

Vendor Differentiation and Active Participation in Carnival Calabar: Implications for Sustainable Event Management in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Vendor participation is an important component of event management because vendors contribute to visitor experience, entrepreneurship, local economic activity and sustainable event operations. However, limited empirical attention has been given to the differentiated structure of vendors participating in major events in Nigeria. This study examined vendor differentiation and participation in Carnival Calabar, Nigeria, by identifying the major vendor categories and determining whether their representation differed significantly. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design employing a quantitative approach was adopted. Data were collected from 275 respondents selected through a multi-stage sampling procedure from vendor operating points along major Carnival Calabar routes. Frequencies and percentages were used for descriptive analysis, while the Chi-square goodness-of-fit test was employed at the 0.05 significance level. The findings revealed that food and beverage vendors constituted the largest category (29.8%), followed by informal roadside traders (25.8%) and fast-food restaurants and franchises (23.3%), while corporate brand exhibitors and seasonal roadside vendors each accounted for 10.5%. The Chi-square result, $\chi^2(4, N = 275) = 43.95, p < .001$, confirmed that the observed distribution differed significantly across vendor categories. The study concludes that vendors constitute a differentiated stakeholder group within Carnival Calabar and that recognizing these differences is important for stakeholder coordination, economic inclusion and sustainable event management. It recommends differentiated vendor-management arrangements incorporating appropriate classification, designated operating spaces, proportionate registration, sanitation, waste-management and food-safety measures.

Keywords: Carnival Calabar; event management; stakeholder participation; sustainable event management; vendor differentiation; vendor participation

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry is a dynamic and service-oriented sector that encompasses a wide range of activities designed to satisfy the accommodation, food, beverage, recreation, entertainment, and related needs of individuals and groups. Within this broad sector, events have increasingly become important platforms for tourism development, cultural expression, social interaction, entrepreneurship, and economic exchange (Getz & Page, 2024). Events such as festivals, carnivals, trade fairs, conferences, cultural celebrations, and other organized gatherings attract visitors and create opportunities for numerous businesses and service providers to participate in the delivery of products and services. Consequently, the successful management of events depends not only on event organizers and attendees but also on the contributions of diverse stakeholders operating within the event environment (Diminyi et al., 2022).

One important group of stakeholders in event environments is vendors. Vendors provide a variety of products and services that contribute to the comfort, satisfaction, and overall experience of event attendees. Their activities may include the sale of food and beverages, souvenirs, fashion items, crafts, promotional materials, and other consumer goods, as well as the provision of services such as photography, entertainment, transportation,

decoration, and other event-related services. The presence and diversity of vendors therefore form an important component of the event ecosystem because they respond to the immediate needs of attendees while also creating opportunities for income generation, entrepreneurship, employment, and local economic participation (Getz & Page, 2024).

Vendor participation in events is particularly important from the perspective of sustainable hospitality operations because events often generate temporary but intensive economic activities within host destinations. Vendors purchase supplies, employ assistants, interact with customers, and establish relationships with event organizers, suppliers, transport operators, local authorities, and other businesses (Getz & Page, 2024). These relationships create value chains through which economic benefits can circulate within the host community. When effectively coordinated, vendor activities can contribute to local economic development, enhance visitor experiences, support small and medium-scale enterprises, and strengthen the capacity of local communities to benefit from tourism and event activities (Diminyi, 2024). However, poorly organized vending activities may also create challenges related to congestion, waste generation, environmental sanitation, competition for space, food safety, and regulation. This makes vendor management an important consideration in sustainable event and hospitality operations.

The diversity of vendors participating in an event may vary according to the type, size, location, duration, target audience, and level of organization of the event. Large cultural festivals and tourism events may attract formal businesses, informal traders, food and beverage operators, mobile vendors, artisans, service providers, corporate exhibitors, and promotional brands. Some vendors may operate from permanent business premises close to event venues, while others may establish temporary stalls, tents, roadside points, or mobile operations specifically for the event period. The differences among these vendor groups are important because they may influence how vendors participate in events, how they access customers, how they interact with event organizers, and how economic value is created and distributed within the event environment.

