

Regulatory Structures and Social Identity: A Phenomenological Examination of Street Vending in Kitwe

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Abstract

Street vending has long constituted an integral dimension of everyday life in Kitwe, Zambia. For decades, vendors have made public spaces lively by offering fruits, vegetables, and handmade goods, thereby contributing to both the city's economic vitality and its social rhythms. In recent years, however, the visibility of these vendors has diminished. This decline does not stem from migration or occupational change, but rather from the increasingly fluid regulatory environment, that governs informal trade. Although statutory provisions appear straightforward, their implementation often generates uncertainty, leaving vendors unsure of when and where vending is permissible. Field observations reveal that regulatory practices exert subtle yet pervasive influence on daily routines. The presence or absence of enforcement shapes not only economic activity but also patterns of speech, consumption, and even dress. These micro-adjustments, accumulating over time, illustrate how governance extends beyond formal orders into the patterns of everyday life. Rules, therefore, acquire significance less as written instruments than as lived experiences, mediated through social interactions and community ties. In this context, belonging and self-understanding emerge through dialogue and collective negotiation rather than through official pronouncements. At the same time, the resilience of street vendors is evident in their adaptive strategies. Despite shifting regulations, they continue to develop ways of sustaining their livelihoods, demonstrating agency within constrained circumstances. The findings underscore the importance of examining governance not merely as a matter of legal frameworks but as a dynamic process, that reshapes social relations and everyday practices.

Keywords: Resilience, Governance, Adaption.

1.0 Introduction

Not every worker is officially employed, yet street vendors play a role many locals depend on. This reflects what is often called 'urban informality' how survival can happen away from rules, yet still shape daily life. According to Jongh,¹ ideas about good governance quietly guide how space gets used even among informal buyers and sellers alike, far from neutrality in how control is used. The money earned from street sales provides not only financial consistency but also a sense of belonging to a wider community. Yet these activities unfold under tightly set rules imposed by authorities. Jongh argues that, while regulations

¹ Jongh (2021), p.112

are intended to supervise, they often deepen power imbalances between officials and street vendors.² Oversight mechanisms, by guiding control, shape how identity and belonging are perceived. According to Kaoma & Saili,³ over time, what begins as simple monitoring evolves into influence over personal identity and social inclusion. Scholars note that rules reflect existing inequalities, unevenly framing visibility in public spaces. Uwamahoro & Khoo⁴ highlight how abrupt removals from public spaces expose the fragility of their economic security, yet these sellers persist, gradually adapting to each new policy shift.

1.1 Statement Of The Problem

According to Kehinde⁵ a problem of the statement is essentially an overview of an area that currently stands to be investigated in relation to knowledge gaps, practice, or ideal and desired realities; it defines the gap that currently exists. Street vending in Kitwe constitutes a vital livelihood for a vast number of urban people who cannot find space or permission within the formal workforce and, therefore, is forbidden by statute and in bylaws, classified as a disturbance. Enforcement exercises such as Operation Clean City (OCC) that oscillate between outlawing and sanctioning, choosing public order over the survival needs of vendors and reinforcing their existence as illegal on the fringes, and vendors are not purely helpless actors. Rather, they reassert their existence by re-inventing their legitimacy in the eyes of other community members and asserting resilience against exclusionary policies, while it seems they may need more investigation for how the current laws actually shape life for these vendors and identity categories. Yet this gap is significant, for governance to effectively serve vulnerable populations and reduce inequality must be understood as a contested process by the individuals who are impacted by regulations, rather than simply viewing it as a neutral set of instruments through a phenomenological lens, and as a process experienced by informal vendors. This study aims, therefore, to explore how vendors negotiate their identities, negotiate the terms of regulatory structure, challenge or reinforce social categories in Kitwe through understanding how encounters with regulation shape them.

1.2. Research Objectives

This study was guided by the research objectives below:

1. To explore how regulatory structures in Kitwe shape the lived experiences of street vendors, particularly in relation to their perceptions of legality, legitimacy, and marginality.
2. To examine how street vendors construct and negotiate social identities in response to regulator encounters and shifting governance practices.

1.3. Research Questions

For this study, the research questions are as follows:

1. How do street vendors in Kitwe experience and interpret regulatory structures, and what meanings do they attach to legality and enforcement in their everyday lives?
2. In what ways do regulatory encounters influence the construction, negotiation, and contestation of street vendors' social identities within the urban context of Kitwe?

The research unfolds across five principal components. The first introduces the study. The second reviews scholarship on informality, governance, and identity, which frames the research. The third outlines the methodology, combining phenomenological interviews, participant observation, and interpretive analysis. The fourth presents expected results, examining how vendors construct identities within regulatory

² Ibid, p. 45

³ Kaoma & Saili, 2023, p.7

⁴ Uwamahoro & Khoo (2025), pp. 652-653

⁵ Kehinde (2025),p.93

contexts. Finally, the conclusion highlights broader policy implications, stressing the need for regulations that recognize vendors as people rather than mere transactions. The study contributes to understanding urban informality and governance in African cities by moving beyond economic and administrative accounts. For residents excluded from wage labour, street vending has become a vital survival strategy. Yet, prevailing rules often portray vending as illegal or immoral, casting vendors in negative terms. This research demonstrates that regulation is not simply an objective technical measure of efficiency or legality. It can also function as a moral category, shaping judgments about inclusion and exclusion in the city. By positioning vending within governance debates, the study underscores how regulations influence identity and belonging. It calls for policies that acknowledge the humanity of vendors, offering insights into the lived realities of urban informality and its governance. This occurs within specific instruments in the Zambian context. In the context of Kitwe, the '*Local Government (Street Vending and Nuisances) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations*',⁶ effectively move vending into more closely supervised environments that allows the council to monitor this trading by setting up fixed sites licenses thereby controlling vendor locations. According to Uwamahoro & Khoo⁷, The vendor identified as 'entrepreneurs', 'caretakers,' or 'survivors', are also developed in response to these shifting regulatory landscapes through strategic acts of identity construction. Other research areas, including vendors' meaning making of legality, the ethics of enforcement, and the power dynamics of governance and regulation, will be scrutinized in the present study. As noted by Uwamahoro & Khoo,⁸ inconsistent governance can lead to uncertainty in terms of policy, and this leads vendors to adapt and resist. Furthermore, as indicated by Uwamahoro & Khoo,⁹ the research has a policy-making implication, and shows the importance of the vendor's meaning making of law enforcement.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Resilience and Collective Agency: Street Vending in Contested Urban Spaces of Kitwe

