

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILES OF CHOP BAR OWNERS AND CUSTOMERS IN GHANA: IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY AND PATRONAGE PATTERNS**^{1,*}Dr. Ebenezer Ocran Turkson and ²Dr. Kojo Ackaah-Kwarteng**¹KAAF University²Rosebank International University College (RIUC), GhanaReceived 20th May 2025; Accepted 27th June 2025; Published online 31st July 2025

Abstract

This study examines the demographic and socioeconomic profiles of chop bar owners and patrons within Ghana's food service industry, a vital sector contributing to employment, entrepreneurship, and socio-economic development. Employing a quantitative approach with structured questionnaires, data were collected from 767 respondents across six major regional capitals, revealing that the industry is predominantly driven by middle-aged female owners and male customers. The findings indicate that most owners possess between 6 to 10 years of experience and have educational backgrounds mostly below diploma level, whilst customers generally hold diploma or higher qualifications and have engaged with chop bar services for comparable periods. The analysis highlights gender disparities, with women constituting the majority of owners and men representing the primary customer base, reflecting complex social and cultural dynamics. The results emphasise the sector's stability, resilience, and potential for growth, underscoring the importance of targeted interventions such as capacity-building, improved access to finance, and policy support to enhance sustainability and inclusivity. This research addresses critical gaps in context-specific data, providing empirical insights for policymakers, development stakeholders, and entrepreneurs seeking to strengthen Ghana's informal food sector.

Keywords: Chop Bar Industry, Ghana, Demographic Characteristics, Women Entrepreneurs, Informal Food Sector, Socioeconomic Factors.

INTRODUCTION

Chop bar is a major enterprise within Ghana's food service industry (Turkson *et al.*, 2025). It constitutes a vital component of Ghana's socio-economic fabric, playing a significant role in employment creation, entrepreneurship, and daily sustenance for a diverse population (Gheribi & Voytovych, 2018). By definition, "to chop" in Ghanaian Pidgin refers to eating rather than cutting, and a "bar" is a place where people congregate. Therefore, a chop bar is fundamentally a venue where individuals gather to eat (Turkson *et al.*, 2025; Andoh, 2014). In Ghana, these informal food establishments are typically owned by women and are found in both urban and rural areas, particularly near markets, transportation hubs, and along roadsides. They generally offer affordable traditional African cuisine. Ghanaians widely patronise chop bars, which are regarded as a sub-sector with a substantial market component where customers and service providers engage in service co-creation (Turkson *et al.*, 2025). Among the various sectors within this industry, chop bars stand out as accessible and affordable dining options that are especially important in both urban and rural contexts. These eateries do more than provide nourishment; they serve as engines of economic activity, generating employment opportunities and fostering small-scale entrepreneurship within local communities (Turkson *et al.*, 2025). Given their prominence, understanding the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of chop bar owners and their patrons is essential for assessing the sector's sustainability and identifying opportunities for growth. Previous research has highlighted that factors such as age, gender, educational background, and years of experience significantly influence business operations and consumer

patronage within informal food sectors (Asravor & Acheampong, 2024; Marsasi & Barqiah, 2023). However, despite the sector's importance, there remains a notable scarcity of detailed, context-specific data on the profiles of owners and customers in this industry. Addressing this gap is crucial for gaining deeper insights into ownership patterns, consumer preferences, and operational challenges, which are necessary for designing effective policies and strategic interventions aimed at strengthening the sector (Musa, 2024).

This study aims to systematically explore the demographic and socioeconomic profiles of chop bar owners and customers in Ghana. It emphasises how these characteristics influence patronage patterns and the long-term viability of businesses (Jung & Woodside, 2021). By providing detailed data on variables such as age, gender, education, and experience, the research seeks to shed light on the underlying dynamics that shape ownership and consumer behaviour. Additionally, the study addresses key gaps in existing literature by offering empirical evidence necessary for developing targeted support programmes, especially in areas related to gender participation, business longevity, and educational backgrounds. A notable aspect of this investigation is its focus on gender dynamics within the industry. Preliminary findings suggest that women predominantly own chop bars, contrasting with a male-dominated patron base (Bertay, Dordevic & Sever, 2025). Understanding these gendered patterns is vital for promoting gender equity, empowering women entrepreneurs, and overcoming barriers to female ownership (Fernandez, 2023). Moreover, the study examines the stability of businesses, with many owners maintaining operations for six to ten years, indicating resilience and maturity in the sector. Customer loyalty over several years further underscores the importance of stability and trust in fostering industry growth (Bakar & Adzis, 2024). The socioeconomic backgrounds of owners and patrons, often characterised by education levels below diploma but with certificates or equivalent qualifications, are also

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examined. Recognising these educational profiles is essential for tailoring capacity-building initiatives, training programmes, and support mechanisms that enhance service quality and business skills (Lee & Yu, 2023). Overall, this research advances understanding of the demographic and socioeconomic factors influencing Ghana's informal food service sector, providing insights that are critical for policymakers, development practitioners, and stakeholders committed to promoting sustainable growth and economic empowerment within this vital industry.