Vendor differentiation refers to the classification of vendors into distinct categories based on characteristics such as the nature of products or services offered, business size, level of formalization, mode of operation, and degree of involvement in event activities (Gan, 2020; Son et al., 2021). In event environments, vendors may be differentiated as food and beverage sellers, craft and souvenir traders, fashion retailers, service providers, corporate exhibitors, mobile vendors, stationary vendors, registered businesses, and informal operators. These distinctions are important because different categories of vendors often possess varying levels of financial resources, operational capacity, regulatory compliance, access to strategic trading locations, customer engagement, and relationships with event organizers (Chen et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2026). Consequently, vendor differentiation may influence the extent of participation, business performance, visitor interaction, and the overall contribution of vendors to event value chains and destination economies. Understanding these differences is therefore essential for developing inclusive policies, effective vendor management strategies, and sustainable event operations.

In Nigeria, events have become increasingly important to tourism, hospitality, cultural promotion, and local economic development. Cultural festivals, carnivals, trade fairs, religious gatherings, entertainment events, and other celebrations provide platforms through which local entrepreneurs and businesses interact with visitors and residents (Diminyi et al., 2022). Vendors operating within these environments often constitute an important part of the informal and formal economy. Their participation provides opportunities for employment and income generation while also enabling visitors to access local food, crafts, souvenirs, entertainment, and other products that contribute to the authenticity of the destination experience (Gan, 2020). Despite this importance, vendor participation is sometimes treated as a secondary aspect of event management, with greater attention being given to event organizers, attendees, attractions, and destination marketing.

Cross River State provides a particularly relevant setting for examining vendor participation in events because of its strong tourism and event culture. The state is recognized for major cultural and tourism-related activities, particularly in Calabar, where Carnival Calabar has developed into a major event attracting residents, visitors, businesses, performers, and other stakeholders. The concentration of people and commercial activities associated with major events creates a favourable environment for vendors to offer products and services to attendees. Food and beverage sellers, fast-food businesses, roadside traders, craft and souvenir sellers, mobile vendors, service

providers, and corporate promotional operators may all participate in the event economy in different ways (Osuoha, et al., 2022, Diminyi, 2024).

The institutional environment surrounding Carnival Calabar is shaped by the involvement of state and local agencies responsible for carnival administration, tourism, event management, urban development and environmental management. The Cross River State Carnival Commission provides an institutional framework for carnival organization, while recent state initiatives have increasingly incorporated digital platforms for participant registration and stakeholder management (Cross River State Government, 2026a). Within the wider urban environment, vending activities also intersect with regulations concerning the use of public spaces, environmental sanitation, waste disposal, public health and obstruction of roads or drainage facilities (Cross River State Government, 2026b). These regulatory considerations are particularly relevant to informal and roadside vendors whose operations frequently depend on access to high-traffic public spaces. Consequently, vendor differentiation at Carnival Calabar occurs not only according to products and business characteristics but also within an institutional setting in which formal businesses, registered participants and informal operators may experience different levels of access, recognition and regulatory oversight. Effective vendor management therefore requires coordination between carnival authorities, relevant government agencies and vendors to balance commercial participation with public safety, environmental sanitation and orderly use of event spaces.

The nature and extent of vendor participation in such events have implications for sustainable hospitality operations and event value chains in Cross River State. Vendors serve as important links between producers, suppliers, event organizers, and consumers (Diminyi & Ogoina, 2024; Ossowska et al. 2023). Their activities can support local sourcing, employment creation, entrepreneurship, visitor satisfaction, and the circulation of income within the destination. At the same time, differences between registered and unregistered vendors, formal and informal operators, permanent and temporary businesses, and stationary and mobile traders may create different operational opportunities and challenges. Understanding these differences is therefore essential for developing effective approaches to vendor coordination, regulation, inclusion, and sustainable event management.

Although existing studies have examined event tourism, festival economies, visitor satisfaction, entrepreneurship, and the contribution of vendors to event environments (Laguo & Diminyi, 2024; Osuoha et al., 2022; Son, et al., 2021; Andersson & Getz, 2008), limited empirical attention has been given to the specific types of vendors that actively participate in Carnival Calabar. There is also insufficient evidence on how these vendor categories are differentiated within the event environment and the extent to which they contribute to the broader event value chain. This gap makes it difficult for event managers, government agencies, destination managers, and other stakeholders to develop appropriate strategies for vendor inclusion, regulation, resource allocation, and sustainable event operations.

