

NAVIGATING PRICE FLUCTUATIONS: ECONOMIC STRATEGIES OF LOCAL RICE SELLERS IN RESPONSE TO MARKET CHANGES

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Abstract : This study examined the economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to rice price fluctuations in Maasim, Sarangani Province. Anchored on supply and demand theory, price elasticity of demand, market adaptation theory, and behavioral economics, the study aimed to describe sellers' demographic profiles, determine the extent of economic strategies employed in pricing, consumer demand, and production and supply, test differences in strategies when grouped according to average monthly income, and identify reasons behind the limited use of digital platforms in product promotion. A mixed-method research design was employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were gathered from 30 local rice sellers through a structured survey questionnaire, while qualitative data were obtained through key informant interviews with three selected sellers using purposive sampling. Descriptive statistics and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to analyze quantitative data, while thematic analysis was applied to qualitative responses. Findings revealed that local rice sellers were predominantly female, middle-aged to older adults, and generally belonged to low-income groups. Price-related strategies were the most frequently employed, while consumer demand- and production supply-related strategies were only sometimes practiced, indicating situational rather than consistent strategic application. Statistical results showed no significant difference in the extent of economic strategies employed when grouped according to average monthly income. Qualitative findings revealed that limited digital platform use stemmed from perceived customer buying behavior, limited digital literacy, and physical or age-related constraints. Overall, the study highlights that local rice sellers rely on practical, experience-based strategies shaped by shared market conditions rather than income capacity. The findings provide valuable inputs for policymakers, local government units, business support programs, and future research on community-level market adaptation.

IndexTerms - rice price fluctuations, economic strategies, local rice sellers, small-scale retailing, market adaptation, consumer demand, mixed-method research.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rice remains the Philippines' most politically sensitive and economically consequential food staple because it dominates household food spending, especially among low-income families. Recent macroeconomic evidence shows that rice inflation significantly contributed to headline inflation spikes, with the poorest households being the most vulnerable because rice occupies a large share of their consumption basket (World Bank, 2024). These pressures are shaped not only by domestic production conditions but also by global supply shocks and policy shifts. International monitoring reports link food price volatility to climate variability (including El Niño effects), shifting trade flows, and export restrictions, factors that can amplify uncertainty in rice markets (AMIS, 2024; FAO, 2025). In the Philippines, this volatility becomes visible to ordinary consumers through frequent changes in retail rice prices and availability, creating downstream pressures on small businesses involved in distribution and retailing.

While many discussions focus on farmers and consumers, a critical but less examined group is local rice sellers, particularly those operating small stores in municipalities. In Maasim, Sarangani Province, local rice sellers function as front-line market actors who must respond to shifting purchase power, fluctuating wholesale prices, and unstable supply. National-level monitoring shows rice inflation spikes can be abrupt (e.g., a sharp rise recorded in early 2024), which can disrupt pricing decisions and inventory planning for sellers (Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department [CPBRD], 2024). Further, recent current events underscore how persistent retail rice price concerns can escalate into urgent policy action, including the government's declaration of a "food security emergency" in 2025 to stabilize rice prices through buffer stock releases (Reuters, 2025). These conditions make it necessary to document how small rice sellers cope, what strategies they use, and what challenges constrain them in a local context like Maasim.

Furthermore, this study is important to society because rice price instability directly affects food access and family welfare. National and international reports consistently emphasize that rice inflation and food price movements can quickly translate into household hardship, especially for the bottom-income groups. Policy attention has recently intensified, with government efforts focusing on retail price moderation, administrative pricing measures, and market interventions (Department of Agriculture [DA],

2025; Department of Finance [DOF], 2025). At the community level, sellers are pressured to keep rice affordable while sustaining business viability, an everyday tension that mirrors national concerns about food security and inflation management.

Legally and policy-wise, the rice market continues to be shaped by reforms such as the Rice Tariffication Law and its performance outcomes, monitored through policy briefs and technical papers that discuss impacts on prices and market behavior (Beltran, 2024; CPBRD, 2024; Villar, 2024). In 2025, the DA issued administrative circulars on the Maximum Suggested Retail Price (MSRP) for imported rice, reflecting the state's continuing regulatory role in protecting consumers and stabilizing markets (DA, 2025). From a values-based standpoint relevant to many Philippine communities, Christian business ethics writings in the contemporary period emphasize honesty and fairness in trade—principles applicable to pricing and selling staple food commodities (Harrigan, 2024).

In business and economics, understanding market adaptation at the micro level is essential for explaining how price shocks are transmitted from national/global systems to local retail behavior. Recent research on rice price inflation dynamics in the Philippines highlights how multiple forces, external price movements, domestic constraints, and policy actions, interact in shaping rice price behavior (Antonio, 2024). However, empirical work still leans heavily toward macro indicators or farm-level outcomes. This study contributes to ABM and applied business research by focusing on sellers' economic strategies (e.g., pricing decisions, inventory practices, sourcing adjustments, and customer-related adaptations) and documenting constraints that can inform local interventions and enterprise support programs. It also supports methodological strengthening by grounding analysis in actual seller experiences in a specific municipality, producing evidence that is locally actionable and academically contributory.

