
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Study on the Post Pandemic Marketing Mix Responses of Micro Food Businesses in Laguna, Philippines

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| ABSTRACT

The study identified the marketing mix responses of micro-businesses and the respective reasons for implementation within Laguna, specifically in Cabuyao and Santa Rosa City. Subsequently reviewing the market and environmental factors and the marketing mix of the food industry, the researchers pursued a qualitative case study, data saturation, key informant approach, and thematic analysis in interviewing and interpreting the responses of ten micro-businesses. Product Development (Improvement) in the product variable; Cost-based Pricing in the price variable; and word-of-mouth, personal selling, digital media, and network media in the promotion variable, while being near to suppliers and consumers when the distribution is concerned. This is in place of the consumer's frugality and decreased demand, raw material shortages, and supply constraints due to restricted importations, Ukraine and Russia conflict, price inflation/fluctuations causing the commodities' price increase, customer bargains, consumer complaints, consumer demographics, consumer preferences, consumption of technological mediums, and the competitor's post-pandemic marketing mix responses.

| KEYWORDS

Marketing Mix, Post Pandemic, Micro Business, Consumer Behavior, Strategies.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The Philippines entered the early stages of the post-pandemic, an era in which people in all age groups have developed partial immunity to the virus (Upadhyay, 2020). Metro Manila and 38 other areas (including Laguna under Region 4A) were subjugated in the restrictions and protocols by February 2022 under alert level 1 (Philippine News Agency, 2022; Tomacruz, 2022). In the lowest alert level, all workplaces, establishments, and vehicles may operate and accommodate at full capacity. Although people should wear facemasks, there is no necessary paper-based or digital tracing done when entering commercial buildings and proof of vaccination must be presented for entry when attending mass gatherings or indoor activities (Ranada, 2022; Tomacruz, 2022; Zinampan, 2020). Hence, the researchers claim that this would affect numerous business sectors, leading the latter to implement a modified marketing mix in the post-pandemic.

The refined 4Ps marketing mix idea (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion) was introduced by McCarthy (1960). Products are (in)tangible things offered and marketed by businesses for usage and are metaphorically portrayed as the ammunitions to wage war against competitors (Kotler, 1984; Low & Tan, 1995). Price refers to the employed methods by businesses to levy a financial rate in exchange for the products (Chiliya et al., 2014; Mawardani & Sodikin, 2020; Tinker, 2003). The place is the location where the product or service is distributed by the trader and can be purchased or made available to the customers (Basera et al., 2007; Ellitan, 2021; Goi, 2009). Promotion is the balanced approach of advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, and public relations to conduct the company's selling activities (Dellyana & Laraswati, 2016).

On the other hand, the market and environmental forces in the industry enable the management to formulate action plans regarding the marketing mix of the enterprise (Magrath, 1986). The market forces are (1) Trade Behavior, which explains the motivations, practices, and attitudes of the organization's wholesalers/retailers; (2) Competitors' Position and Behavior specifying the market share, number, size, strength, motivations, attitudes, technological variables, social elements, products offered, and pricing degrees of (in)direct competition and the industry structure that the enterprise engages; (3) Governmental Behavior like implementing regulations on the market's products, prices, competitive activities, and promotion; and (4) Consumer Behavior (e.g., lifestyle, purchasing motivations, habits, attitudes) (Borden, 1984). The environmental forces are (1) the Political environment; (2) the Economic environment; (3) the Technological environment; (4) the Social and Cultural environment; and (5) the Competitive environment (Devi & Triyuni, 2021; Lekhanya & Mason, 2013; Low & Tan, 1995).

Few local publications focused on the pre-pandemic marketing mix model of micro-food businesses (Amurao et al., 2014; Añonuevo et al., 2020; Claveria & Mendoza, 2021; Domingo, 2018; Mercado & Mercado, 2016). However, there is a possibility that the pre-pandemic marketing practices may have changed in the post-pandemic period. Moreover, there are foreign studies regarding micro-businesses in the post-pandemic environment (Boro, 2022; Gupta & Mukherjee, 2022; Kureethara et al., 2021). This includes the strategic framework proposed by Fabeil et al. (2020), stating that micro-businesses would deal with the post-crisis phase by conducting (1) business model/concept reconstructions; (2) business plan/model modifications; (3) new business investments; and (4) updates on the information regarding the segmented market; intersecting with Recovering and Restoring crisis phases designed by Cook (2015).

Nevertheless, to the researcher's knowledge, there are no local studies about the marketing mix of the micro-businesses and the corresponding factors of its execution in the post-pandemic environment. This has led the researchers to (1) specify the common marketing mix (product, price, place, & promotion) responses utilized by micro food businesses to transition to the post-pandemic circumstances prevalent within Cabuyao and Santa Rosa, Laguna; and (2) identify the factors that have led micro food businesses to carry out the marketing mix (product, price, place, and promotion) responses in the post-pandemic circumstances prevalent within Cabuyao and Santa Rosa, Laguna.