It is against this background that this study examines vendor differentiation and participation in Carnival Calabar. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the major categories of vendors participating in the event and determine whether their representation differs significantly across categories. By documenting the differentiated structure of vendor participation, the study provides empirical evidence for improved vendor management, stakeholder coordination, economic inclusion and sustainable event operations within Carnival Calabar.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vendor differentiation in event environments

Vendor differentiation refers to distinctions among vendors based on characteristics such as products and services offered, business scale, formalization, mobility, operating location and mode of participation. It recognizes that vendors within event environments are heterogeneous actors possessing different resources, operating strategies and relationships with organizers, regulators and consumers. Studies of informal vending demonstrate this heterogeneity. Adama (2020), for example, found that street vendors in Abuja employ different spatial, relational and temporal strategies in negotiating access to public spaces, while Balarabe and Sahin (2020) identified mobility as an important strategy through which vendors respond to trading opportunities and regulatory pressures. Similarly, Recchi (2021) showed that informal street vending varies considerably across

institutional, spatial and socioeconomic settings. Collectively, these studies challenge approaches that treat vendors as a homogeneous commercial group.

Within tourism and event environments, differentiation is also evident in the variety of products, services and visitor experiences provided by vendors. Food vendors, merchandise and souvenir traders, artisans, mobile sellers, service providers and corporate exhibitors may occupy different positions within an event marketplace. Food-related vendors are particularly important because they simultaneously contribute to commercial exchange and the destination experience. Park and Widyanta (2022) demonstrated the importance of food experiences within destination foodscapes, while Ossowska et al. (2023) conceptualized food-festival vendors as participants in entrepreneurial ecosystems involving suppliers, visitors, organizers and supporting institutions. Kwiatkowski et al. (2024) similarly showed that exhibitors and vendors at food festivals display entrepreneurial orientations that influence their participation in event environments. These findings suggest that vendor differentiation has economic and experiential implications extending beyond the simple classification of businesses.

Vendor diversity may also create different management requirements. Formal businesses and corporate exhibitors may possess greater organizational resources and operate through more structured arrangements, whereas informal, mobile and seasonal vendors may depend more heavily on flexible access to customers and public spaces. Event management systems that treat these groups uniformly may therefore overlook differences in their resources, interests and operational circumstances. This issue is particularly relevant to Carnival Calabar, where formal hospitality businesses coexist with informal roadside traders, seasonal operators and corporate exhibitors. Understanding the composition of this vendor ecosystem is consequently important for stakeholder coordination, spatial planning, economic inclusion and sustainable event management.

Vendor participation and the research gap

Vendor participation refers to vendors' involvement in the commercial and operational activities associated with an event, including the provision of products and services, interaction with customers and organizers, use of event spaces and compliance with relevant operating requirements. Participation can be influenced by the institutional and managerial conditions surrounding an event. Gan (2020), for example, showed that communication, coordination and clarity of expectations affect relationships between vendors and event management, while Eyisi et al. (2021) emphasized the broader importance of stakeholder collaboration and opportunities for participation in tourism development. From an event-management perspective, therefore, vendor participation involves not merely physical presence but relationships among commercial actors, organizers, consumers and regulatory stakeholders.

Research further indicates that vendors contribute to entrepreneurship, local economic activity and visitor experience. Ossowska et al. (2023) identified vendors as important actors within food-festival entrepreneurial ecosystems, while Kwiatkowski et al. (2024) highlighted their entrepreneurial orientation. Son et al. (2021) similarly demonstrated the relevance of tourism and hospitality small and medium-sized enterprises to event leveraging. These studies establish the economic importance of vendor participation, but much of the literature concentrates on vendor contributions, stakeholder relationships or particular forms of vending rather than systematically examining the composition and relative representation of different vendor categories within a major event.