Resilience among street vendors is seen in their ability to keep selling despite urban pressures. Strategies such as shifting products, moving stands, relying on neighbors, and experimenting with new methods become routine survival tactics. Peimani & Kamalipour¹⁰ describe resilience as ongoing survival under restrictive rules. For example, In Dar es Salaam, vendors adapt routines when stalls are displaced, while in Cape Town, food sellers managed supplies during health crises, linking resilience to longer-term gains. The vendors develop fresh ways to attract customers and operate under restrictions. This includes, cashless payments, reusing urban spaces, and novel vending techniques illustrate this. For example, Informal cross-border traders (ICBTs) in Zimbabwe reshaped food networks during pandemic travel bans. According to Lemessa et al,¹¹ evening street selling in Ethiopia emerged as an adaptive response to poverty and marginalization. Adaptation builds on resilience and innovation. Vendors adjust operations as city settings change. Regulation shifts unpredictably, yet many continue through quick moves like relocating stands or altering timing. Studies by Peimani & Kamalipour¹² emphasize adaptation as crucial when cities change.

⁶ Statutory Instrument (S.I.) No. 12 of 2018

⁷ Uwamahoro & Khoo (2025), p. 645

⁸ Ibid. Pp.3-6

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Peimani & Kamalipour (2022), p.829

¹¹ Lemessa et al. (2021), pp.148-150

¹² Peimani & Kamalipour (2022), P. 829

Studies by Thulare & Moyo¹³ show that during COVID lockdowns, traders across southern Africa transformed routines to survive. Informal workers also band together, reasserting presence despite bans. Studies by Grinspun et al.¹⁴ highlight adaptation through coordinated policy efforts to strengthen resilience. In Kitwe, vending appears as both survival and resistance to fixed economic labels. Though Zambia initially outlawed outdoor vending, later statutes shifted rules. Jongh underscores how contested urban spaces reveal vendors' collective agency in reoccupying streets despite hostility. Studies by Jongh¹⁵ demonstrates how contested urban spaces in Kitwe reveal vendors' collective agency and resilience in reoccupying city streets despite regulatory hostility.

2.1.1 Resilience and informality in Kitwe

In the markets in Kitwe, street vendors return quickly even when chased away, which is a sign of quiet strength (resilience) under tight rules. According to Jongh,¹⁶ returning to disputed city spots means adaptation shaped by governance that folds shifting power into daily choices. Together, traders form ties not just for profit, but also for safety, speaking to officials when warnings arrive, standing together when removal seems near. Studies by Peimani & Kamalipour¹⁷ suggest that resilience and informality in the markets in Kitwe, street vendors return quickly even when chased away, which is a sign of quiet strength (resilience) under tight rules. According to Jongh,¹⁸ returning to disputed city spots means adaptation shaped by governance that folds shifting power into daily choices. Together, traders form ties not just for profit, but also for safety, speaking to officials when warnings arrive, standing together when removal seems near. According to Roever & Skinner,¹⁹ resilience links closely to how they absorb disruption while staying visible despite exclusion. Mutual support runs deep among vendors, often formed through consistent help and exchanged favors. This endurance is not just survival; it is a way of claiming space even when access feels denied. Judicial precedent reinforces this: in *Kapasa v Kitwe City Council*,²⁰ the High Court upheld council authority to fine and eject vendors, yet their persistence shows resilience beyond legal exclusions that because vendors talk to officials, overlap grows between rules, leading to validation of life built through daily exchange.

2.1.2 Governance, Marginality, and Everyday Negotiation

In Kitwe, the street vending economy is governed by Statutory Instrument (S.I),²¹ which formally banned vending outside specified markets, framed vendors as a public nuisance, and empowered councils to fine or eject them. These processes of governance reveal broader political contests over urban rule, with spaces prioritized over livelihoods. Regulations position vendors as "illegal traders," reinforcing their marginalized status. However, vendors resist by claiming that they contribute to the community. According to Peimani & Kamalipour,²² vendors claim a sense of identity and community through resilient adaptation of social identity theory (SIT). Their identity is fragile and shifting due to encounters with the state. Courts have reinforced this marginalization: in *The People v Lusaka City Council (Ex-Parte*

¹³ Thulare & Moyo (2021), pp.3-5

¹⁴ Grinspun et al. (2022)

¹⁵ Jongh (2021), p.45

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Peimani & Kamalipour (2022).

¹⁸ Jongh (2021).

¹⁹ Roever & Skinner (2016), p.359

²⁰ 2015 / HP/0678/[2015]ZMHC

²¹ No. 12 of 2018,

²² Peimani & Kamalipour (2022)

Vendors),²³ the High Court upheld council powers to eject vendors from Cairo Road, confirming vending outside designated markets as unlawful.

Similarly, in *Attorney General v Roy Clarke*,²⁴ the Supreme Court reinforced the state's authority in defining "public nuisance," a concept central to vending regulation. More recently, *Zambia Community Resources Board & 5 Others v Attorney General*²⁵ affirmed statutory powers of government bodies to regulate community activities, paralleling council enforcement of vending bans. Despite these rulings, vendors continue to thrive, largely because markets are overcrowded and the costs of obtaining licenses remain prohibitively high. Street vending activity is positioned within broader contestations over norms, networks, and power. It is both a tactic and a practice.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