Additionally, this research is personally meaningful to the researchers because rice price changes are directly experienced in daily household budgeting and community buying patterns. Observing how local sellers manage complaints, maintain supply, and balance affordability with survival motivated the inquiry. By documenting sellers' lived realities in Maasim, the study aimed to elevate community-grounded knowledge into evidence that can support practical business improvement and responsive local policymaking, consistent with the intent described in the manuscript.

Moreover, this study was anchored on contemporary policy and regulatory actions related to rice market stabilization and consumer protection, including: (a) ongoing evaluation and performance monitoring of the Rice Tariffication policy framework (Beltran, 2024; CPBRD, 2024; Villar, 2024), and (b) recent DA administrative circulars implementing MSRP guidelines for imported rice to moderate retail prices (DA, 2025). These reflect the timeliness of examining how market-level decisions impact small retailers and consumers.

Guided by the above context, the main objective of this study was to determine and describe the economic strategies used by local rice sellers in Maasim, Sarangani Province in response to rice price fluctuations, and to identify the challenges they encountered in pricing, supply, and demand conditions.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to describe the economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations and to identify the challenges they faced in navigating these fluctuations.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1 Gender;
 - 1.2 Age Range; and
 - 1.3 Average Monthly Income?
2. What is the extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations in terms of:
 - 2.1 Price;
 - 2.2 Consumer Demand; and
 - 2.3 Production Supply?
3. Is there a significant difference in the extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations when they are grouped according to their average monthly income?
4. What are the reasons behind the limited use of digital platforms and social media by sellers in promoting their products?

Hypothesis of the Study

H₀ There is no significant difference in the extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations when they are grouped according to their average monthly income.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it seeks to provide practical, academic, and policy-relevant insights into the economic strategies of local rice sellers amid fluctuating rice prices. By examining the challenges and adaptive practices at the community level, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how price volatility affects small enterprises, consumer access to staple food, and local market stability. The findings of this study are expected to benefit various stakeholders directly and indirectly, as discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

National Policymakers and Regulatory Agencies. At the national level, policymakers and regulatory agencies may benefit from the study by gaining insights into how rice price fluctuations are experienced and managed at the retail level. The findings may complement broader policy assessments by providing ground-level perspectives that help evaluate the effectiveness of market regulations and price stabilization measures. This evidence may assist in refining policies to ensure that interventions address the realities faced by small rice sellers and consumers alike.

Local Government Units (LGUs). Local government units may utilize the results of this study as an evidence-based reference in designing programs and interventions that support small-scale rice retailers. The localized data generated by the research may guide policy formulation, market regulation, and enterprise development initiatives that are responsive to actual conditions in Maasim. In doing so, LGUs may strengthen their role in promoting food security, economic stability, and inclusive local development.

Local Rice Sellers. This study directly benefits local rice sellers in Maasim, Sarangani Province by providing a systematic understanding of the economic strategies they employ in response to rice price fluctuations. By identifying effective practices and recurring challenges in pricing, sourcing, and inventory management, the study offers insights that may help sellers improve decision-making, enhance business sustainability, and strengthen resilience against market instability. The findings may also serve as a reference for sellers seeking practical approaches to balance affordability for consumers with the viability of their enterprises.

Consumers and Households. Consumers and households stand to benefit indirectly from this study through its potential contribution to more stable rice availability and pricing within the community. By highlighting the constraints faced by rice sellers that influence retail prices and supply consistency, the study supports a clearer understanding of market dynamics that affect everyday food access. Improved seller strategies informed by the study's findings may help reduce abrupt price changes and supply disruptions, thereby supporting household food security.

The Academic Community and Future Researchers. This study contributes to the academic community by expanding the body of knowledge on market adaptation and small-scale retailing in the context of staple food commodities. By focusing on local rice sellers, the research addresses an area that is often underrepresented in existing studies. Future researchers may use the findings as a foundation for comparative studies, further theory development, or methodological enhancement in business and economic research.

ABM Students. For Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) students, this study serves as a practical example of how business theories and concepts are applied to real-world community issues. The research demonstrates the relevance of business analysis, strategic thinking, and problem-solving in addressing economic challenges faced by small enterprises. As such, it supports experiential learning and reinforces the value of applied research in professional preparation.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focused on assessing the economic strategies of local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations in Maasim, Sarangani Province. Conceptually, the study examined the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of gender, age, and average monthly income, as well as the extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to rice price fluctuations, changes in consumer demand, and conditions related to production and supply. These concepts were analyzed within the context of small-scale rice retail operations, emphasizing how sellers with physical stores adapted their business practices to prevailing market conditions.

Methodologically, the study employed a mixed-method research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were gathered through a structured survey questionnaire administered to 30 local rice sellers, while qualitative data were collected through Key Informants Interviews (KII) with three (3) selected participants to obtain detailed insights into their personal experiences and economic strategies. The respondents and participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the following inclusion criteria: rice sellers who owned and operated a physical store selling rice, had at least two (2) to three (3) years of experience in selling rice, and possessed a valid business permit.