This limitation is particularly evident in the literature relevant to Carnival Calabar. Existing studies have examined aspects of events, tourism, hospitality and visitor experiences in Cross River State, but provide limited empirical evidence on the differentiated structure of vendors participating in Carnival Calabar. Consequently, there is insufficient event-specific evidence showing which vendor categories constitute the commercial environment and whether their representation differs significantly. The present study addresses this gap by empirically identifying and classifying the major vendor categories participating in Carnival Calabar and testing whether their observed distribution differs significantly across categories. In doing so, the study shifts attention from treating vendors as a single stakeholder group toward understanding the differentiated structure of vendor participation and its implications for stakeholder coordination and sustainable event management.

Theoretical anchor

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory, advanced by Freeman (1984), holds that the success and sustainability of an organization, project, or event depend on recognizing and managing the interests of individuals and groups that can affect or are affected by its activities. Rather than viewing organizational performance solely from the perspective of owners or managers, the theory emphasizes relationships among multiple stakeholders and the value created through their interactions. In an event environment, these stakeholders may include event organizers, vendors, attendees, sponsors, government and regulatory agencies, host communities, security agencies, and service providers. Their interests, resources, responsibilities, and levels of influence may differ, making stakeholder coordination important for effective and sustainable event management.

The theory is particularly relevant to this study because vendors are not a homogeneous stakeholder group. Food and beverage vendors, fast-food restaurants and franchises, informal roadside traders, corporate brand exhibitors, and seasonal vendors differ in their resources, operating structures, regulatory status, market roles, and relationships with event organizers. These differences can affect their access to vending spaces, customers, information, infrastructure, and opportunities for participation. Stakeholder Theory therefore provides a basis for understanding vendor differentiation not simply as differences in business categories, but as differences in stakeholder interests, resources, influence, and participation within the Carnival Calabar event ecosystem.

The stakeholder salience framework developed by Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997) further strengthens the application of the theory to the study. The framework proposes that stakeholder salience can be understood through three attributes: **power**, referring to the capacity of a stakeholder to influence decisions or outcomes; **legitimacy**, referring to the perceived appropriateness or validity of the stakeholder's involvement; and **urgency**, referring to the extent to which stakeholder needs require immediate attention. Applied to Carnival Calabar, these attributes help explain why different categories of vendors may occupy different positions within the event environment. Corporate exhibitors and established businesses may possess relatively greater financial resources, formal recognition, and capacity to negotiate with organizers, whereas informal and seasonal vendors may possess less formal influence but considerable legitimacy and urgency because they provide products and services required immediately by large numbers of event attendees.

The framework is especially useful for interpreting the prominence of food and beverage vendors and informal roadside traders at Carnival Calabar. Their relatively high participation may reflect the immediate demand for food, beverages, convenience products, and other services during the event, thereby increasing the urgency and practical legitimacy of their presence. Conversely, corporate exhibitors may possess greater organizational and financial power but constitute a smaller proportion of vendors because their participation is more specialized and may depend on formal agreements, promotional objectives, and designated spaces. Vendor salience should therefore not be interpreted solely from numerical dominance; rather, different vendor groups may possess different combinations of power, legitimacy, and urgency.

Stakeholder Theory also draws attention to potential conflicts among actors within the event environment. The commercial interests of vendors may conflict with organizers' requirements for crowd control, sanitation, environmental protection, food safety, traffic management, and orderly use of public space. Similarly, formalization may improve regulatory compliance while creating financial or administrative barriers for small and informal vendors. Although Stakeholder Theory has been criticized for providing limited guidance on how competing stakeholder interests should ultimately be prioritized, particularly in highly informal economic settings, it remains useful for this study because it provides a framework for examining vendor diversity, stakeholder salience, competing interests, and the need for inclusive coordination. Accordingly, the theory supports the argument that sustainable management of Carnival Calabar requires differentiated approaches that recognize the varying characteristics and interests of vendor groups while balancing economic inclusion with regulatory, social, and environmental objectives.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria, with particular focus on vendors operating along major routes associated with Carnival Calabar. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design employing a quantitative research approach was adopted. The population comprised 885 individuals directly or indirectly involved in vending-related activities across 40 identified vendor operating points along the selected Carnival Calabar routes. The 40 vendor operating points consisted of 20 registered vendor establishments and 20 unregistered vendor points. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed. At the first stage, purposive sampling was used to identify major Carnival Calabar routes with substantial vendor activity. These included Calabar Road, Mary Slessor Avenue, IBB Way, Ndidem Usang Iso Road, Effio Ete Junction, 8 Miles, Murtala Mohammed Highway, and Goldie. At the second stage, the identified vendor operations were classified into two broad strata: registered vendor establishments and unregistered vendor points. At the third stage, respondents were selected from the identified vendor locations in proportion to the number of workers associated with each location.