Hence, the study was constructed as follows. First, the existing literature was reviewed regarding the 4Ps marketing mix (product, price, place promotion) and the respective market and environmental factors of the food industry. Second, the researchers pursued a qualitative case study, data saturation, key informant approach, non-probability sampling, and purposive sampling in data gathering. Third, thematic analysis was applied to interpret the responses, leading the researchers to draw conclusions, recommendations, and a proposed model that partly support the framework illustrated by Fabeil et al. (2020) about the recovery and restoration of micro-businesses during the post-crisis phase.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Product Variable of the Food Industry

The food sector gives importance to product innovations/development to address the consumers' purchasing behavior and changing preferences, heterogeneous resources, limited marketing opportunities prevalent, and external market conditions in the industry (García et al., 2014; Grunert, 2005; Pooya & Soltani-Fesaghandis, 2018). Hence, food producers highlight the product's quality in the growth and decline phase of the product life cycle (Alizadeh et al., 2017). Particularly, fast-food establishments consider the taste, nutrition, quality, and type (adult-size/kiddie meal) of the consumable item (Anderson & He, 2009; Lin, 2011). Family-style or fine-dining restaurants on the other hand serve diverse, tasty, well-packaged foods that meet or exceed an individual's satisfaction and demand (Ababio et al., 2017; Devi & Triyuni, 2021; Domingo, 2018; Rampal, 2018). Yet, micro-businesses supplied, produced, and/or distributed fresh, clean, and properly stored foods by performing product planning and development with ease to construct new, innovative, or imitated commodities (Chiliya et al., 2014; Claveria & Mendoza, 2021; Lekhanya & Mason, 2013; Mercado & Mercado, 2016). MSMEs also offer food products that are different from their competitors (Añonuevo et al., 2020). And some MSMEs offer food products that are like their competitors as the attributes of the good are deemed insignificant to customer patronage (Basera et al., 2007).

2.2 The Price Variable of the Food Industry

Cost-plus pricing is one of the pricing responses employed by food businesses in reviewing internal variables (i.e., production cost, organizational objectives, etc.) and external variables (i.e. consumer perception, inflation, etc.) (Anjani et al., 2019; Basera et al., 2007; Chiliya et al., 2014; Cunanan et al., 2019; Desiana & Nurdina, 2019; Domingo, 2018; Mawardani & Sodikin, 2020; Mercado & Mercado, 2016; Nurrochmat et al., 2016; Singh, 2014; Tinker, 2003). Although this might be the case, the pricing levied by micro-business remains unchanged (Kureethara et al., 2021).

2.3 The Place Variable of the Food Industry

Micro food businesses accentuate the geographic factors when it comes to market segmentation (Alizadeh et al., 2017). These enterprises are particularly situated in public areas (e.g., neighborhoods, malls, paved street sidewalks) where students, workers, suppliers, and retailers are to guarantee the delivery of the raw materials and the product to the producer and consumer (Chiliya et al., 2014; Mercado & Mercado, 2016; Tinker, 2003). The distribution channel within food establishments exists and is done in a direct method (where the chef personally serves the food to the consumer) or an indirect method (where waiters/waitresses serve the food instead of the chef) (Cunanan et al., 2019).

2.4 The Promotion Variable of the Food Industry

Food organizations utilize integrated marketing channels to boost awareness and penetrate the market (Chrysochou, 2010). And micro-businesses adopted new marketing approaches and utilize traditional marketing (e.g., posters & fliers), online marketing (e.g., internet advertising), and word-of-mouth (Chiliya et al., 2014). Numerous studies also support the previous literature, as it is found that food-providing businesses use digital media (e.g., social media) in promoting food commodities in the pre-pandemic period (Añonuevo et al., 2020; Cunanan et al., 2019; Desiana & Nurdina; 2019; Nurrochmat et al., 2016).

2.5 Economic Forces

Natural, man-made, and other disruptions heavily disturb the activities of the enterprise (Tamayo & Pediangco, 2018). For instance, a foreign study has projected that micro-businesses will face restrictions on food exports declared by some supplying countries and a decline in food importations, causing commodity shortages in the post-pandemic (Gurbuz & Ozkan, 2020; Keskin, 2020). Additionally, micro-businesses must reckon inflation as a factor in the post-pandemic (Boro, 2022).

2.6 Political Forces and Government Behavior

Employment, safety, consumers, and other policies mandated by government units and pressure groups might affect the operations of the businesses, triggering enterprises to devise marketing decisions. Hence, understanding the policies is crucial for businesses (Lekhanya & Mason, 2013).