Geographically, the study was conducted in Barangay Colon, Kablacan, Malbang, Poblacion, and Tinoto in the municipality of Maasim, Sarangani Province. Data collection took place during School Year 2025–2026, allowing the researchers to capture current and relevant business practices and market conditions. This scope enabled the collection of both numerical and narrative data that provided a comprehensive understanding of the economic strategies and challenges of local rice sellers.

However, despite its focused approach, the study excluded rice sellers who did not operate a physical store, had less than two (2) to three (3) years of experience in selling rice, did not possess a valid business permit, or were not located in the specified barangays. Conceptually, the study did not examine agricultural production processes, international rice trade, national-level policy impacts, consumer consumption behavior, or detailed financial performance indicators such as profit margins and capital structures. Methodologically, the study was limited to surveys and interviews; observational methods, experimental designs, longitudinal price tracking, and advanced statistical or econometric analyses were not utilized. The study also had limited control over respondent honesty, recall accuracy, and potential response biases, which may have affected objectivity and internal validity. Furthermore, the relatively small sample size, the use of non-probability sampling, and the confinement to a single municipality limited the external validity and generalizability of the findings. Consequently, the results were applicable only to the rice sellers, locations, and time frame covered by the study.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The present study was anchored on selected economic and behavioral theories that collectively explain the relationship between rice price fluctuations and the economic strategies of local rice sellers. The primary independent variable of the study was rice price fluctuations, which were influenced by production and supply conditions, consumer demand, and inflationary pressures. This variable was explained by Supply and Demand Theory, which posits that changes in supply and demand conditions directly affect price movements in the market. In the context of the rice market, fluctuations in production levels, availability of rice, and consumer demand resulted in varying retail prices, which serve as the main trigger for sellers to adjust their business practices. This theoretical perspective directly supported the study's research questions that sought to identify the factors contributing to rice price fluctuations experienced by local sellers.

In addition, the study was guided by Price Elasticity of Demand Theory to explain consumer responses to rice price changes. As rice is a staple commodity, demand is generally price inelastic; however, consumers may respond to rising prices by reducing quantities purchased or switching to lower-priced rice varieties. These behavioral adjustments affect purchasing patterns

and directly influence sellers' pricing and inventory decisions. This theory supported the research questions related to consumer demand and buying behavior and clarified why rice sellers often implemented gradual price adjustments instead of abrupt increases, despite rising costs.

Moreover, the dependent variables of the study were the economic strategies employed by local rice sellers, specifically their pricing strategies, supply and sourcing decisions, inventory management, and responses to changes in consumer demand. These strategies were explained by Market Adaptation Theory, which asserts that market actors adjust their practices in response to uncertainty and changing environmental conditions. In this study, rice sellers' adaptive strategies were viewed as rational responses to fluctuating rice prices, unstable supply, and changing demand conditions. This theory aligned with the research questions that examined how local rice sellers responded strategically to rice price fluctuations in their daily operations.

Furthermore, Behavioral Economics Theory provided a complementary explanation for seller decision-making by recognizing the influence of social, psychological, and ethical factors. Unlike classical economic models that assume purely rational behavior, this theory explained that rice sellers' decisions were often shaped by long-standing relationships with customers, concerns about fairness and affordability, and risk aversion. These behavioral considerations helped explain why some sellers chose to absorb price increases, maintained stable prices, or offered flexible purchasing arrangements despite rising operational costs. This perspective supported the research questions that explored the challenges and considerations faced by rice sellers in implementing economic strategies.

Taken together, these theories formed an integrated framework that explains the causal and behavioral pathways examined in the study. Rice price fluctuations, driven by supply, demand, and inflation, influence consumer buying behavior, which in turn affects the economic strategies of local rice sellers. These strategies were shaped not only by market forces but also by adaptive mechanisms and behavioral factors. This integrated theoretical framework provided a coherent foundation for analyzing the economic strategies of local rice sellers in Maasim, Sarangani Province and guided the interpretation of the study's findings.

Research Gap

The studies reviewed collectively examined rice as a staple commodity, rice price fluctuations, inflation dynamics, consumer behavior, small-scale retailing, production and supply factors, and government policy interventions. These studies include works by Valera, Balie, Emiliano, and Magrini (2021), Pangesti et al. (2023), Wang (2020), Sharma and Singh (2021), Antonio (2024), Beltran (2024), Dela Cruz (2023), Setiawan and Yusuf (2024), Feryanto et al. (2023), Kumar (2019), Basu and Shukla (2022), Choudhury and Dutta (2022), Lal and Rao (2023), Rao (2022), Zhang et al. (2022), Mishra, Singh and Verma (2021), Amin, Rahman, and Hasan (2022), Khan, Rahman, and Hossain (2021), Patel and Joshi (2020), Sahu, Mishra, and Patel (2022), and Sullivan, Torres, and Lee (2023), among others. Collectively, these studies provide strong theoretical and empirical explanations of rice price volatility, inflationary transmission, policy impacts, and consumer responses at national and international levels. Most of the literature relied on macroeconomic data, time-series analysis, econometric modeling, and secondary datasets to explain price behavior and inflation outcomes. While these studies significantly contribute to understanding rice market dynamics, they largely emphasize producers, consumers, or policy outcomes rather than retail-level market actors.