Theory-influenced research methods gained importance in the mid-1900s as scholars established standards for structuring theoretical models into empirical study design, procedures, and analyses. A 'theory' is defined as a set of interrelated constructs, definitions, and propositions that provides a systematic perspective on phenomena by identifying relationships among variables to forecast or describe behavior.²⁶ According to Okangba, et al.²⁷ a 'theoretical framework' is "a set of concepts, theories, and background that facilitate the interpretation and contextualization of categories of analysis within research." The Frameworks matter regardless of method type such as qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, as they shape early study ideas by demonstrating the primary factors and their connections.²⁸ These organizing principles guide design choices and measurement tools, influencing direction before data collection begins. Though often unseen, frameworks frame understanding through logical patterns and definitions. Lux, et al.²⁹ emphasize that the theoretical framework links study objectives to methodology, creating coherence and relevance. Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides a critical lens. Gaffney & Hogg³⁰ argue that identity emerges not from individual traits but through placement within categories, shaping perceptions and actions. Steffens et al.³¹ demonstrate empirically that group membership informs self-perception, reactions to governance, and exclusionary behaviors. Studies by Recchi³² extends Social Identity Theory (SIT) into urban contexts, showing how belonging shapes everyday practices. Informal Economy Theory (IET) supplements this by situating urban street vending within structural frameworks that highlight its role in survival strategies and urban economies. Peimani & Kamalipour³³ review informal vending as integral to urban resilience. Uwamahoro & Khoo³⁴ analyze conflict between vendors and authorities in Sub-Saharan Africa, emphasizing relational and dynamic identities. Anupriya & Anuradha,³⁵ show vending as both survival mechanism and social order, resisting encroachment by structured markets.

²³ 2010/HP/0456 [2010] ZMHC

²⁴ 2004/SCZ/7/04[2004] ZMSC 27

²⁵ 2022/HP/0925 [2024] ZMHC

²⁶ Sreekumar's work (2024)

²⁷ Okangba, et al. (2026), p. 24

²⁸ Ravitch & Carl, (2019).

²⁹ Lux, et al. (2026), pp. 1-29

³⁰ Gaffney & Hogg (2017), p. 92

³¹ Steffens et al. (2017), pp. 303-335

³² Recchi (2021), p. 810

³³ Peimani & Kamalipour (2022), p. 829

³⁴ Uwamahoro & Khoo (2025), p. 648

³⁵ Anupriya & Anuradha (2021), pp. 45-62

Phenomenology further enriches this framework. Neubauer et al,³⁶ describe phenomenology as examining lived experience itself as an object of investigation, privileging human experience over abstract categories. This approach situates informality not only as economic agency but also as praxis with urban space, reclaiming and reworking that space under constraints. Together, these frameworks produce a holistic image of resilience among Kitwe's street vendors, integrating identity, socio-economic, and lived experience dimensions.

3.1.1 Linking Theories to Research Questions in Kitwe

Using Social Identity Theory (SIT) as the lens of analysis allows investigation into identity formation during regulatory redefinition. Uwamahoro & Khoo³⁷ provide insight into how vendors confer meaning to regulatory frameworks and legitimacy, useful for the first research question: *How do Kitwe's street vendors experience and interpret regulatory structures, and what meanings do they give to legality and enforcement?* Regulatory encounters are formative events that vendors negotiate and contest. For the second research question, *In what ways do regulatory encounters influence the formation, negotiation, and contestation of street vendors' social identity within Kitwe's urban context?* Social Identity Theory (SIT) conceptualizes identities as relational, dynamic, and interaction dependent.

According to Peimani & Kamalipour³⁸ Informal Economy Theory explains why vending persists despite restrictive legislation, situating street vending as a resilient form of informal urbanism that adapts to regulatory pressures while sustaining livelihoods. Studies by Anupriya & Anuradha³⁹ argue that vending, functions as survival mechanism and social order, not by adhering to formal regulations but by holding onto street space against encroachment. This theoretical framework integrates *Social Identity Theory*, *Informal Economy Theory* and *Phenomenology*, alongside empirical insights from Peimani & Kamalipour.⁴⁰ Together, they provide a coherent lens for analyzing resilience, adaptation, and identity among Kitwe's street vendors under Statutory Instrument and judicial precedents such as *Kapasa v Kitwe City Council*; this integrated perspective underscores how informality functions not merely as economic survival but as a negotiated space of legality, social belonging, and everyday governance. This information is illustrated in the table below in table 1:

Table No. 1: Linking Theories and Research Questions in the study of street vendors in Kitwe

Theory / Frame	Focus / Contributions	Linked Research Questions
Social Identity Theory	Explains how vendors construct, negotiate and redefine their identities in response to regulatory structures. Frames identity as dynamic relational and shaped through governance counters	RQ2: In what ways do regulatory encounters influence the construction, negotiation and contestation of street vendors? Social identities within the urban context of Kitwe.
Informal Economy Theory	Situates street vending within broader socio-economic	RQ 1: How do street vendors in Kitwe experience and interpret

³⁶ Neubauer et al. (2019), pp. 90–97

³⁷ Uwamahoro & Khoo, (2025)

³⁸ Peimani & Kamalipour (2022), p. 829

³⁹ Anupriya & Anuradha, (2021).

⁴⁰ Peimani & Kamalipour, (2022)

	contexts. Explains persistence of informal trade despite restrictive regulation. Highlights vending as survival strategy and social practice challenging urban order.	regulatory structures, and in what meanings do they attach to legality and enforcement in their everyday lives?
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Source: The Researcher (2026)

4.0 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework provides the overarching structure within which the key concepts, theories and ideas of this study are organized and interconnected. According to Van der Walddt,⁴¹ a conceptual framework is an intellectual map, which states and conceptualizes the problem to be studied and how it is formulated and how they are connected. This study employed a Social Identity Theory paradigm framed within a phenomenological philosophy and situated within Informal Economy Theory in order to investigate how vendors of the informal economy of Kitwe meaningfully construct identity, particularly as informed by the regulatory structures of the informal economy of Kitwe. The vendor voices are privileged to describe regulation's impact on their sense of identity and to elucidate the everyday intersections of regulation and identity. The studies of Uwamahoro & Khoo⁴² illustrate how street vendors "craft" themselves as entrepreneur, caretaker or survivor in the midst of changing regulatory environments. Furthermore, Peimani & Kamalipour⁴³ demonstrated that vendors use resilience and adaptability as survival mechanisms in the face of restrictive urban policy. Lastly, the work of Saquing et al.⁴⁴ provide insights into coping mechanisms that sustain their livelihoods and offer policy recommendations. Additionally, Salamandane et al.⁴⁵ empirically showed the effects of socioeconomic constraints on vendor resilience. Furthermore, Chiila, et al⁴⁶ explore the social, economic, and environmental challenges to the adaption of climate change among youths in street situations in Lusaka's Central Business District (CBD). Their study demonstrates how vulnerability intersects with informality, shaping adaptation strategies influenced by regulatory pressures and environmental realities, thereby linking regulation, resilience, and identity within vendors' everyday lives. Using phenomenology, it reveals regulation shaping lived experience, resilience enabling survival, and identity formed socially within Kitwe's informal economy. This is illustrated and presented in the figure below Fig. 1.1.