2.7 Socio-cultural Forces and Consumer Behavior

With the authorized restrictions and protocols under alert level 1, a new set of consumer habits, demands, trends, and behaviors has been formed during today's post-pandemic stage (Steggals, 2021). Moreover, the marketing mix should still be constructed and/or adjusted from the needs, preferences, purchase frequencies, and other sociocultural elements of the consumer (Anderson & He, 2009; Añonuevo et al., 2020; Bashawir, et al., 2012; Burdick et al., & Keith, 1985; Gronroos, 1994; Jadranka et al., 2002; Khatibi et al., 2019; Maxwell, 1992; Nurrochmat et al., 2016). This is because customers consider pricing important as it influences their purchasing decision when distinguishing and measuring food prices (Anderson & He, 2009, French, 2003; Nurrochmat et al., 2016; Sanlier & Karakus, 2010). Consumers tend to bargain in the traditional market depending on (1) the procured quantity of the product(s), (2) the amount of money that customers are willing to purchase and exchange, and/or (3) close and established connection of the buyer to the seller (Anjani et al., 2019; Chiliya et al., 2014; Mawardani & Sodikin, 2020; Mercado & Mercado, 2016; Singh, 2014; Tinker, 2003). Thus, in place of the consumer's behavior, and the food industry's certain market and environmental variables (eg. company markup, inflation, competitor prices), micro-businesses seek to understand such factors to increase brand loyalty (Abou-Moghli & Al-Abdallah, 2012; Chiliya et al., 2014; Low & Tan, 1995; Mawardani & Sodikin, 2020; Serhan & Serhan, 2019). And micro-businesses pay heed to the competitors' positions and behavior and economic forces as products give the entity a competitive advantage once local and global trends are considered (Lekhanya & Mason, 2013; Sun & You, 2018).

2.8 Technological Forces

Utilizing technological tools will be beneficial to the continuity and resiliency of an enterprise because it serves as the organization's recovery tool to empower the creation of up-to-date products, services, and business models in respective markets (Assibi, 2022; Jiang, 2021). Furthermore, micro-businesses may encounter difficulties in gaining a technological advantage over competitors (Subrahmanya, 2009; Sun & You, 2018).

2.9 Competitors' Behavior

Apart from the technological variables, a business must also recognize the competitors' market share, number, size, strength, motivations, attitudes, social elements, products offered, and pricing degrees to understand the market for the marketing responses to be successful (Borden, 1984). Therefore, the researchers argue that the direct and indirect competitors of an enterprise will also generate a post-pandemic marketing mix to get ahead of the market. In addition, the proposition of Borden (1984) is heavily practiced by organizations, as proven in the pre-pandemic studies of Subrahmanya, (2009), Lekhanya and Mason (2013), and Mawardani and Sodikin (2020) in terms of the product variable; Basera et al. (2007), Desiana and Nurdina (2018), and Domingo (2018), in terms of the price variable; Mawardani and Sodikin (2020) in terms of the place variable; and Nguyen et al. (2015) and

Rampal (2018) in terms of the promotion variable — where entities perceive competition as a reference in developing a competitive marketing mix.

3. Methodology

3.1 Method and Sampling

The study employed a qualitative method to communicate the questions and uncover the experience of a person (Park & Park, 2016). The case study approach was applied as it is ideal for studies with a small number of respondents and looks closely at a complex phenomenon to uncover underlying patterns and causes (Cox, 2012; Dresch et al., 2015). Data Saturation was also utilized to prevent redundancies as the potential respondents that were not interviewed could deliver the same context (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017). The non-probability sampling, purposive sampling, and key informant approach were incorporated to objectively select and acquire extensive discussions with community members who are knowledgeable about the current situation or phenomenon, respectively (Cox, 2012; Jaafar et al., 2014).

3.2 Context and Respondent Criteria

Laguna is one of the provinces found in Region 4A - CALABARZON, Philippines (PhilAtlas, 2023). As far as the researchers' knowledge, the locale is least explored in this type of study. Thus, the researchers covered barangay Dila under Santa Rosa City, and barangays Poblacion Tres, Sala, Banay Banay, and Banlic in Cabuyao City. The interviewees were owners and managers whose micro-businesses are in the mentioned areas. Regardless of whether operating in the (in)formal sector and (in)directly competing with the other respondents, these entities are (1) employing less than 10 employees; (2) utilizing an asset size lower than PHP 3,000,000; (3) operating in a sole branch under the food production industry (transforming raw materials into finished goods); (4) specialized in selling a food category, (e.g., local viands, bread-based products, etc.); and is (5) operating at least five years, conducting post-pandemic business activities in physical and/or online means.