Despite the breadth of existing literature, several research gaps were identified. First, there was a limited focus on local rice sellers, particularly small-scale retailers operating in rural or municipal settings. Second, most studies analyzed rice price fluctuations and inflation at the macro or national level, offering minimal insight into how price instability affects day-to-day business decisions of sellers. Third, many studies relied heavily on quantitative and secondary data, resulting in limited exploration of sellers' lived experiences, adaptive strategies, and decision-making processes. Fourth, while economic theories explained price behavior conceptually, few studies empirically applied these theories to retail-level practices, especially in the Philippine context. Finally, there was a lack of localized, mixed-method research that integrated both numerical trends and qualitative insights from rice sellers themselves.

Among these gaps, the present study specifically addressed the lack of retail-level, localized, and seller-centered research on rice price fluctuations. This study focused on local rice sellers with physical stores in Maasim, Sarangani Province, examining their economic strategies in pricing, supply management, inventory handling, and responses to consumer demand amid fluctuating rice prices. By employing a mixed-method approach, the study integrated quantitative data on seller profiles and strategies with qualitative insights from in-depth interviews, thereby capturing both measurable patterns and lived experiences. In doing so, the research filled the gap left by macro-focused and policy-centered studies and contributed localized evidence that explains how rice sellers adapt to price fluctuations in real market conditions. This directly addressed the identified gaps in the literature and advanced understanding of rice market adaptation at the community level.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study illustrates the relationship between the independent variables, intervening variables, and dependent variables in examining the economic strategies of local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations. Anchored on economic and behavioral perspectives, the framework explains how external market conditions influence seller behavior while accounting for individual seller characteristics. The independent variables consist of rice price fluctuations and inflation, which represent external economic forces affecting the rice market. Rice price fluctuations arise from changes in supply availability, production costs, import conditions, and market demand, while inflation reflects the general increase in prices that raises operational and procurement costs for rice sellers. Studies have consistently shown that rice prices significantly contribute to inflation and that inflation amplifies price volatility in staple food markets, particularly in rice-dependent economies (Valera et al., 2021; World Bank, 2024). These factors serve as the primary triggers that compel rice sellers to reassess their pricing and operational decisions.

On the other hand, the dependent variable of the study is the extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations, specifically in terms of prices, consumer demand, and production supply. These dimensions capture how sellers adjust their pricing practices, respond to changes in consumer purchasing behavior, and manage supply constraints.

Market Adaptation Theory explains that sellers respond to unstable market conditions by adopting adaptive strategies such as gradual price adjustments, price averaging, inventory control, and supplier negotiation (Choudhury & Dutta, 2022; Lal & Rao, 2023). Similarly, Behavioral Economics Theory suggests that sellers’ strategies are influenced not only by profit considerations but also by risk aversion, fairness, and customer retention concerns (Basu & Shukla, 2022).

The framework also incorporates intervening variables, namely gender, age range, and average monthly income of rice sellers. These variables do not directly cause price fluctuations but may influence how sellers perceive risks and implement economic strategies. Research indicates that demographic and income characteristics affect decision-making styles, risk tolerance, and capacity to absorb price shocks among small-scale retailers (Mishra et al., 2021; Amin et al., 2022). For instance, sellers with higher income levels may have greater flexibility in managing inventory and absorbing temporary losses, while age and experience may shape strategic choices based on accumulated market knowledge.

In sum, the conceptual framework demonstrates a cause–effect relationship wherein rice price fluctuations and inflation influence the economic strategies of local rice sellers, while seller demographics and income characteristics intervene in shaping the extent and manner of these responses. This framework provides a structured guide for analyzing how external economic pressures and internal seller characteristics interact to determine pricing, demand response, and supply management strategies among rice sellers in Maasim, Sarangani Province. The framework thus was aligned with the objectives of the study and supported the investigation of seller-level adaptation to rice price volatility.

