, targeted advertising can be beneficial for reaching specific customer segments and increasing brand awareness, but it can also be costly and may not reach the intended audience. Similarly, building relationships with local media and influencers can generate positive publicity, but these efforts can be unpredictable and difficult to sustain. Finally, special offers and discounts can attract new customers and encourage repeat business, but they can also erode profitability if not carefully managed. Balancing strong customer relationships with efficient operations and consistent product quality is essential. Understanding customer preferences and market trends is valuable for informing menu development and marketing strategies, but it should not come at the expense of the food truck's core identity and values. In conclusion, this analysis reveals that while marketing is a critical success factor for food trucks, it's important to maintain a balanced approach. Over-reliance on any single tactic or channel can be detrimental. Therefore, a diversified marketing strategy that combines online and offline channels, brand building, and customer engagement, while remaining mindful of costs and operational efficiency, is essential for achieving sustainable success in the food truck industry.

Underpinning all these elements, sound financial management is crucial for the sustainability and growth of any food truck business. This analysis underscores the critical role of financial stewardship, while also acknowledging the potential drawbacks of an overly rigid approach. To begin, developing a comprehensive business plan that outlines financial projections, funding sources, and operational strategies is paramount (Truong, 2019). However, this plan should not become a rigid framework that stifles innovation and responsiveness to changing market demands (Truong, 2019). Furthermore, securing adequate start-up capital to cover initial expenses and ongoing operational costs is vital (Truong, 2019). Yet, it is equally crucial to maintain the flexibility to pivot and invest in new initiatives as needed (Truong, 2019). In addition, meticulous cost management, encompassing inventory control, waste reduction, and operational efficiencies, is essential for financial health (Truong, 2019). However, this should not come at the expense of investing in product quality, customer experience, and employee development (Truong, 2019). Moreover, pricing strategies that balance profitability and customer value are crucial (Truong, 2019). However, these strategies should also allow for adjustments to respond to market conditions (Truong, 2019). Similarly, financial analysis and reporting provide valuable insights into performance and inform decision-making (Truong, 2019). Yet, these analyses should be used to inform, not rigidly constrain, decision-making (Truong, 2019). Finally, establishing a realistic budget, maintaining accurate financial records, and complying with tax regulations are essential bookkeeping practices. However, these should not become an all-consuming focus that distracts from the core mission of the business (Truong, 2019). In conclusion, this analysis reveals that while financial stewardship is a critical success factor for food trucks, an overemphasis on rigid financial models and cost minimization can undermine agility and the ability to capitalize on emerging opportunities (Salamah, 2023; Truong, 2019). A balanced approach that combines financial discipline with adaptability and a customer-centric focus is essential. Therefore, effective financial management, encompassing both strategic planning and flexible execution, emerges as a key driver of food truck success, ensuring sustainability, resilience, and the ability to thrive in a dynamic culinary landscape.

Finally, to ensure smooth and effective execution, efficient operations are essential for providing timely service, managing costs, and ensuring customer satisfaction. This analysis highlights the importance of operational efficiency in food truck success, while also acknowledging the potential downsides of over-optimization. To begin, streamlining processes, from food preparation to order fulfillment, is essential for minimizing costs and maximizing profits (Saleh, 2023). However, rigidly adhering to standardized processes may limit the flexibility

needed to innovate and offer a unique culinary experience. Furthermore, leveraging technology, such as point-of-sale systems and online ordering platforms, can enhance efficiency and improve the customer experience (Truong, 2019; Saleh, 2023). However, over-reliance on technology can create dependence and detract from the personal touch that often attracts customers to food trucks. In addition, implementing robust inventory management practices is crucial for minimizing waste and ensuring the availability of fresh ingredients (Saleh, 2023). Yet, stringent inventory management can lead to an inflexible supply chain that struggles to accommodate seasonal variations or unexpected spikes in demand. Moreover, strict adherence to food safety regulations and best practices is critical for protecting customer health and maintaining a positive reputation (Saleh, 2023). However, an excessive focus on bureaucratic requirements can stifle creativity and the ability to experiment with new menu items or service models. Similarly, maintaining a clean and sanitary food truck environment is essential for building customer confidence and complying with regulations (Saleh, 2023). Finally, obtaining all necessary permits and licenses and adhering to relevant regulations is a crucial operational consideration (Saleh, 2023). Food truck operators should also account for factors like waste management, equipment maintenance, and contingency planning to ensure smooth and sustainable operations. In conclusion, this analysis reveals that while operational efficiency is a critical success factor for food trucks, an overemphasis on streamlining and cost optimization can hinder adaptability and innovation. A balanced approach that combines efficient processes with flexibility, technological integration with a personal touch, and regulatory compliance with creative freedom is essential. Therefore, effective operations management, encompassing both optimization and agility, emerges as a key driver of food truck success, ensuring productivity, customer satisfaction, and the ability to thrive in a dynamic culinary landscape.