Theoretical Underpinning of the Study

Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

The conceptual framework of this study is rooted in understanding the pivotal role of the food service industry, particularly chop bars, within Ghana's socio-economic fabric. As essential providers of affordable and accessible food, chop bars serve not only as vital sources of daily sustenance but also as catalysts for economic empowerment and small-scale entrepreneurship, especially in both urban and rural settings (Turkson *et al.*, 2025; Gheribi & Voytovych, 2018). Their significance extends beyond food provision, contributing substantially to employment creation, community development, and local economic resilience. This can be understood through the resource-based view (RBV) theory. The RBV emphasises that a firm's resources such as human capital, experience, and social capital are critical determinants of its competitive advantage and sustainability (Dhrubo, 2025; Gerhart & Feng, 2021; Wernerfelt, 1984). Applying this theory helps to elucidate the relationships observed between demographic characteristics and business outcomes within the Ghanaian chop bar industry. Firstly, the predominance of women owning chop bars suggests that social and cultural resources, such as gender roles and community networks, play a significant role in entrepreneurial activities within this sector (Joshi *et al.*, 2024; Hanson & Blake, 2009). According to RBV, women's ownership may be linked to their social capital and community integration, which serve as valuable resources for establishing and maintaining businesses in this context (Adam *et al.*, 2022).

Secondly, the association between education levels and business operation highlights the importance of human capital resources (Gerhart & Feng, 2021). While many owners and customers have education levels below diploma, the presence of diploma and graduate qualifications indicates that higher educational attainment can enhance skills, managerial capacity, and service quality. According to RBV, these educational resources can provide a competitive edge (Vasudevan, 2021), enabling owners to adopt better business practices, improve customer service, and sustain their enterprises.

Thirdly, the experience levels of both owners and customers relate to organisational and relationship resources (Husnah *et al.*, 2025). Owners with several years of experience are likely to possess valuable tacit knowledge, operational skills, and industry insights, which can improve business efficiency and adaptability (Parente *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, long-term customer patronage suggests loyalty and trust, which are intangible social resources that contribute to business stability and growth. It is of interest to note that RBV theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how demographic factors such as gender, education, and experience

serve as critical resources influencing the sustainability and competitiveness of chop bar businesses in Ghana (Adam *et al.*, 2022). Recognising and leveraging these resources can assist entrepreneurs in developing strategies to enhance their operational capacity and market positioning within the industry (Windiyani, W., Akhter, Kaur, & ulHaque, 2025; Hamid *et al.*, 2024; Budiati *et al.*, 2022).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative methodology, utilising both stratified and simple random sampling techniques to ensure a representative sample across six major cosmopolitan regional capitals in Ghana (Turkson *et al.*, 2025; Rahman *et al.*, 2022; Ahmad *et al.*, 2019). The methodology was carefully designed to gather detailed demographic information from two primary respondent groups: chop bar owners and customers. To achieve this, a structured approach was adopted, involving the collection of data through questionnaires that focused on key demographic variables such as age, gender, education level, and years of experience. This comprehensive data collection aimed to ensure that the sample accurately reflected the diverse characteristics of the population under investigation. A total of 767 respondents participated, comprising 383 chop bar owners and 384 customers. These participants were selected using appropriate sampling techniques, such as stratified random sampling or convenience sampling, to ensure broad representation across different demographic categories. The questionnaires included sections where respondents provided their demographic details, which were then carefully coded and entered into a database for analysis. The demographic variables were categorised into specific groups for clarity and consistency. Age was divided into four groups: 16–30, 31–45, 46–60, and 61 and above. Gender was classified as male or female. Education levels were categorised as postgraduate, graduate, diploma, and others. Experience in the chop bar industry was measured in years and grouped into five categories: 1–5, 6–10, 11–15, 16–20, and 21 and above. Once the data were collected, descriptive statistical methods were employed to analyse the demographic profiles of the respondents. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for each variable within both groups—owners and customers. This analysis provided a clear overview of the sample's composition, highlighting the distribution of respondents across various demographic categories. Such descriptive statistics are essential for understanding the characteristics of the respondents, ensuring the representativeness of the sample, and providing context for further analytical procedures. In conclusion, the methodology involved systematic sampling, structured questionnaire administration, and detailed descriptive statistical analysis. This approach ensured that the demographic data collected were both accurate and representative, providing a solid foundation for subsequent analysis and interpretation within the study.