Taro Yamane (1967) formula was used to determine a sample size of 275 respondents across registered and unregistered vendor establishments that operate during and along the major carnival routes. Data collected through the structured questionnaire were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe respondents' characteristics, vendor categories and participation patterns. The Chi-square goodness-of-fit test was employed to determine whether the observed frequencies of the identified vendor categories differed significantly from an equal distribution. This test was considered appropriate because the study's inferential objective was to establish whether significant differences existed in the representation of vendor categories rather than to estimate causal or predictive relationships among vendor characteristics. The hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULT

Characteristics of respondents

Figure 1 presents the characteristics of the respondents in terms of gender, age, educational qualification, vendor type and years of vending experience. Male respondents constituted 57.1%, while females accounted for 42.9%. Regarding age, respondents aged 26–35 years constituted the largest group (33.5%), followed by those aged 36–50 years (25.8%) and 18–25 years (23.3%). Respondents above 50 years accounted for 10.5%, while those below 18 years constituted the smallest group (6.9%).

In terms of educational qualification, respondents with secondary education constituted the largest proportion (34.9%), followed by those with tertiary education (26.9%), primary education (14.9%) and vocational training (14.6%), while respondents with no formal education accounted for 8.7%. Food vendors constituted the largest vendor type (32.4%), followed by roadside or mobile vendors (28.4%) and fast-food restaurant operators (22.2%). Service providers accounted for 11.6%, while corporate exhibitors or brand agents constituted 5.4%. Regarding vending experience, respondents with 1–3 years of experience constituted the largest proportion (30.2%), followed by those with 4–6 years (26.9%), 7–10 years (18.5%), less than one year (13.5%) and above 10 years (10.9%).