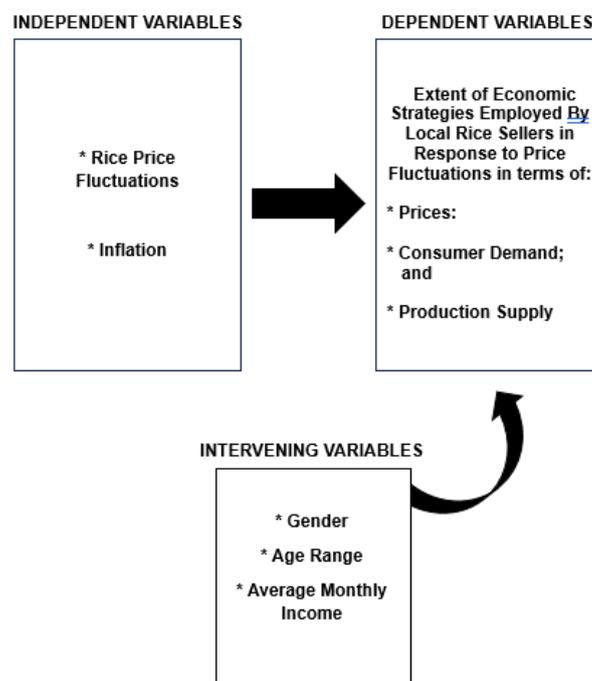


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the economic strategies of local rice sellers in response to rice price fluctuations in Maasim, Sarangani Province. The quantitative component utilized a descriptive research design to determine the demographic profile of the respondents and to assess the extent of economic strategies employed by rice sellers in terms of pricing practices, responses to consumer demand, and management of production and supply conditions. As noted by McCombes (2019), descriptive research is appropriate when the objective is to identify characteristics, trends, and patterns within a population, making it suitable for systematically describing sellers’ economic strategies under fluctuating market conditions. The qualitative component complemented the quantitative data by providing in-depth insights into sellers’ experiences, decision-making processes, and challenges encountered in adapting to rice price fluctuations.

For the qualitative component, the study adopted a phenomenological approach through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) to address the research question: “What were the reasons behind the limited use of digital platforms and social media by local rice sellers in promoting their products?” This qualitative inquiry focused on the variable of digital platform and social media usage for product promotion. The phenomenological approach was appropriate because it enabled the researchers to examine how rice sellers constructed meaning from their firsthand experiences with digital tools in the context of their daily business operations. By emphasizing lived experiences, the approach allowed the study to capture sellers’ motivations, constraints, and attitudes toward digital promotion practices (Salmons, 2022).

The quantitative phase measured the extent of digital platform and social media usage through survey items that asked respondents about the frequency of use, types of platforms utilized, and purposes of digital engagement in promoting rice products. These survey items operationalized the variable by quantifying sellers' level of digital adoption. Subsequently, the Key Informant Interviews were designed to elaborate on these findings by exploring why digital platforms were minimally used. The interview guide included questions related to digital literacy, access to internet and devices, perceived usefulness of online promotion, preference for face-to-face transactions, customer characteristics, and time or resource constraints. This mapping ensured that the qualitative data directly explained the quantitative results.

The integration of the mixed-method design strengthened the alignment between the research question, variable, and data collection tools. While the survey identified patterns indicating limited use of digital platforms and social media, the qualitative interviews provided contextual explanations for these patterns. Sellers explained how their business environment, customer base, and personal capabilities influenced their promotional choices. Through triangulation, the study was able to link numerical trends with experiential narratives, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers to digital promotion.

Overall, this explicit alignment between the research question, variable, survey items, and interview guide enhanced the coherence and validity of the study. By combining quantitative measurement with qualitative explanation, the research provided a holistic analysis of the limited use of digital platforms among local rice sellers. This approach supported the study's objective of generating context-sensitive recommendations for improving promotional strategies that are feasible and appropriate for the local rice market in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

Selection Process

The selection of participants in this study followed a purposive criterion sampling technique, ensuring that only individuals with direct, relevant, and first-hand experience in rice retailing were included. In line with Creswell and Creswell's guidance on purposive sampling, this approach was appropriate because the study sought information-rich cases capable of providing meaningful insights into the economic strategies of local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations.

Specifically, the respondents were selected based on the following criteria: (a) they owned and operated a physical rice-selling store; (b) they had at least two to three years of experience in selling rice; (c) they possessed a valid business permit; and (d) their stores were located in Barangay Kablacan, Poblacion, Colon, Malbang, or Tinoto in Maasim, Sarangani Province. These criteria ensured that participants had sufficient operational experience and exposure to market price fluctuations, consumer demand, and supply conditions relevant to the study.

A total of thirty (30) local rice sellers who met the inclusion criteria were selected as respondents for the quantitative component of the study. From among these respondents, three (3) key participants were purposively chosen for the qualitative phase based on their ability to articulate in-depth explanations of their economic strategies and their reasons behind the limited use of digital platforms and social media in promoting rice products. This multi-level selection process ensured that both numerical trends and contextual explanations were adequately captured, thereby strengthening the comprehensiveness and credibility of the study's findings.

Quantitative Respondents

This study involved two groups of individuals: survey respondents for the quantitative phase and research participants for the qualitative phase. This nomenclature follows the recommendation of Morse (1991), who differentiates respondents as individuals who answer structured instruments and participants as contributors who actively provide in-depth qualitative insights.

A total of 30 eligible local rice sellers served as the survey respondents of the study. All 30 invited individuals successfully completed the questionnaire, yielding a 100% response rate with no attrition or withdrawal.

Purposive sampling is appropriate when the researcher identifies individuals who can provide specific, relevant information based on their experience (Palinkas, 2020). This ensured that all respondents were capable of evaluating the extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations.