RESULTS

The results pertaining to the demographics of the respondents are reported in Table 1. The age classifications indicate that 214 of the chop bar owner respondents who constitute the majority (56.0%) were between the ages of 31 and 45 years, followed by the next 100 chop bar owners, who make up 26%, falling within the age grouping of 46 and 60 years. Those

between the ages of 16 and 30 were 43 in number, or 11% of the chop bar owners sampled. Those over 61 years old were 27 in total (7%).

Table 1. Demographic data of respondents

Variables	Chop bar owners		Customers		
	Component	Freq. (n = 383)	Percent (100%)	Freq. (n = 384)	Percent (100%)
Age (Years)	16-30	43	11.0	88	22.9
	31-45	213	56.0	187	48.7
	46-60	100	26.0	65	16.9
	61 and above	27	7.0	44	11.5
Gender	Male	47	12.3	270	70.3
	Female	336	87.7	114	29.7
Education	Postgraduate	-	-	46	12.0
	Graduate	16	4.2	68	17.7
	Diploma	167	43.3	243	63.3
	Others	200	52.2	27	7.0
Experience (Years)	1-5	49	12.8	89	23.2
	6-10	177	46.2	230	59.9
	11-15	57	14.9	32	8.3
	16-20	67	17.5	33	8.6
	21 and above	33	8.6	9	2.3

In the case of the customer respondents, the majority of them (187), or 48.7%, were aged between 31 and 45 years. This was followed by the second largest group (88 respondents, or 22.9%), who were between 16 and 30 years old. The third largest group consisted of those aged between 46 and 60 years, numbering 65 individuals, or 16.9%. The final group comprised customers aged over 61 years, representing 11.5%. Regarding gender identities, the majority of the chop bar owners (336), or 87.7%, were women, whilst the minority (47), or 12.3%, were men. Conversely, the gender distribution among the customers was the opposite: the majority (270), or 70.3%, were men, whereas female customers numbered 114, or 29.7%. These findings suggest that more women own chop bar businesses in Ghana and tend to be within the economically active segment of the population. Additionally, the results imply that more men patronise chop bar services than women in Ghana. Concerning educational attainment, the majority of chop bar owner respondents (200), or 52.2%, indicated that they could not specify their exact level of education but selected 'Others', which appears to be below diploma level. Education levels below a diploma might include certificates or equivalent qualifications. The next largest group, comprising 167 respondents (43.6%), held diplomas, while a smaller group of 16 individuals (4.2%) identified as graduates. Among the customers, the majority (243), or 63.3%, possessed diplomas, followed by 68 (17.7%) with graduate qualifications. A further 46 customers (12%) had postgraduate education, while 27 (7%) could not specify their educational status and selected 'Others'. In terms of experience in the chop bar industry either as operators or consumers the data shows that most chop bar owners (177), or 46.2%, had been involved in the business for between 6 and 10 years. The next largest group (67 respondents, or 17.5%) had been operating for 16 to 20 years, with 57 (14.9%) having 11 to 15 years' experience. Forty-nine owners (12.8%) had been in business for 1 to 5 years, and 33 (8.6%) had been active for more than 21 years. On the consumer side, the majority (230), or 59.9%, had patronised chop bar services for between 6 and 10 years, followed by 89 respondents (23.2%) with 1 to 5 years of experience. Thirty-three customers (8.6%) had been using chop bar services for 16 to 20 years, while 32 (8.3%) had patronised for 11 to 15 years. Only 9 customers reported more than 21 years of experience with chop bar services.

DISCUSSION

The demographic characteristics of chop bar owners and their customers in Ghana reveal important insights into the social and economic dynamics of this vital sector. A detailed analysis of the data indicates that the industry is predominantly driven by middle-aged individuals, with a notable presence of women owners and a predominantly male customer base. These patterns reflect broader socio-cultural and economic trends within Ghanaian society, and understanding them can inform future policies aimed at promoting inclusive growth and entrepreneurship. Firstly, the age distribution among respondents shows that the majority of chop bar owners, accounting for 56%, are within the 31–45-year age bracket. This suggests that the industry is mainly operated by individuals in their productive years, likely benefiting from their energy, experience, and social networks. Similarly, the demographic data of customers indicate that nearly half (48.7%) of patrons are also within this age group, emphasising that middle-aged adults are the primary consumers of chop bar services. The presence of younger patrons, aged 16–30 years, representing 22.9%, points to the sector's appeal to youth, possibly due to accessibility or affordability. Conversely, older age groups over 61 years constitute a smaller segment, which might imply a decline in patronage or ownership as individuals age beyond their working years (Mattioli & Farinetti, 2025; Khamis *et al.*, 2022; Eshghi & Lesch, 1993). Gender disparities are particularly striking within the industry. An overwhelming majority of chop bar owners are women, making up 87.7% of respondents. This aligns with existing literature highlighting the prominence of women entrepreneurs in Ghana's informal sectors, particularly in food services and small-scale enterprises (Ketchum, 2022).