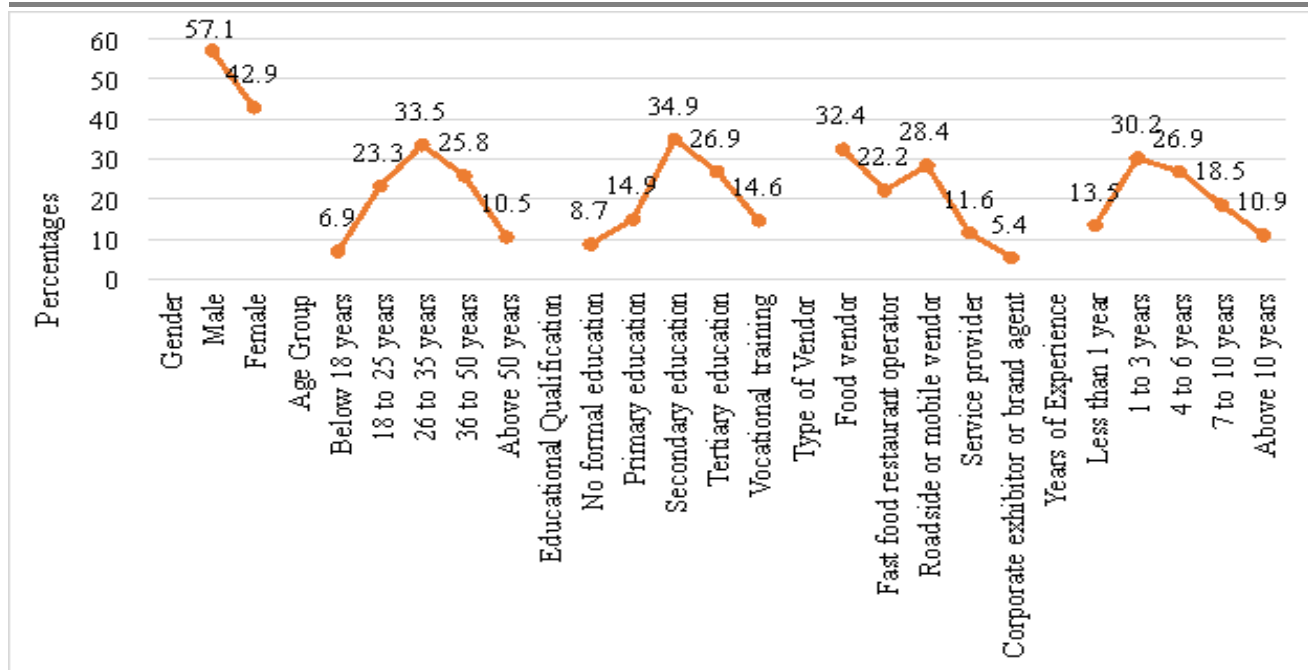


Figure 1: Characteristics of respondents

Table 1 presents the major categories of vendors operating during Carnival Calabar. Food and beverage vendors constituted the largest category, with 82 respondents representing 29.8%, followed by informal roadside traders with 71 respondents (25.8%) and fast-food restaurants and franchises with 64 respondents (23.3%). Corporate brand exhibitors and seasonal roadside vendors each recorded 29 respondents, representing 10.5% respectively. The results therefore show variations in the representation of the five vendor categories, with food and beverage vendors recording the highest proportion and corporate brand exhibitors and seasonal roadside vendors recording the lowest.

Table 1: Categories of vendors that operate at Carnival Calabar

Category of Main Vendors	Frequency	Percentage
Food and beverage vendors only	82	29.8
Fast-food restaurants and franchises	64	23.3
Informal roadside traders only	71	25.8
Corporate brand exhibitors only	29	10.5
Seasonal roadside vendors	29	10.5
Total	275	100.0

Source: Authors' computation, 2026.

Table 2 presents the main operating locations of vendors during Carnival Calabar. Roadside pavements and streets recorded the largest proportion, with 94 respondents representing 34.2%, followed by designated stalls along the carnival routes with 63 respondents (22.9%). Mobile positions within crowd areas accounted for 48 respondents (17.5%), while permanent shops and restaurants recorded 41 respondents (14.9%). Temporary tents and pop-up stands constituted the least-reported operating location, with 29 respondents representing 10.5%. The findings indicate that vendors operated across both fixed and mobile locations, with roadside pavements and streets recording the highest representation.

Table 2: Vendors locations during Carnival Calabar

Main Operating Locations	Frequency	Percentage
Inside designated stalls along carnival routes	63	22.9
Along roadside pavements and streets	94	34.2
Inside permanent shops and restaurants	41	14.9
Mobile moving positions within crowd areas	48	17.5
Temporary tents and pop-up stands	29	10.5
Total	275	100.0

Source: Authors' computation, 2026.

Table 3 presents respondents' assessment of the dominant vendor types operating along Carnival Calabar routes. Informal roadside food sellers recorded the highest frequency, with 96 respondents representing 34.9%, followed by beverage and drink vendors with 62 respondents (22.5%) and fast-food restaurants with 58 respondents (21.1%). Craft and souvenir sellers accounted for 37 respondents (13.5%), while corporate promotional vendors recorded the lowest proportion, with 22 respondents representing 8.0%. Thus, informal roadside food sellers were the most frequently identified dominant vendor type, whereas corporate promotional vendors were the least frequently identified.

Table 3: Dominant vendor type along Carnival Calabar routes

Most Dominant Vendor	Frequency	Percentage
Fast-food restaurants	58	21.1
Informal roadside food sellers	96	34.9
Beverage and drink vendors	62	22.5
Craft and souvenir sellers	37	13.5
Corporate promotional vendors	22	8.0
Total	275	100.0

Source: Authors' computation, 2026.

Table 4 presents respondents' assessment of the least common vendor groups during Carnival Calabar. Corporate exhibitors were most frequently identified as the least common group, with 81 respondents representing 29.5%, followed by service providers such as photographers and entertainers with 73 respondents (26.5%). Mobile snack sellers accounted for 52 respondents (18.9%), while food vendors accounted for 44 respondents (16.0%). A further 25 respondents (9.1%) indicated that all vendor categories were equally represented. Overall, corporate exhibitors were most frequently perceived as the least common vendor group during the event.