⁴¹ Van der Walddt (2024), pp.1-2

⁴² Uwamahoro & Khoo (2025), pp.3-6

⁴³ Peimani & Kamalipour (2022), p.829

⁴⁴ Saquing et al. (2026), pp.10-14

⁴⁵ Salamandane et al. (2023), pp.5-7

⁴⁶ Chiila et al. (2025), pp.55-70

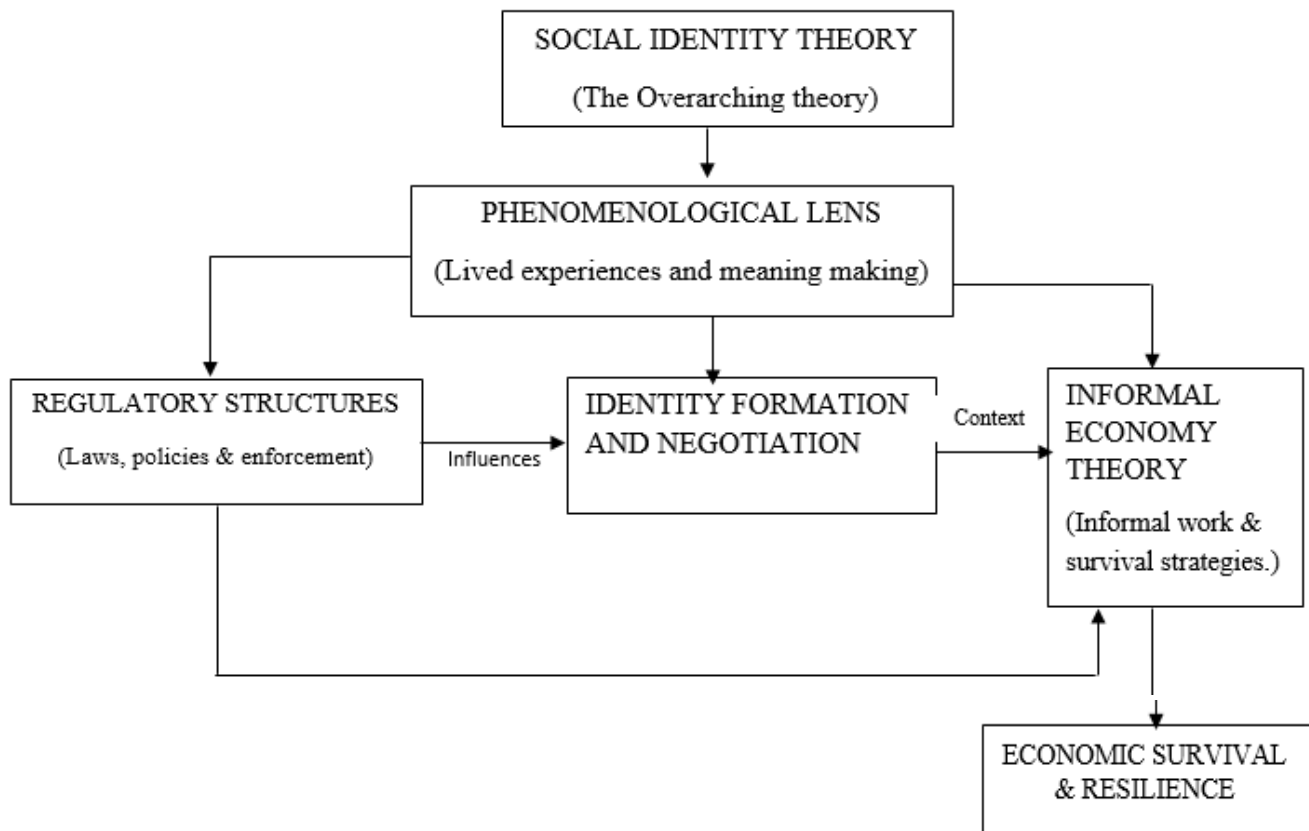


Figure. No. 1.1 Conceptual Framework.

Source: The Researcher (2026).

4.1 Philosophical Underpinning

This study adopts a qualitative method. The researcher chose this method because it helps explain people's experiences in detail, instead of reducing them to numbers. The study is based on an interpretivist view, which means reality is understood as something people create together in their daily lives. Creswell & Poth⁴⁷ explain that interpretivism focuses on how people make sense of events, making it useful for complex social issues like informal trade. The main foundation of this study is phenomenology. Phenomenology comes from the work of Husserl,⁴⁸ who argued that to understand something, we must look at how people experience it. Creswell describes phenomenology as a way of "describing the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon." Emiliussen, et al.⁴⁹ highlight that bracketing remains a central concept in phenomenological qualitative research, stressing the importance of recognizing the embeddedness of research practices. Williams⁵⁰ argues that phenomenological methods in qualitative research must balance philosophical authenticity with practical adaptability, ensuring that lived experiences are captured without rigid adherence to Husserlian prescriptions. Beck⁵¹ further underscores that phenomenology provides a methodological foundation for qualitative inquiry, ensuring rigor while remaining sensitive to lived experience. Phenomenology is often