In a nutshell, this comprehensive analysis reveals that food truck success hinges on a multifaceted approach encompassing six critical factors: human resources, product, location, marketing, finance, and operations. Skilled and adaptable staff, coupled with strong leadership, are essential for delivering exceptional customer experiences and navigating the dynamic industry landscape. A high-quality and innovative product offering, strategically priced, attracts and retains customers. A well-chosen location, considering accessibility, competition, and local demographics, maximizes visibility and sales. Effective marketing, utilizing a diverse range of channels, builds brand awareness and customer loyalty. Disciplined financial stewardship ensures sustainability, while flexible operational practices promote efficiency and adaptability. Ultimately, a successful food truck venture requires a holistic approach that balances these critical factors, fostering a dynamic and resilient business capable of thriving in the competitive culinary arena.

## **5. Conclusion**

This analysis delivers a significant contribution to the burgeoning literature on food truck entrepreneurship by meticulously mapping the critical success factors (CSFs) that underpin thriving businesses within this vibrant sector. By synthesizing existing knowledge and illuminating novel insights, the study extends the understanding beyond previously identified factors, offering a more nuanced and holistic perspective. The findings underscore the imperative for food truck entrepreneurs to cultivate excellence across a spectrum of operational domains, encompassing human resources, product innovation, strategic location selection, targeted marketing, sound financial management, and efficient operations, all of which are essential for sustainable growth. Notably, the research highlights the pivotal role of staff motivation and morale, the transformative power of technology in optimizing operations and marketing strategies, and the necessity for tailored approaches that align with unique business characteristics and target market preferences. Consequently, by effectively implementing these refined CSFs, entrepreneurs can significantly enhance their prospects for success in the dynamic and competitive landscape of food truck entrepreneurship, thereby solidifying the sector's trajectory towards sustained innovation and prosperity.

### **5.1 Future Studies**

This study highlights several promising avenues for future research, each building upon the other to create a more comprehensive understanding of food truck entrepreneurship. Firstly, longitudinal studies are crucial to examine the long-term impact of various CSFs on food truck success, tracking the evolution of businesses over time, and identifying factors that contribute to sustained growth and profitability. Building on this understanding of long-

term trends, cross-cultural comparisons are needed to investigate how different cultural contexts influence food truck operations and customer preferences, providing insights into the adaptability of various CSFs across diverse markets. Furthermore, as markets evolve, the impact of technology on food truck operations must be explored, including the use of artificial intelligence, automation, and data analytics, to understand how technology can enhance efficiency, customer experience, and decision-making. Simultaneously, researchers should investigate sustainability and social responsibility in the food truck industry, examining practices such as using eco-friendly packaging and sourcing local ingredients, to understand how food trucks can minimize their environmental impact and contribute to their communities. To ensure businesses are effectively reaching their audience, customer segmentation and targeting studies are necessary, helping entrepreneurs better understand their customer base and tailor offerings and marketing efforts to specific segments, leading to improved engagement and loyalty. Finally, to support industry growth and sustainability, research on the impact of policy and regulation is essential, analyzing licensing requirements, zoning restrictions, and food safety regulations to inform policy recommendations. By addressing these interconnected research gaps, future studies can contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of food truck entrepreneurship, providing valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners in this dynamic and evolving industry.

## 5.2 Future Direction

Future directions for food truck entrepreneurship necessitate a multi-faceted approach, beginning with the exploration of hybrid business models, such as combining food truck operations with catering or online ordering, to diversify revenue streams and expand customer reach. Building upon this expanded reach, entrepreneurs should focus on community building through active social media engagement, loyalty programs, and collaborations with local businesses, fostering a strong and loyal customer base. As this community grows, it's crucial to integrate a sustainability focus, incorporating eco-friendly packaging and locally sourced ingredients to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers and contribute to a sustainable food system. Concurrently, technology integration is paramount, leveraging online ordering, mobile payments, and data analytics to enhance operational efficiency and understand customer preferences, thus improving the overall customer experience. This foundation allows for the exploration of global expansion, adapting the food truck concept to diverse cultural contexts and culinary traditions. To further amplify growth and innovation, entrepreneurs should cultivate partnerships and collaborations with other businesses, such as breweries and event organizers, leveraging shared resources and creating unique offerings. By strategically embracing these interconnected future directions, food truck entrepreneurs can not only innovate and adapt but also thrive within the dynamic and ever-evolving food industry.

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