Table 4: Least common vendor groups during Carnival Calabar

Least Common Vendor Group	Frequency	Percentage
Food vendors	44	16.0
Service providers (photographers, entertainers)	73	26.5
Corporate exhibitors	81	29.5
Mobile snack sellers	52	18.9
All categories are equally present	25	9.1
Total	275	100.0

Source: Authors' computation, 2026.

Test of hypotheses

Hypothesis one

H₀: There is no significant difference in the distribution of vendor categories participating in Carnival Calabar.

H₁: There is a significant difference in the distribution of vendor categories participating in Carnival Calabar.

Tables 5 and 6 present the Chi-square goodness-of-fit test of the distribution of vendor categories participating in Carnival Calabar. Based on an equal expected frequency of 55 respondents per category, food and beverage vendors recorded an observed frequency of 82, fast-food restaurants and franchises 64, informal roadside traders 71, corporate brand exhibitors 29, and seasonal roadside vendors 29. The respective contributions to the overall Chi-square statistic were 13.25, 1.47, 4.65, 12.29 and 12.29.

The result, $\chi^2(4, N = 275) = 43.95, p < .001$, indicates that the observed distribution of vendor categories differed significantly from an equal distribution. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected, while the alternative hypothesis was supported. Food and beverage vendors, informal roadside traders, and fast-food restaurants and franchises recorded frequencies above the expected value, whereas corporate brand exhibitors and seasonal roadside vendors recorded frequencies below the expected value.

Table 5: Chi-square goodness-of-fit analysis of vendor categories participating in Carnival Calabar

Vendor Category	Observed Frequency (O)	Expected Frequency (E)	O-E	(O-E) ² /E
Food and beverage vendors only	82	55	27	13.25
Fast-food restaurants and franchises	64	55	9	1.47
Informal roadside traders only	71	55	16	4.65
Corporate brand exhibitors only	29	55	-26	12.29
Seasonal roadside vendors	29	55	-26	12.29
Total	275	275		43.95

Source: Authors' computation, 2026.

Table 6: Summary of Chi-square goodness-of-fit test

Variable	χ^2	df	p	Decision
Distribution of vendor categories participating in Carnival Calabar	43.95	4	<.001	Reject H_0

Source: Authors' computation from field survey, 2026.

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed a differentiated and uneven vendor structure within Carnival Calabar. Food and beverage vendors constituted the largest category (29.8%), followed by informal roadside traders (25.8%) and fast-food restaurants and franchises (23.3%), while corporate brand exhibitors and seasonal roadside vendors each accounted for 10.5%. The Chi-square goodness-of-fit test, $\chi^2(4, N = 275) = 43.95, p < .001$, confirmed that the observed distribution differed significantly across vendor categories. This indicates that the commercial environment of Carnival Calabar is characterized more strongly by food-related and informal trading activities than by corporate and seasonal vending. The prominence of food and beverage operators is consistent with the consumption-intensive nature of major events, where attendees require readily accessible meals, snacks and refreshments during prolonged periods of participation. Similarly, the substantial representation of informal roadside traders illustrates the capacity of small-scale enterprises to respond flexibly to temporary concentrations of consumer demand. The findings therefore demonstrate that vendors should not be regarded as a homogeneous stakeholder group because their representation, operating structures and roles within the carnival environment differ considerably.

The findings are broadly consistent with literature portraying event environments as entrepreneurial ecosystems in which different commercial actors contribute to visitor experiences and local economic activity. Ossowska et al. (2023) identified vendors as important actors within food-festival entrepreneurial ecosystems through their relationships with visitors, suppliers, organizers and supporting institutions, while Kwiatkowski et al. (2024) emphasized the entrepreneurial orientation of vendors and exhibitors at food festivals. Similarly, Son et al. (2021) demonstrated the relevance of tourism and hospitality small and medium-sized enterprises to the realization of event-related opportunities. The present study extends these perspectives by providing event-specific evidence on the composition and relative representation of vendor categories within Carnival Calabar. The comparatively lower representation of corporate exhibitors also suggests that numerical prominence should not necessarily be equated with stakeholder importance, since different categories may contribute to the event through different economic, promotional and service functions. The findings therefore highlight the importance of recognizing vendor heterogeneity when planning commercial spaces, stakeholder engagement and service provision within major events.