3.3 Interviews

The interview process was held from November 8, 2022, to January 5, 2023, due to the lower levels of academic and personal time constraints attributed. Online and Face-to-face voice-recorded interviews were executed to (1) take precautionary measures despite the ongoing threat of the Covid-19 virus in the post-pandemic environment; (2) respect the interviewee's privacy, preferred date, time, and schedule; and (3) yield flexibility in data gathering. The researchers introduced themselves and other information (e.g., purpose, benefits, process, conditions, ethical treatment) regarding the said activity to exhibit courtesy, professionalism, and understanding to the interviewee. The facilitators profiled the interviewee and the business to ensure that the respondent criteria set was complied with and assigned pseudo-names to the businesses that participated (e.g., Business 1; Business 2) to integrate privacy and anonymity. Asking unstructured, open-ended questions and probing was done to answer the research gap identified by the study. Finally, the researchers utilized the contact information acquired in the profiling stage and forwarded follow-up questions that would support the study, if there is any.

3.4 Analysis

The voice-recorded interviews were transcribed, stored, and organized in a type-written manner. This allows the researchers to perform thematic analysis, a method practiced in most qualitative studies to look through a data set (e.g., audio/interview transcripts) and spot patterns to generate themes (Boyatzis, 1998; Cox, 2012). In addition, the data was studied and checked by an expert in the marketing field to enforce the honesty and integrity of the data collected. Through an iterative process, the collection of coded data was evaluated to find patterns, groupings, and correlations, focusing on the frequency, similarity, and contrast of the coded material (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Nevertheless, the study complied with the regulations stipulated in Republic Act No. 10173 - Data Privacy Act. Any documents considered confidential were disposed of immediately after the study was complete, polished, and compiled.

4. Results and Discussion

Themes 4.1 to 4.4 specify the common marketing mix (product, price, place, & promotion) responses utilized by micro food businesses to transition to the post-pandemic circumstances prevalent within Cabuyao and Santa Rosa, Laguna. Whereas Themes 4.5 to 4.9 explore what factors have led micro-food businesses to implement the post-pandemic marketing mix (product, price, place, & promotion) responses within Cabuyao and Santa Rosa, Laguna.

4.1 Product Development (Improvement)

All the respondents use Product Development, which corresponds to the literary works of García et al. (2014), Grunert (2005), and Pooya and Soltani-Fesaghandis (2018) that the food sector gives importance to product innovations/development to address the consumers' purchasing behavior and preferences, heterogeneous resources, limited marketing opportunities prevalent, and external market conditions in the industry. Businesses 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 apply the approach whether it may be enhancing the customer loyalty, brand image, differentiation, or research of the enterprise to specify whether the improvement to be applied is

appropriate or not in consideration to the competitor's behavior. These reasons strengthen the findings of Añonuevo et al. (2020), that MSMEs offer food products different from the competition, and the works of Lekhanya and Mason (2013) and Sun and You (2018) where micro-businesses pay heed to the competitors' positions and behavior and economic forces because the product gives the entity a competitive advantage by considering the local and global trends.

The findings reject the claim of Basera et al. (2007) that some MSMEs offer similar food products as their competitors because the attributes of the good are deemed insignificant to customer patronage. In achieving differentiation, all ten businesses improve their products' taste, serving size, and nutritional content by using healthy, natural/chemically artificial-free ingredients. Quality is also given importance by the ten respondents, indicating that the products sold by the interviewees are in the growth and decline phase, as claimed in a study that food producers highlight the mentioned product feature in the product life cycle (Alizadeh et al., 2017). This extends the findings of Anderson and He (2009) and Lin (2011) that fast-food establishments consider the taste, nutrition, quality, and type (adult-size/kiddie meal) of the consumable item, signifying that fast-food establishments and local micro food-businesses share a similar notion. Moreover, instead of the type (adult-size/kiddie meal) of the product, the serving size is applied as the product feature. Product texture, shelf-life, quick-to-serve, sanitation and cleanliness of the food, and the tools utilized in creating the product are other features improved by most of the respondents. The results confirm that local micro-businesses supplied, produced, and/or distributed fresh, clean, and properly stored foods by performing product planning and development in constructing new, innovative, or imitated commodities (Chiliya et al., 2014; Claveria & Mendoza, 2021; Lekhanya & Mason, 2013; Mercado & Mercado, 2016). Overall, the results reject the assumption of the researchers that the pre-pandemic marketing mix on the product variable has changed in the post-pandemic period.