The predominance of female ownership may be attributed to traditional gender roles, community support systems, or the relative ease of establishing small businesses within the informal economy (Martins *et al.*, 2024). Conversely, the customer base is predominantly male, with 70.3% of respondents being men. This gendered pattern suggests that men are the main consumers of chop bar services, possibly due to social norms, cultural preferences, or convenience factors. The contrasting gender dynamics between ownership and patronage highlight the complex social fabric influencing business operations and consumer behaviour in Ghana. Educational attainment among respondents further enriches this picture. Among chop bar owners, more than half (52.2%) could not specify their exact level of education beyond selecting "Others," which likely indicates informal or semi-formal education, such as certificates or vocational training. A significant proportion (43.6%) hold diplomas, suggesting that many owners possess some level of formal education conducive to managing small enterprises. For customers, educational levels are somewhat higher, with 63.3% holding diplomas and 17.7% having graduate-level qualifications. This indicates that chop bar patronage spans various educational backgrounds but generally leans towards the middle class. Education appears to influence both entrepreneurship and consumer choices, affecting perceptions of quality, service standards, and business practices (Mahmood *et al.*, 2020).

Finally, the experience of respondents in the sector suggests a relatively stable industry. Most owners (46.2%) have been in the business for between 6 and 10 years, indicating moderate experience that likely contributes to operational stability and

customer loyalty. Similarly, the majority of customers have patronised chop bar services for 6–10 years (59.9%), reflecting consistent and sustained engagement with these establishments. This stability may be driven by factors such as location, reputation, and social ties, which are vital in informal sector businesses (Ilmafa'ati, 2021). In conclusion, the demographic analysis of chop bar owners and customers in Ghana uncovers significant gender, age, educational, and experiential patterns that shape the industry. The dominance of women owners and male patrons underscores the gendered nature of entrepreneurship and consumption in the sector (Khan, 2020). The prominence of middle-aged individuals highlights their vital role in sustaining the industry, while the educational profiles reflect the semi-formal nature of many enterprises. Recognising these patterns can inform targeted policies to promote gender equality, enhance entrepreneurial skills, and improve service delivery ultimately contributing to the sector's growth and socio-economic development.

Conclusion

In summary, the demographic characteristics of chop bar owners and their customers in Ghana provide a comprehensive understanding of the sector's social and economic landscape. The dominance of middle-aged women owners underscores the significant role women play in entrepreneurial activities within the informal economy, whilst the predominantly male customer base highlights social and cultural consumption patterns. Educational backgrounds further emphasise the semi-formal nature of many businesses, with experience levels indicating industry stability and loyalty among both owners and patrons. Recognising these demographic trends is essential for policymakers and stakeholders aiming to foster inclusive growth, support female entrepreneurship, and enhance service quality within the sector. Ultimately, understanding these dynamics can facilitate the development of targeted interventions that promote the sustainability and socio-economic contribution of the chop bar industry in Ghana.

Recommendations

Implementing targeted training programmes to enhance women entrepreneurs' business management skills, financial literacy, and hygiene standards can significantly improve their competitiveness and sustainability within the chop bar industry. Facilitating access to microcredit and financial services will enable small-scale owners to expand and modernise their enterprises, whilst promoting collaboration through associations or co-operatives can foster knowledge sharing and strengthen collective bargaining power. Consumer awareness campaigns emphasising food safety and quality are essential to attract a broader customer base, including women and younger patrons. Additionally, integrating the sector into formal economic frameworks can provide regulatory support, access to health infrastructure, and social security benefits, ultimately transforming the chop bar industry into a more inclusive, modern, and sustainable sector that contributes meaningfully to Ghana's economic development.

Limitations

This study faced several limitations. Firstly, the sample size and geographic scope were limited, which may affect the generalisability of the findings to all chop bar owners and customers across Ghana. Secondly, data collection relied on

self-reported information, which could be subject to bias or inaccuracies. Thirdly, the cross-sectional nature of the study prevents an understanding of changes over time or causal relationships. Lastly, factors such as seasonal variations and economic fluctuations were not accounted for, which could influence the demographic and business patterns observed.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Future research should consider expanding the sample size and geographic coverage to include diverse regions for broader insights. Longitudinal studies are recommended to examine changes over time and assess the impact of interventions or economic shifts on the sector. Additionally, qualitative approaches, such as interviews and focus groups, can provide a deeper understanding of the motivations, challenges, and perceptions of owners and customers. Investigating the impact of formalisation, technological adoption, and health standards on business performance could also be valuable. Finally, comparative studies between urban and rural chop bars may reveal unique challenges and opportunities within different contexts, informing more tailored policy interventions.

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