The observed vendor differentiation also has important implications for sustainable event management. The strong presence of food and beverage vendors and informal roadside traders demonstrates the economic and social value of Carnival Calabar as a platform for entrepreneurship, income generation and local participation. However, concentrated commercial activity within event routes can simultaneously create pressures relating to waste generation, sanitation, food safety, pedestrian movement, traffic management and competition for public space. Sustainable vendor management therefore requires balancing economic inclusion with environmental protection, public health and safety. Greater formalization through registration, designated vending zones and compliance requirements may facilitate coordination and accountability, but overly restrictive or costly arrangements may disadvantage small-scale and seasonal operators. Conversely, unrestricted informal vending may enhance entrepreneurial access while increasing difficulties associated with congestion, waste management and regulatory oversight. A differentiated approach involving designated vending zones, proportionate registration arrangements, accessible sanitation and waste-disposal facilities, food-safety sensitization and vendor associations could therefore provide a more inclusive basis for balancing commercial participation with sustainable event operations.

These findings further strengthen the relevance of Stakeholder Theory to vendor management at Carnival Calabar. Freeman (1984) emphasizes the importance of recognizing the interests of different actors who affect or are affected by organizational activities, while Mitchell et al. (1997) distinguish stakeholder salience through power, legitimacy and urgency. Applied to the present findings, established businesses and corporate exhibitors may possess comparatively greater financial and organizational power, whereas food vendors and informal roadside traders may derive considerable legitimacy and urgency from their immediate provision of products required by large numbers of event attendees. Their numerical prominence does not necessarily imply greater institutional power, just as the smaller number of corporate exhibitors does not imply limited stakeholder influence. Effective event management should therefore recognize the different interests, resources and levels of salience associated with each vendor category rather than adopting a uniform approach to vendor engagement and regulation. Nevertheless, the Chi-square analysis establishes differences in vendor representation but does not identify the factors responsible for those differences. Possible influences such as business formalization, operating location, experience and business scale were not statistically tested and should therefore be regarded as directions for further investigation rather than explanations established by the present study.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined vendor differentiation and participation in Carnival Calabar and established that the event's commercial environment comprises distinct vendor categories whose representation is uneven. Food and beverage vendors constituted the largest category (29.8%), followed by informal roadside traders (25.8%) and fast-food restaurants and franchises (23.3%), while corporate brand exhibitors and seasonal roadside vendors each accounted for 10.5%. The Chi-square goodness-of-fit test confirmed that the observed distribution differed significantly across vendor categories. These findings demonstrate that vendors should not be treated as a homogeneous stakeholder group within the Carnival Calabar event ecosystem.

The study contributes to event-management literature by providing an empirical classification of vendors within Carnival Calabar and demonstrating the relevance of vendor differentiation to stakeholder coordination and sustainable event management. From a stakeholder perspective, differences among vendor categories imply varying interests, resources, operating conditions and management needs. Event organizers and relevant authorities should therefore adopt differentiated vendor-management arrangements that combine appropriate classification and designated operating spaces with proportionate registration, sanitation, waste-management and food-safety requirements. Particular attention should be given to maintaining opportunities for small-scale and informal vendors while ensuring environmental quality, public safety and orderly event operations.

Limitations and directions for further research

The findings should be interpreted within the specific context of Carnival Calabar and should not be generalized automatically to other event types or destinations. The study was primarily designed to identify vendor categories and determine whether their representation differed significantly; it did not statistically examine whether business formalization, operating location, experience or business scale predicts participation outcomes. Future research could compare vendor differentiation across cultural festivals, trade fairs, religious gatherings, sporting events and other event environments and employ relational or multivariate analyses where appropriate. Longitudinal research could also examine how vendor composition and participation patterns change as events expand, become more formalized or experience changes in regulatory and management practices.

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