Ninety percent of the respondents improve their product offerings by offering a variety of food items and initiating batch cooking. The result partially agrees with the argument of Ababio et al. (2017), Devi and Triyuni (2021), Domingo (2018), and Rampal (2018) that family-style or fine-dining restaurants serve diverse, tasty, well-packaged foods that meet or exceed an individual's satisfaction and demand. This indicates that family-style/fine-dining restaurants and local micro- food businesses share a similar notion.

4.2 Cost-Based Pricing

In levying commodity prices, the participant (except Business 9) use cost-based pricing to calculate (1) the costs forecasted and incurred; (2) the budget to be disposed of in procuring raw materials; & (3) other expenses that support the creation of the product which are either internal or external variables. The results agree with literary works that collectively recognize cost-plus pricing as one of the pricing responses employed by food businesses in reviewing internal variables (i.e., production cost, organizational objectives, etc.) and external variables (i.e., consumer perception, inflation, etc.) (Anjani et al., 2019; Basera et al., 2007; Chiliya et al., 2014; Desiana & Nurdina, 2019; Domingo, 2018; Mawardani & Sodikin, 2020; Mercado & Mercado, 2016; Nurrochmat et al., 2016; Singh, 2014; Tinker, 2003). Thus, the literature given rejects the assumption of the researchers in the pre-pandemic marketing mix approach under the pricing variable has changed in the post-pandemic period.

4.3 Dine-in and Delivery Distributions Near to Suppliers and Consumers

Micro food businesses accentuate the geographic factors when it comes to market segmentation (Alizadeh et al., 2017). This is why enterprises are situated in public areas (e.g., neighborhoods, malls, street sidewalks) to reach (1) suppliers and retailers; and (2) students and working people to guarantee the delivery of the raw materials and the product to the producer and consumer, respectively (Chiliya et al., 2014; Mercado & Mercado, 2016; Tinker, 2003). Six participants based the distance of their place of distribution with the suppliers to reduce the transportation time and cost spent. In connection, fifty percent of the respondents chose accessible, busy, or people-congested locations (e.g., schools, companies, terminals) in which potential customers would execute their personal/work-related tasks. The findings reject the assumption of the researchers that the pre-pandemic marketing mix approach under the place of distribution variable has changed in the post-pandemic period.

At least fifty percent of the respondents use cell phones and social media as their distribution tools. Such mediums enable the ten businesses to perform dine-in and/or delivery distributions with the help of their on-site employees. The distribution channel is classified as direct (where the chef personally serves the food to the consumer) or indirect method (where waiters/waitresses serve the food instead of the chef) (Cunanan et al., 2019). Based on the responses of Businesses 1, 2, 5, and 9, the entity utilizes the indirect method, while Businesses 6, 7, and 10 utilize both direct and indirect methods. Although the distribution channel is attributed to the fast-food industry, it extends the findings of Cunanan et al. (2019), local public canteens as well as other food MSMEs in the Philippines have the same systems.

4.4 Usage of Word-of-Mouth, Digital Media, Network Media, and Personal Selling

Food organizations utilize integrated marketing channels to boost awareness and penetrate the market (Chrysochou, 2010). According to the results, the ten participants use WOM in the post-pandemic period due to its efficiency in emphasizing product features (e.g., quality and taste). This agrees with the work of Anjani et al. (2019) and Chiliya et al. (2014) that food-providing

businesses use WOM marketing. Six businesses also utilize digital media (e.g., social media) by posting content as it is an influential, effective, useful, and powerful form of instrument to (1) market the product; (2) prosper the business growth; and (3) inhibit consumer reach, engagement, and communications. This agrees with the claim of Añonuevo et al., (2020), Desiana and Nurdina (2019), and Nurrochmat et al. (2016) in which food-providing businesses use digital media (e.g., social media) in promoting food commodities in the pre-pandemic period.

Micro-businesses adopt new marketing approaches (Chiliya et al., 2014). Such that, the respondents use Network Media and Personal Selling as a part of their post-pandemic promotional response. Seventy percent of the respondents use network media by sending or posting messages to inform and update the market about new or available products. Whereas nine participants practice personal selling by at least recommending a product or conducting a free product taste test to consumers. These results agree with the assumption of the researchers in the pre-pandemic marketing mix approach under the promotion variable has changed in the post-pandemic period.

4.5 Exhibited Frugality, Decreased Demand, Bargaining, and Complaints of Consumers

A new set of consumer habits, demands, trends, and behaviors has been formed during today's post-pandemic stage (Steggals, 2021). The findings state that more than seventy percent of the participants have recognized the consumers' frugality and decreased demand due to the loans and/or income obtained by prospects despite the price increase of goods. Thus, consumers purchase quality substitutes levied at lower prices, or even prepare the meals instead to perceive that a rational decision was achieved. This confirms that customers consider pricing important as it influences their purchasing decision when distinguishing and measuring food prices (Anderson & He, 2009; French, 2003; Nurrochmat et al., 2016; Sanlier & Karakus, 2010).