Qualitative Participants

For the qualitative phase, 3 participants were recruited from the pool of survey respondents using purposive criterion sampling. All three agreed to participate, resulting in no withdrawal or non-response. Each participant provided specialized and experience-based insights through semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KII). Below are short descriptive profiles of the participants, as required:

Participant 1 (SP-1), is a 55-year-old male rice seller residing in Barangay Kablacan. He reported that he had no experience using digital platforms or social media for product promotion. According to him, customers in the community preferred to purchase rice through face-to-face transactions, and there was no observed demand for online buying. As a result, he perceived digital promotion as unnecessary for his business.

Participant 2 (SP-2), is a 60-year-old female rice seller from Barangay Kablacan. She shared that she lacked the skills and knowledge required to use social media for business purposes. Although she owned social media accounts, these were used exclusively for personal communication with family and friends. She expressed uncertainty and hesitation in using these platforms for selling, indicating a lack of confidence in digital marketing.

Participant 3 (SP-3), is a 65-year-old female rice seller residing in Barangay Kablacan. She explained that she was still adjusting to the use of mobile phones and experienced difficulty operating digital devices. In addition, she reported having visual limitations, which made it challenging for her to read and navigate applications on a mobile screen. These physical and technological constraints discouraged her from using digital platforms and social media for promoting her products.

These participants were purposely chosen because they exhibited diversity of reasons for limited usage of digital platforms and social media for product promotion, allowing the qualitative phase to capture a broader range of local rice seller experiences, a criterion supported by information-rich sampling strategies (Campbell et al., 2020).

Research Instruments

The primary research instrument used in this mixed-method study was a researcher-made survey questionnaire, supplemented by a semi-structured interview guide for the qualitative phase. The use of a structured questionnaire is widely recognized as appropriate for descriptive research because it enables systematic and quantifiable assessment of attitudes, perceptions, and experiences across a large group of respondents (Gray & Grove, 2020). Contemporary scholars note that questionnaires are effective instruments for collecting standardized data in business and market studies, particularly when the objective is to measure the extent of practices, behaviors, and perceptions across multiple variables (Molina-Azorín, 2021). In alignment with the objectives of this study, the questionnaire was designed based on the conceptual framework and an extensive review of related literature on the extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations, digital platform usage, small-scale retailing, and seller promotional strategies. The instrument focused on gathering quantitative data regarding the extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations, as well as selected demographic and business-related characteristics relevant to the study.

The questionnaire consisted of two major parts. Part I captured the respondents' demographic profile, including gender, age range, and average monthly income. These variables were necessary to answer Research Question 1 and to determine whether demographic characteristics influenced the extent of economic practices ratings. Part II measured extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Never Practice, 2 = Rarely Practice, 3 = Sometimes Practice, 4 = Often Practice, and 5 = Always Practice, covering the key dimensions of prices, consumer demand, and production supply. Likert-type scales continue to be one of the most widely accepted tools for measuring subjective evaluations such as extent of practice because they provide clarity, ease of interpretation, and statistical flexibility (Joshi, Kale, Chandel, & Pal, 2020).

Before formal administration, the survey instrument underwent expert validation to ensure clarity, relevance, and content accuracy. Three validators with expertise in business and marketing and research evaluated whether the items represented the constructs of the extent of economic strategies employed. A pilot test involving twenty (20) local rice sellers from the selected barangays was conducted to assess the instrument's reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficient yielded acceptable values across all constructs, indicating strong internal consistency and coherence of items, a standard practice endorsed by recent methodological literature (Boateng, Neilands, Frongillo, Melgar-Quinonez, & Young, 2020). Based on pilot feedback, several items were refined to enhance clarity, reduce redundancy, and improve overall respondent comprehension.

For the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to gather deeper insights from purposively selected key informants. The guide comprised open-ended questions designed to explore participants' lived experiences, particularly their reasons behind their limited use of digital platforms and social media in promoting their products, an issue that emerged prominently in preliminary data. The semi-structured format allowed researchers to maintain alignment with the study objectives while adapting questions to probe emerging insights as needed. This approach is consistent with contemporary qualitative research practices advocating for conversational flexibility, participant-centered inquiry, and thematic depth (Salmons, 2023). The interview guide was reviewed by experts to ensure cultural sensitivity, ethical appropriateness, and alignment with research questions.

Together, the survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide provided a comprehensive and methodologically sound set of tools for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. These instruments ensured systematic, meaningful, and triangulated insights into the extent of economic strategies employed by the local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations and their reasons behind their limited use of digital platforms and social media in promoting their products in Maasim, thereby supporting the rigor of the mixed-method design.

Data Collection

Before the formal data collection, the researchers conducted a pilot test to evaluate the clarity, reliability, and overall functionality of the survey questionnaire. This preliminary phase aimed to detect ambiguous items, assess internal consistency, and verify whether respondents could successfully navigate the instrument without assistance, a practice recommended in contemporary methodological literature (Taherdoost, 2022). Twenty (20) local rice sellers from the five barangays in Maasim participated in the pilot test, after which necessary refinements were made to improve item wording and structure.