⁴⁷ Creswell & Poth (2016), p.96

⁴⁸ Husserl (2025), pp.197-220

⁴⁹ Emiliussen, et al. (2021), p.4

⁵⁰ Williams (2021), p.370

⁵¹ Beck (2019), p.22

seen as a bridge between philosophy and practice. Parodi⁵² notes that it helps capture the richness of human life in fields such as education, sociology, and governance. Sokolowski⁵³ explains that phenomenology aims to uncover the “essence” of experiences by examining how people interpret events. Christensen et al.⁵⁴ add that phenomenology distinguishes between knowledge we have before experience (a priori) and knowledge gained through experience (a posteriori). Beyond basic description, Peimani & Kamalipour⁵⁵ point out that phenomenology allows not just accounting for experiences but also for their understanding, opening up possibilities for the unearthing of hidden meanings. Studies by Mazani⁵⁶ argues that management strategies toward street vending in Chipata reveal critical tensions between regulation and practice, offering insights into governance and informality in Zambian cities. Phenomenological research shows Saquing, et al.⁵⁷ that street food vendors, negotiating ever tighter regulatory frameworks, adopt coping mechanisms and interpret their experiences in ways that are not immediately accessible. In wider urban systems, Cociña & Landesman⁵⁸ note that phenomenological theory offers a way to understand climatic and regulatory forces within informal settlements as experienced, rather than just described. Recent scholarship continues to affirm this relevance. Pula⁵⁹ argues that phenomenology continues to matter in sociological theory, especially in its role of grounding social phenomena in lived experience. Raza⁶⁰ emphasizes that phenomenology remains vital in sociological research, offering both empirical and theoretical insights into lived experience and governance. Similarly, Zhang, et al.⁶¹ highlight how phenomenology uncovers cultural meanings in social issues, bridging structuralist and interpretivist approaches. Jongh⁶² notes this same point⁶³ as he tracks in Kitwe the extent to which governance forms influence how vendors relate to place and to themselves through phenomenological analysis. This approach fits the current study because it examines how street vendors in Kitwe experience government regulations and how these rules shape their social identity. Antonini & Achilli⁶⁴ argue that phenomenology is useful for showing how governance affects people’s ability to act and make choices. Peimani & Kamalipour⁶⁵ emphasizes analyzing the informal economy alongside firms’ struggles, reinforcing qualitative research in deprived areas. Cociña & Landesman⁶⁶ emphasize qualitative analysis of transforming informal settlements under climate and governance pressures. Recent literature highlights phenomenological and qualitative methodologies grounding urban resilience research.

5.0 Methodology

Lived experience under governance was approached through ethnographically grounded qualitative meth-

⁵² Parodi (2019), p.112

⁵³ Sokolowski (2000), p.3

⁵⁴ Christensen et al. (2011), p.45

⁵⁵ Peimani & Kamalipour (2022), pp.829-835

⁵⁶ Mazani (2024), pp. 55–60

⁵⁷ Saquing, et al. (2026), pp. 245–263

⁵⁸ Cociña & Landesman (2025), pp. 33–52

⁵⁹ Pula (2022), p.420

⁶⁰ Raza (2024), p.190

⁶¹ Zhang, et al. (2024), p.520

⁶² Jongh (2021), pp.45-52

⁶³ Jongh (2021), pp. 115–140

⁶⁴ Antonini & Achilli (2025), pp.229-231

⁶⁵ Peimani & Kamalipour (2022), pp.829-835

⁶⁶ Cocina & Landesman (2025), pp.33-52

odologies. Phenomenology provided the philosophical lens guiding data collection and analysis. The researcher employed Semi-structured interviews and participant observation to gather data. According to Pin,⁶⁷ semi structured interviews are guided by a grid of questions used in a very flexible manner, enabling both systematic data collection and exploration of personal perspectives. As suggested by Roosmeier,⁶⁸ participant observation is a flexible, methodologically plural approach that allows researchers to interpret everyday cultural structures by temporarily living within a group. Studies by Williams⁶⁹ suggest that phenomenological methods must balance philosophical authenticity with practical adaptability, ensuring that lived experiences are captured without rigid adherence to Husserlian prescriptions. Emiliussen, et al.,⁷⁰ highlight that bracketing remains a central concept in phenomenological qualitative research, stressing the importance of recognizing the embeddedness of research practices. In recent work, Villanueva⁷¹ describes phenomenology of public governance as a reflexive description of realities and facts experienced without assuming established theories, making it useful for analyzing governance structures. Raza⁷² emphasizes phenomenology's importance in sociological research, offering both empirical and theoretical insights into lived experience. Fernandez & Crowell⁷³ add that phenomenology today is unified by its methodological approach, which continues to evolve across diverse topics such as governance, identity, and social complexity. Building on this, justifying phenomenology for the study context highlights its value in understanding how urban governance influences the sense of self among street vendors in Kitwe. Importantly, Jongh,⁷⁴ demonstrates that phenomenology enables analysis of changing governance rationalities and how vendors experience them, emphasizing displacement, negotiation, and reoccupation as central lived realities. Moreover, Jongh⁷⁵ extends analysis of contested urban spaces in Kitwe, showing governance rationalities shape vendors' claims and agency, as phenomenology reveals identity and resilience reshaped through place. In addition, Uwamahoro & Khoo,⁷⁶ Highlight how urban development policies across Sub Saharan Africa exacerbate vendor vulnerabilities while surfacing resilience strategies. Governance conflicts underscore phenomenology's importance, grounding resilience in vendor narratives reshaped by governance transitions.

5.1 Research Design

Starting small, street vendors in Kitwe may seem out of sight, but listening closely reveals how they truly live. Research like this relies on personal stories, peeking beneath surface facts to uncover real meanings. Literature by Creswell & Poth⁷⁷ point out what makes sense shows up when experience is described carefully. Additionally, studies by Jongh⁷⁸ writes further that deeper understanding comes from letting people's thoughts and feelings steer research directions. From an ethnographic standpoint, though, vendors' tales stretch past financial gain. According to Chisanga & Hakasenke,⁷⁹ street vending connects to taxes and government control, while everyday life shows how community ties and official rules mix,