Due to budget constraints, Businesses 2, 3, 4, 6, and 10 received consumer complaints beforehand on their price increase. Businesses 4 and 10 have also encountered customers who tend to bargain in their levied prices, like how consumers deal with some supplier prices in the traditional market (Anjani et al., 2019; Chiliya et al., 2014; Mawardani & Sodikin, 2020; Mercado & Mercado, 2016; Singh, 2014; Tinker, 2003). In place of the consumer's behavior and the food industry's certain market and environmental variables (e.g., company markup, inflation, competitor prices), micro-businesses seek to understand such factors to increase brand loyalty (Abou-Moghli & Al-Abdallah, 2012; Chiliya et al., 2014; Low & Tan, 1995; Mawardani & Sodikin, 2020; Serhan & Serhan, 2019). Businesses 2, 4, 6, and 10 consider the demand of the consumer before levying prices using Cost-based pricing. Business 10 also decreased the product's serving size. In contrast, Business 2 enhanced the product size to assure that the prospect made the right choice. Such marketing approaches support the argument that the marketing mix should be constructed and/or adjusted from the needs, preferences, purchase frequencies, and other sociocultural elements of the consumer (Anderson & He, 2009; Añonuevo, et al., 2020; Bashawir, et al., 2012; Gronroos, 1994; Jadranka et al., 2002; Khatibi et al., 2019; Maxwell, 2005; Nurrochmat et al. 2016).

4.6 Raw Material Shortages, Trade Constraints, Importation Restrictions, and Foreign Warfare Resulting in the Commodities' Price Increase

It is projected that micro-businesses will face restrictions on food exports declared by some supplying countries and a decline in food importations, causing commodity shortages in the post-pandemic (Gurbuz & Ozkan, 2020; Keskin, 2020). Eight participants confirm the projection because the government's restrictions on importing raw materials (e.g., onions, chicken, meat) have caused decreased supply and increased demand, inducing the rise in the costs of goods accessible and sold in the market. The findings also support the claim of Tamayo and Pediangco (2018), that natural, man-made, and other disruptions heavily disturb the activities of the enterprise. In this case, aside from mandated importation restrictions, the conflict between Ukraine and Russia is a man-made disruption. The participants claim that it has caused constraints in the supply chain, adversely affecting the transportation costs for cooking and vehicle gas.

Micro-businesses must reckon inflation as a factor in the post-pandemic (Boro, 2022). This is because understanding the consumers' behavior, and the food industry's certain market and environmental variables (eg. company markup, inflation, competitor prices) can increase brand loyalty (Abou-Moghli & Al-Abdallah, 2012; Chiliya et al., 2014; Low & Tan, 1995; Mawardani & Sodikin, 2020; Serhan & Serhan, 2019). In addition, employment, safety, consumers, and other policies mandated by government units and pressure groups might affect the operations of the businesses, triggering enterprises to devise marketing decisions (Lekhanya & Mason, 2013). In the Philippine post-pandemic setting, micro-food businesses deal with government-restricted importations and price increases by focusing on the price variable and/or product variables while recognizing the consumers' behavior (see theme 5, page 10), and/or perception (e.g., huge servings at a lower price) before levying the commodity's rate. Using Cost-based pricing to cope with the price changes, Businesses 2 and 9 increased or re-adjusted their product's pricing. Whereas Businesses 3, 7, & 10 maintained the same pricing, which aligns with the foreign works of Kureethara et al. (2021) that the pricing remains unchanged. Due to the pricing decisions made, Business 7 supplies the serving size to its prospects which is

the same as before the post-pandemic transpired. Yet Businesses 6 and 10 decreased the serving size of the products sold to consumers.

4.7 Consumer Demographics and Preferences

Eight participants demographically segmented students, business owners/workers, boarders, and/or neighbors as their target market, causing entities to modify their marketing mix, as reflected in the works of Anderson & He (2009), Añonuevo, et al. (2020), Bashawir, et al. (2012), Gronroos (1994), Jadranka et al. (2002), Khatibi et al. (2019), Maxwell (2005), and Nurrochmat et al. (2016). As a response, Businesses 6 and 9 derive a reasonable price and a product without sacrificing its features (e.g., taste, cleanliness, etc.), supporting the works of García et al. (2014), Grunert (2005), and Pooya and Soltani-Fesaghandis (2018) as stated in theme 6. Whereas Business 3 and 7 choose the appropriate place of distribution (e.g., near areas where students/workers/neighbors often engage in their personal/educational/work-related activities) and/or provided appropriate meal suggestions based on the prospect's food constraints (e.g., health issues; religious beliefs).