Following the pilot test, the researchers sought formal approval from the school principal to conduct the study outside school premises, in compliance with ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. After securing institutional clearance, permission from the local rice sellers was obtained to invite them as potential respondents and participants. This process aligns with current ethical standards that emphasize negotiated entry, transparency, and respect for organizational boundaries (Bhandari, 2023).

The recruitment process began with the researchers approaching eligible local rice sellers who met the inclusion criteria. The informed consent process involved the researchers explaining the study's nature, purpose, risks, benefits, and confidentiality measures. Local rice sellers were assured that participation was voluntary, refusal carried no consequences, and they could withdraw at any time without justification. Because the study involved adult participants, only standard informed consent was required, but participants who preferred to answer in Bisaya were allowed to do so to ensure comfort and clarity. Written consent was obtained before surveys or interviews were administered, consistent with ethical guidelines on autonomy and participant protection (World Health Organization, 2022).

Moreover, the quantitative phase began with the distribution of the researcher-made survey questionnaire, which contained items relating to demographic profile, and extent of economic strategies employed. Each respondent was given approximately sixty (60) minutes to complete the instrument. The researchers organized the distribution process systematically: one researcher handled the introduction and instructions, another monitored the completion of forms, and a third handled retrieval and checking for completeness. Weighted means, frequency counts, and reliability statistics were applied to evaluate responses, ensuring alignment with descriptive research principles and internal consistency standards (Field, 2020).

For the qualitative phase, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with three selected participants whose survey responses indicated strong experiential insights, particularly regarding their reasons behind their limited use of digital platforms and social media in promoting their products. These interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing the researchers to probe deeper into personal experiences related to the reasons behind the local rice sellers' limited use of digital platforms and social media in promoting their products. Each interview lasted 60 minutes and took place in a quiet area preferred by the participants. With their consent, interviews were video and audio-recorded to ensure accuracy during transcription and thematic analysis. The researchers adhered to best practices in qualitative interviewing, including rapport-building, neutral questioning, and reflexive listening (Salmons, 2021). Data saturation was monitored to ensure that themes were grounded and no longer producing new information.

All data collected, completed questionnaires, video and audio recordings, signed consent forms, and transcriptions, were stored securely in a password-protected digital folder accessible only to the research team. Hard copies were kept in a locked drawer in the adviser's office to uphold confidentiality and data security. Digital and physical data will be retained for one year after publication of the study, after which digital files will be permanently deleted and hard copies will be shredded, following ethical data destruction protocols (British Psychological Society, 2021).

Finally, a feedback session was planned in which the researchers summarized key findings and presented them to the participating local rice sellers. This step allowed stakeholders to verify interpretations, clarify ambiguities, and benefit directly from the study's insights. Such feedback loops are recognized as an ethical and practical component of community-engaged research practices (Tracy, 2020). Through these systematic procedures, rooted in ethical conduct, methodological rigor, and contextual sensitivity, the researchers ensured that data collection remained aligned with the research questions and the overall mixed-method research design.

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedures in this study were systematically aligned with each of the research questions and with the mixed-method research design that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, while the qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Integration of findings occurred during interpretation to ensure triangulation, convergence, and comprehensive understanding of economic strategies of local rice sellers in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

Analysis for Research Question 1: "What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of gender, age range, and average monthly income?" To answer this question, the demographic data were quantified using frequency counts and percentage distributions. These descriptive statistics allowed the researchers to identify patterns in the local rice sellers' characteristics, which serve as the contextual background for understanding variations in the extent of economic strategies employed ratings. Descriptive analysis is appropriate for summarizing categorical variables and presenting them in a meaningful structure (Frey, 2022). Results were presented in tables for clarity and comprehension.

Analysis for Research Question 2: "What is the extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations in terms of price, consumer demand, and production supply?" To determine the extent of practice, weighted mean was used as the primary statistical tool because the items in the questionnaire employed a 5-point Likert scale. The scoring and verbal interpretation followed this scheme:

| Mean Range | Verbal Interpretation |
|-------------|-----------------------|
| 4.21 – 5.00 | Always Practice |
| 3.41 – 4.20 | Often Practice |
| 2.61 – 3.40 | Sometimes Practice |
| 1.81 – 2.60 | Rarely Practice |
| 1.00 – 1.80 | Never Practice |

These verbal interpretations were used to evaluate respondents' extent of practice of the economic strategies in response to price fluctuations. The use of Likert-based weighted means is consistent with best practices for assessing extent of economic strategies practices in business and marketing research (Joshi et al., 2020; Widhiarso & Suprpto, 2022). Reliability of each construct was evaluated through Cronbach's alpha, with acceptable internal consistency set at $\alpha \geq 0.70$, following Field (2020). The reliability scores from the pilot test guided refinements in the instrument prior to deployment.

Analysis for Research Question 3: "Is there a significant difference in the extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations when they are grouped according to their average monthly income?"