⁶⁷ Pin (2023), p. 4

⁶⁸ Rossmeier (2025), p.788

⁶⁹ Williams (2021), p. 370

⁷⁰ Emiliussen, et al. (2021), p.4

⁷¹ Villanueva (2021), pp.91-107

⁷² Raza (2024), p.190

⁷³ Fernandez & Crowell (2021), p.120

⁷⁴ Jongh (2021), pp.67-89

⁷⁵ Jongh (2022), pp.45-52

⁷⁶ Uwamahoro & Khoo (2025), pp.3-6

⁷⁷ Creswell & Poth (2016), p.96

⁷⁸ Jongh (2021), p.92

⁷⁹ Chisanga & Hakasenke (2024), p.12

shaping how vendors work and live. Without clear procedures, findings might miss their mark. Instead of leaning on past views, researchers can use the strategy of Creswell & Poth,⁸⁰ which is a phenomenological case study design to let everyday reality emerge. This approach fits well within ethnography's spirit of discovery. Chisanga and Hakasenke⁸¹ suggest practical steps too: access must be negotiated, policies customized, because forcing control alone only deepens conflict. Accordingly, Chisanga & Hakasenke⁸² later show how uneven enforcement keeps systems in flux - this instability comes from ongoing battles between order and survival. Boundaries matter too when it comes to shaping this kind of research. One place to start lies within Yin,⁸³ there, he warns, complexity often grows from specifics on the ground. Sharp focus helps reveal small details while keeping reasoning firmly planted. Instead of broad sweeps, precision uncovers texture. Nakweti⁸⁴ points out that these places often operate in the shadows, as "gray zones" where laws are unclear and everyday life depends on personal connections and whom people know. Literature by Mtisi⁸⁵ Emphasizes constructing interpretations from conversations through systematic steps ensuring validity. Kitwe's case shows street vending as identity and resilience, enriching qualitative inquiry on governance and belonging. Firstly, semi structured interviews, As Naz, et al.⁸⁶ explain, semi structured interviewing provides systematic access to lived meanings. Likewise, Mashuri⁸⁷ emphasizes its value for exploring participant perspectives. Participant observation and interpretative phenomenological analysis enabled analysis of meanings produced by sellers and consumers. Moreover, McLeod et al.,⁸⁸ highlight phenomenology's effectiveness, yielding detailed insights into vendors' resistance and identity negotiation. Concerning Objective 1, semi structured interviews were central to the methodology. According to Naz, et al.⁸⁹ interview guides provide a structured yet flexible framework for eliciting narratives. Similarly, Dejonckheere & Vaughn,⁹⁰ argue that semi structured interviews allow participants to speak in their own language while enabling researchers to probe emergent themes. This approach gained greater depth than pre-coded categories yielding rich qualitative data on how vendors interpreted and contested governance. The secondly, the method of data collection was participant observation. For Objective 2, *participant observation* was indispensable. As MacLeod et al.,⁹¹ observe immersion in lived environments enables researchers to capture subtle dynamics of identity work. Building on this, MacLeod et al.,⁹² emphasize that discourse analysis in health professions education demonstrates how methodological reflexivity strengthens qualitative inquiry. Furthermore, MacLeod & Cameron⁹³ argue that embodiment and organizational theories provide critical insights into identity negotiation, reinforcing the interpretive power of phenomenological approaches. According to Hadjimichael et al.⁹⁴ Everyday life of vendors, through their embodiment of bureaucratic identity work and the materiality of this practice,

⁸⁰ Creswell & Poth (2016), p.96

⁸¹ Chisanga & Hakasenke (2024), p.12

⁸² Ibid, p.15

⁸³ Yin (2015), p.81

⁸⁴ Nakweti (2023), p.3

⁸⁵ Mtisi (2022), p.6

⁸⁶ Naz, et al. (2022), pp. 42-52

⁸⁷ Mashuri (2022), pp. 15-23

⁸⁸ McLeod et al. (2023), pp. 120-128

⁸⁹ Naz, et al. (2022), pp. 42-52

⁹⁰ Dejonckheere & Vaughn (2019), pp.3-5

⁹¹ MacLeod et al. (2023), pp. 120-128

⁹² Idem, (2024), pp.1058-1070

⁹³ MacLeod & Cameron (2025), pp.1029-1031

⁹⁴ Hadjimichael et al., 2024, pp.545-570

revealed lived experience and identity negotiation within regulatory encounters. Then, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used for the analysis of each objective, thereby ensuring methodological consistency across the study. Owens⁹⁵ explains that IPA is well suited to phenomenological inquiry since it accounts for relational and emergent qualities of human experience. By contrast, descriptive approaches risk overlooking complex processes underlying lived experience. McLeod⁹⁶ further demonstrates IPA's utility in uncovering phenomenological significance within participants' accounts of social identity, enabling deeper meaning-making. While interviews presented narratives about regulation and vendor identity, observation demonstrated vendors' embodied experiences of negotiating identity. Literature by Meydan & Akkas⁹⁷ argue that triangulation strengthens methodological rigor and ensures a holistic understanding of lived experience. In addition, Onwuegbuzie⁹⁸ highlights that methodological innovation, including integration of multiple approaches, enhances the robustness of qualitative inquiry. Thus, combining semi structured interviews, participant observation, and IPA generated a contextualized and richly textured account of vendors' lived experiences.

5.2 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to this study, underscoring trust, integrity, and respect in qualitative inquiry. As Boden et al.⁹⁹ emphasize, informed consent, protection from harm, and the right to withdraw are foundational to safeguarding participants and ensuring credibility. These procedures were not treated as formalities but as relational practices that enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings. Three principles guided the research: informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, and respect for participants. Informed consent was approached as an ongoing dialogical process. Klykken¹⁰⁰ argues that consent must remain a dialogue about purpose, risks, and benefits, enabling participants' agency and self-expression. Privacy and confidentiality were equally critical to establishing trust. Fernandez & Crowell¹⁰¹ highlight the ethical duty to uphold transparency and integrity in qualitative research, particularly in maintaining anonymity and protecting data integrity. Respect for participants formed the ethical foundation of this study. Israel¹⁰² stresses that ethical research requires treating participants with dignity, avoiding harm, and being sensitive to cultural and social contexts. Together, these principles demonstrate that ethical research is not merely procedural but relational, ensuring trustworthiness and credibility in the findings.