4.8 Usage of Cellular Phones and Social Media as Technological Mediums

Utilizing technological tools will be beneficial to an enterprise's continuity and resiliency because it is the organization's recovery tool in creating up-to-date products, services, and business models in respective markets (Assibi, 2022; Jiang, 2021). Businesses 1 to 9 utilized cellular phones and/or social media as a convenient and efficient medium for (1) distribution (e.g., preparing and packaging the purchased unit before it is delivered to the consumer or picked up on the business's physical distribution site by the prospect); (2) communications (e.g., answering customer inquiries); and (3) promotion (e.g. asking where the individual learned the business).

4.9 Competitors' Post Pandemic Marketing Mix Responses

The respondents agree that the competition uses Product Development, yet Businesses 2 and 7 were not affected by such an approach. Businesses 4, 6, 8, and 10 said that some of their products' features (e.g., texture, taste) are what differentiates them from the competition. The findings correlate with the pre-pandemic studies of Lekhanya and Mason (2013), Mawardani and Sodikin (2020), and Subrahmanya (2009) where entities perceive competition as a basis in developing a competitive marketing mix under the product variable.

Five participants mentioned that the competition lowered their prices. Businesses 1 and 4 interpreted that the competitor is sacrificing the quality of their products, paving Business 9 an opportunity to reflect the promised quality based on their pricing. Furthermore, Business 1 occasionally imitates the competitors' pricing, and Business 4 uses the competitors' pricing as a reference in levying prices instead of imitating. On the contrary, Businesses 6, 7, 8, and 10 observed that their competitors implemented high pricing due to their operating expenses (e.g., rentals). In response, Businesses 6 and 7 emphasize their competitive edge in the place of distribution variable by owning the site of distribution instead of renting one. Whereas Businesses 8 and 10 maintained the same pricing while setting a profit margin percentage to be earned and decreasing the serving size, respectively. The results garnered agree with the pre-pandemic studies of Basera et al., (2007), Desiana and Nurdina (2019), and Domingo (2018) where entities perceive competition as a basis in developing a competitive marketing mix under the price variable.

Businesses 1, 3, and 4 observed that the competitors' locations are near suppliers. In contrast, Businesses 5, 6, and 10 stated that the competition establish their operational premises near the target market. Conversely, Businesses 2 and 9 claimed that the competitors position their operations near the said respondents. Furthermore, the former is not affected by the practices of the competition due to the loyalty exhibited by its consumers, indirectly strengthening the work of Mawardani and Sodikin (2020) where entities perceive competition as a basis for developing a competitive marketing mix under the place of distribution variable.

Businesses 1, 2, 4, and 7 indicated that the competition use word-of-mouth (WOM). Businesses 3, 4, 7, 8, and 9 added that the competition utilizes digital media (e.g., social media). Nevertheless, Businesses 4 and 7 apply their promotional mix to counter the competitors' responses, augmenting the pre-pandemic studies of Nguyen et al. (2015) and Rampal (2018) where entities perceive competition as a basis in developing a competitive marketing mix under the place of distribution variable. To illustrate, Business 7 perceived WOM as advantageous because if consumers inhibit unfavourability to the products of the competition, reviews will spread to switch to availing the products of the respondent instead. And although Business 4 and its competitors use personal selling, Business 4 executes the medium differently.

5. Conclusion

The study was pursued by the researchers to address the research gap present in pre-pandemic local studies that pertain to the marketing mix of the micro-businesses and the corresponding factors of its execution in the post-pandemic environment. The results indicate that most of the respondents utilize Product Development (Improvement), Cost-based Pricing, word-of-mouth, personal selling, digital media, and network media while being near suppliers and consumers. The marketing mix variables are

influenced by (1) the recognized consumer behaviors (frugality, decreased demand, bargaining, and complaints) in the market; (2) raw material shortages, trade and importation constraints, and foreign warfare resulting in the commodities' price increase; (3) consumer demographics and preferences; (4) consumption of cellular phones and/or social media as the businesses' technological medium(s); and (5) the competitor's product, pricing, place of distribution, and promotional post-pandemic responses. Hence, the researchers propose the following framework indicating the Post-Pandemic Crisis Marketing Mix (4Ps) Responses of Micro Food Businesses in Laguna:

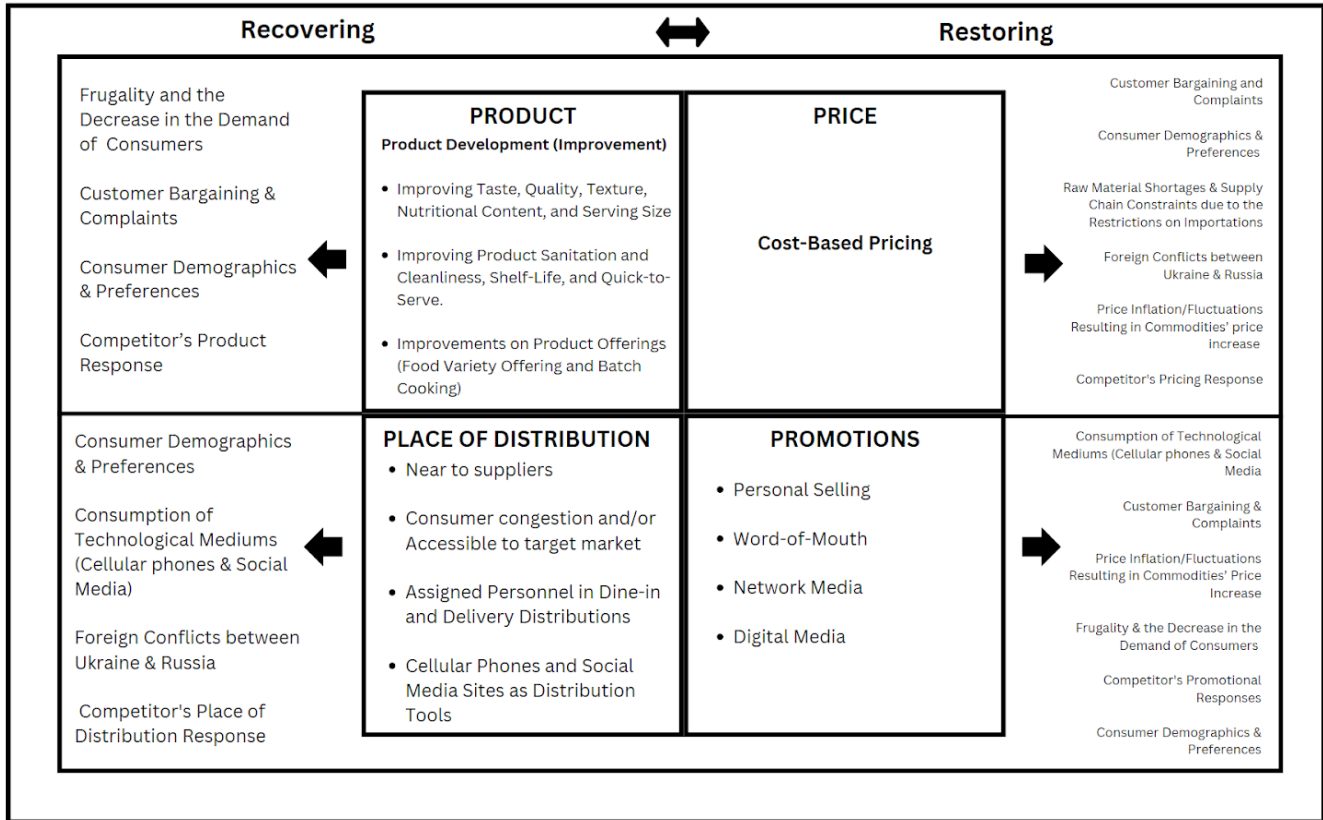


Figure 1. Post Pandemic Marketing Mix Responses

5.1 Implications and Recommendations for Micro-businesses and Future Micro-business Owners

The information presented can influence the management of a business as to the possible marketing mix response to achieve sustainability despite the changing environment prevalent with uncontrollable factors. In response to consumer behaviors identified (see theme 5, page 10), the researchers propose that micro-food businesses can implement periodic discounting systems during holidays (e.g., Christmas), local events (e.g., festivals), or in a specified operating period (e.g., two weeks) where the enterprise experiences an influx of customers. This can increase the revenue and prospects of the business if it does not negatively affect the profit of the entity. Another is for micro-businesses to participate in local events (e.g., holiday fairs and local events) by volunteering or setting up a food stall to enhance their word-of-mouth marketing and market reach. Micro food businesses can also register in government-supported programs to avail of financial and non-financial incentives, aiding the entity to prosper, especially when disruptions occur.

5.2 Implications and Recommendations for Marketing Researchers

The findings can be a basis to develop new ideas/theories on the marketing mix in today's post-pandemic. Based on the researchers' knowledge, this is the first study that dives into the post-pandemic marketing mix in the Philippine context. Nevertheless, the study would be of great importance for researchers looking to further analyze today's environment. It is recommended for future researchers to cover the same context of this study by adapting the People, Process, and Physical Evidence elements found in the 7Ps to acquire further information regarding the marketing approach of businesses. However, if future researchers prefer to explore the 4Ps, it is recommended to focus on other industries aside from the food industry.

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