5.3 Population and Sampling

5.3.1 Population

The population includes all street traders in Kitwe's Central Business District (CBD), encompassing licensed market vendors and those in unregulated spaces. This area operates under shifting policy and regulation, making it central to understanding governance, trader practices, and contested urban identities. Research by Willie¹⁰³ explains that a 'target population' can be defined as "all those elements in the entire population who share the characteristics of the study and to whom the study findings shall be generalized." For this, one must carefully choose the criteria for the sample based on the research goal.

⁹⁵ Owens (2026), pp.77-80

⁹⁶ McLeod (2023), pp. 88-90

⁹⁷ Meydan & Akkas (2024), pp. 101-132

⁹⁸ Onwuegbuzie (2020), pp.12-15

⁹⁹ Boden et al. (2019), p. 44

¹⁰⁰ Klykken (2020), p. 118

¹⁰¹ Fernandez and Crowell (2021), p. 67

¹⁰² Israel (2018), p. 92

¹⁰³ Willie (2024), pp. 75-79

5.3.2 Sampling

According to Creswell,¹⁰⁴ a 'Sample' is defined as 'a subset of individuals or items taken from a larger population, used to represent the whole.' A sample therefore comprises individuals selected from the population of interest to whom the researcher intends to generalize the findings. In this project, the sample size was twelve. In this study, the sample consisted of 12 participants (street vendors) selected from Kitwe's Central Business District (CBD). The starting point of this investigation was the identification of informants with direct, practical knowledge of the phenomenon under study, for which purposive sampling was employed. Street vendors in Kitwe's commercial centre were selected to examine identity and regulation, reflecting shifting policies and diverse responses compliance, resistance, adaptation, and negotiation within contested governance contexts.¹⁰⁵ Within the sample, variety was ensured across age, gender, and vending styles, covering differences in how often, how long, where, and why vendors worked. This mix showed informality as everyday urban experience. According to Peimani & Kamalipour,¹⁰⁶ the contributions of informants were organized to reveal diverse positions and realities among vendors, illustrating the varied practices that constitute informality. In addition, the research engaged broader theoretical perspectives, either by dialoguing with or by critically contrasting phenomenological approaches. Studies by Jongh¹⁰⁷ show that debates about African cities often focus on how informality, rules, and identity connect. In Kitwe's Central Business District (CBD), key roads like Matuka Avenue, Mindolo Road, Independence Avenue, Central Street, Obote Avenue, and Chibuluma Road form the city's core. These busy streets host vendors and frequent encounters with officials. They act as centers of trade and regulation, shaping how people survive and how identities are contested. Daily activity along these corridors reflects wider struggles over power and control in the city. Purposive sampling in such dense urban environments captures the complexity of informality and contested regulation, highlighting heterogeneity and lived realities that enrich the study's findings. Recent scholarship by Mulder et al¹⁰⁸ emphasizes purposive sampling in dense urban corridors to capture informality's complexity and contested regulation. Diversity underscores heterogeneity, highlighting participants' experiences, while theoretical perspectives and diverse cases support understanding informal economies despite challenges of categorization and generalization. Although purposive methods have been criticized for their lack of probability to reflect population characteristics, Patton¹⁰⁹ notes that this issue can be mitigated through pre-specified inclusion and exclusion criteria, thereby ensuring consistency and reliability. More recently, Nyimbili & Nyimbili¹¹⁰ highlight maximum variation sampling as a way to capture diverse perspectives within informal economies. Similarly, Tembo-Silungwe et al,¹¹¹ argues that purposive sampling in urban governance research is essential for capturing contested power relations and lived realities of regulation.

5.4 Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, allowing the voice of the participants to be captured accurately at the outset. A thematic coding paradigm was then applied systematically to the transcripts. This helped to

¹⁰⁴ Creswell (2017), pp.148-149

¹⁰⁵ Jongh (2021), pp.45-47

¹⁰⁶ Peimani & Kamalipour (2022), pp.12-14

¹⁰⁷ Jongh (2022), pp.359-361

¹⁰⁸ Mulder et al.(2024), pp.15-17

¹⁰⁹ Patton (2014), p.264

¹¹⁰ Nyimbiri & Nyimbiri (2024), pp.95-96

¹¹¹ Tembo-Silungwe et al. (2019)

categorize the transcripts and allowed meaningful statements to be selected and grouped into themes. The coding was performed professionally. It allowed patterns to emerge that illuminated the participants' experiences. As Emiliussen et al.¹¹² have pointed out from a phenomenological qualitative perspective; analyses that recognize and acknowledge the participant's embedment are more authentic in thematic analysis. Following this, the themes were explicated in the text to make the themes, meanings related to regulation and identity, which participants attributed to their everyday life, clear. Williams¹¹³ has argued that a balance between philosophical correctness and methodological efficacy is an important tenet of qualitative work that was observed concerning this research. Also noteworthy is literature written by Raza¹¹⁴ highlighting how epistemological humility is necessary in phenomenological analysis to ensure that interpretations are kept grounded in the world experienced. A process of phenomenological reduction informed this study's method, as the researches suspended judgment and allowed only participants' stories, unfiltered, into the data and analysis. This approach, as described by Villanueva¹¹⁵ provided a reflective stance to understand an otherwise opaque reality the vendors' experiences with regulation. To add more depth and strength to the results, observational data was included and integrated into the interview data from real world enforcement practices and coping mechanisms that confirmed and added explanation to vendors' narratives. Observations and interviews were triangulated to assess perceptions and actual practices related to the formation of their identity. Interpretive analysis across participants yielded essential meaning that portrayed the participants' lived realities. This methodology corresponds to the ideas by Fernandez & Crowell,¹¹⁶ stating that, in contemporary qualitative analysis, phenomenological inquiry remains a crucial, evolving approach.

6.0 Findings

6.1 Themes in the Literature

6.1.1 Regulatory Atmospheres

Recent literature emphasizes that street vending is conditioned by regulatory frameworks such as municipal bylaws and national laws, laws that criminalize trading within the urban public sphere and enable authorities to prosecute and forcibly evict vendors. Despite these punitive laws, however there is considerable variation in the extent to which authorities actually enforce these laws, between toleration and repression. Thus, the regulatory atmosphere can shift unpredictably and unpredictably for vendors.

6.1.2 Strategic Identity Work

Similarly, some vendors strategically invoked constitutional protections under the *Zambian Constitution (Amendment) Act, 2016*, which guarantees the right to work and to engage in trade or business under its¹¹⁷ Bill of Rights, citing livelihood rights even in unofficial spaces, thereby maneuvering in and out of enforcement depending on surveillance and discretion. The *2016 Constitution of Zambia*¹¹⁸ affirms that every person has the right to work and to engage in trade or business, though subject to regulation in the interest of public order, health, and safety. Importantly, when vendors take to the streets, they often claim they are serving community needs and therefore acting legitimately, even when legal frameworks classify

¹¹² Emiliussen et al. (2021), p.4

¹¹³ Williams (2021), p.390

¹¹⁴ Raza (2024), p.190

¹¹⁵ Villanueva (2021), pp.91-93

¹¹⁶ Fernandez & Creswell (2021), p.120

¹¹⁷ Bill of Rights, Articles 64-66, (Amended) *Zambian constitution of 2016*

¹¹⁸ *2016 constitution of Zambia -Act No. 2 of 2016, Bill of Rights*

their activities otherwise. In practice, how vendors perceive themselves shifts in response to enforcement strategies where strict or lenient officers shape whether they operate openly or remain guarded. Much of this juggling reflects patterns outlined in Social Identity Theory, yet it bends with setting and circumstance, as individuals frequently resist labels, they find it stigmatizing.¹¹⁹ For example, in cities such as Delhi, vendors during lockdowns negotiated with officials, asserted their presence, and continued trading despite persistent marginalization, illustrating how exclusion became embedded in daily reality.¹²⁰ This moment underscored that resistance was not fixed but adapted according to necessity. Subsequently, pressure from authorities reshaped practices while vendors leaned on collective solidarity, stretched informal credit, and relied on networks to sustain livelihoods with dignity.¹²¹ Likewise, some vendors strategically invoked constitutional protections under the Zambian Bill of Rights¹²² citing rights to livelihood even in unofficial spaces, thereby maneuvering in and out of enforcement depending on surveillance and discretion.¹²³ Ultimately, these recurring cases illustrate that vendor identity is never static; it is continuously reshaped by rules, hardship, endurance, and the dynamics of power. Taken together, the evidence demonstrates that identity work among vendors is a dynamic negotiation, bending under regulation, surviving through resilience, and transforming in response to authority.

6.1.3 Moral Judgments in Enforcement

Moral judgments in vending governance portray street vending as disruptive to urban modernization, with authorities prioritizing spatial and social control over livelihoods. Vendors, however, resist this framing by asserting vending's social and economic contributions, challenging portrayals of disorder and reinforcing its role in identity, resilience, and the contested urban order. In the paper, the paper presents, **Jongh**¹²⁴ situates vendors within cultural and economic conflict, showing moral judgments underpin enforcement, yet vendors resist by framing their work as socially and economically legitimate livelihood practice.

6.1.4 Persistence of Informality

Despite legal restrictions, the informal has become embedded as a survival strategy and as a social practice in deprived and marginalized urban context the omnipresent form of urban informality is arguably informal vending on the streets, while market exclusion and poor provision of market space can also be used to explain the persistence of illegal vending.¹²⁵

6.1.5 Lived Experiences and Coping Strategies

Studies using phenomenology show vendors are not passive victims of exclusion or regulation; instead, they proactively resist and negotiate governance, asserting agency in shaping livelihoods and urban belonging. Hence coping mechanisms in relation to state regulation as noted in studies by Curran et al.¹²⁶ include relocation, informal negotiations with authorities and other forms of coping including collective resistance. In the event of mass protest, vendors in Kitwe who lose licensing lose their licenses, yet still vend despite threats from the police and the local market board and this evidence reveals a coping strategy amongst a population for long associated with resilience and quick adaptation.¹²⁷ This evidence can then

¹¹⁹ Bhattacharjee, Sattar & Sharma (2025), pp. 698-700

¹²⁰ Verma & Singh (2023), pp.12-15

¹²¹ Bhattacharjee et al. (2025), pp.698-700

¹²² No. 2 of 2016, Articles 64-66

¹²³ Vishnu & Nasheer (2024), pp. 45-48

¹²⁴ Jongh (2021), p. 160

¹²⁵ Peimani & Kamalipour (2022), pp.830-832

¹²⁶ Curran et al. (2024), pp. 52-54

¹²⁷ Jongh (2022), pp.389-409; Jongh & Banda (2025), pp.5-9

be used as stepping stone to examine wider issues related to governance of privacy in research amongst vendors.

7.0 Conclusion

Regulatory Structures and Social Identity examined the influence of regulatory frameworks on the daily realities of street vendors in Kitwe, highlighting how vendors negotiate and constitute social identities under shifting governance regimes. Regulation in Kitwe is not merely administrative but continuously shapes vendors' lived realities. Enforcement practices are highly irregular, alternating between tolerance and punishment, thereby creating uncertainty for vendors. In response, vendors adapt by strategically claiming legitimacy, using rhetorical argumentation and practical acts to demonstrate the necessity of their services. These actions destabilize prevailing moral judgments around regulation by making their utility visible through survival and defiance strategies. Tactics such as relocation, informal arrangements with officials, and collective resistance illustrate resilience and coping mechanisms embedded in everyday practice. Regulation, therefore, does not simply suppress informality but paradoxically hard wires informal life into governance structures. From a phenomenological perspective, policies are perceived socially rather than neutrally, shaping identity and resilience. These findings carry significant implications for policy and research. Exclusionary regulation fails to remediate vendors' economic and social conditions and instead renders their contributions invisible. Nevertheless, vendors assert visibility and redefine identities despite exclusion, while exclusionary policies weaken governance legitimacy. The framework offers insights for inclusive urban governance in African cities, examining regulation, informality, and citizenship, and emphasizing inclusive approaches as indispensable for sustainable urban development.

8.0 Abbreviations or Acronyms

IPA	:	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
CBU	:	Copperbelt University
OCC	:	Operation Clean City
ICBTs	:	Informal Cross Border Traders
S I	:	Statutory Instrument
SIT	:	Social Identity Theory
IET	:	Informal Economy Theory
CBD	:	Central Business District

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