To determine if there was significant difference in the extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations when they are grouped according to their average monthly income, One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used. This inferential statistical test was appropriate because the study compared the mean scores of the extent of economic strategies across two or more independent income groups of local rice sellers. Prior to analysis, the assumptions of normality, independence of observations, and homogeneity of variances were examined to ensure the validity of the test, following the guidelines outlined by Pittman (2021). The results were interpreted at the 0.05 level of significance, consistent with standard practice in social science research. A significant p-value ($p < 0.05$) indicated that the extent of economic strategies differed significantly across income groups, while a non-significant p-value ($p > 0.05$) suggested no statistically significant difference, thereby supporting the null hypothesis.

Analysis for Research Question 4 (Qualitative): "What are the reasons behind the limited use of digital platforms and social media by sellers in promoting their products?" Qualitative data from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase thematic analysis, which is suited for identifying patterned meanings across participant narratives. Analysis proceeded through: (1) Familiarization: Transcribing interviews verbatim, repeatedly reading transcripts, and noting initial impressions related to their reasons behind their limited use of digital platforms and social media in promoting their products. (2) Generating Initial Codes: Segmenting data into meaningful units such as "Perceived Irrelevance of Digital Platforms

Due to Customer Buying Behavior,” “Limited Digital Literacy and Skills for Online Promotion,” “Physical Limitations and Technological Difficulty as Barriers to Digital Adoption.”

(3) Searching for Themes: Clustering codes into broader theme “Barriers to Digital Adoption in Rice Retail Promotion” (4) Reviewing Themes: Comparing themes against the full dataset to ensure coherence and representativeness of participant perspectives. (5) Defining and Naming Themes: Refining theme labels and clarifying their relevance to customer expectations and service quality. (6) Producing the Report: Integrating thematic findings with quantitative insights to understand the reasons behind the limited use of digital platforms and social media by the local rice sellers in promoting their products. This thematic approach aligns with phenomenological inquiry, allowing participants’ lived experiences about their reasons behind the limited use of digital platforms and social media in promoting their products to guide interpretation.

Because this study employed a mixed-method design, integration occurred during interpretation through triangulation, where quantitative trends (e.g., limited use of digital platforms and social media in promoting their products) were compared with qualitative explanations (e.g., perceived irrelevance of digital platforms due to customer buying behavior). This allowed the researchers to explain why certain quantitative scores occurred, ensuring depth and contextual accuracy, a process supported by contemporary mixed-methods scholars (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2022). Findings from both data sets informed the formulation of implications in Chapter 5. Quantitative trends highlighted priority areas (e.g., limited use of digital platforms and social media in promoting their products), while qualitative insights offered deeper understanding of systemic issues affecting local rice sellers on the use of digital platforms or social media for product promotion.

Finally, the outputs, implications for the limited use of digital platforms and social media in product promotion, were grounded in both numerical evidence and thematic insights. These were validated through local rice sellers’ feedback sessions with members checking with key informants to verify interpretation accuracy (Tracy, 2020), and expert review by faculty advisers to ensure clarity, feasibility, and academic soundness.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure that the findings of this mixed-method study were credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable, the researchers employed systematic procedures consistent with contemporary criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative and mixed-method research. As recommended by Nowell (2021) and Sharma (2020), methodological rigor was upheld by applying transparent, well-documented processes during data collection, analysis, and validation.

Credibility was strengthened by grounding all interpretations in the actual experiences and perspectives of the local rice sellers who participated in the survey and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). During interviews, the researchers video and audio-recorded the sessions, took reflexive field notes, and conducted interviews in locations chosen by the participants to ensure comfort and enhance accuracy of responses. These practices align with the guidance of Castillo-Montoya (2021), who emphasized prolonged engagement, rapport-building, and contextual familiarity as central to trustworthy qualitative inquiry. Additionally, member checking was conducted by returning a summary of the thematic interpretations to the interview participants for verification, allowing them to confirm, clarify, or adjust the meanings attributed to their statements.

Dependability was ensured by maintaining a clear and consistent documentation of all research activities, including the development of instruments, pilot testing, data collection, transcription, and analysis. An audit trail was created, detailing methodological decisions and changes during the research process, consistent with the recommendations of Korstjens and Moser (2021). Peer debriefing with the research adviser and panel experts from Colon National High School further contributed to dependability by allowing external evaluation of the logic, accuracy, and coherence of the researchers’ analytic decisions.

Confirmability was achieved by practicing reflexivity throughout the study. The researchers consciously bracketed their personal expectations and assumptions regarding participants’ reasons for limited usage of digital platforms and social media for product promotion, ensuring that the findings emerged from the collected data rather than subjective interpretations. Researcher journals and reflexive memos were maintained to document the researchers’ thoughts, potential biases, and analytical challenges. This follows the guidelines of Nowell and Albrecht (2020), who highlight reflexive transparency as a key contributor to confirmability. To further strengthen confirmability, the researchers retained interview recordings, transcripts, and coding matrices as part of the audit trail available for external review.

Transferability was addressed by providing rich, detailed descriptions of the research context, the profiles of the participants, and the reasons for the limited usage of digital platforms and social media by the local rice sellers for product promotion. By offering contextual details, readers may assess how the findings apply to similar local rice selling settings. As Lincoln and Guba’s contemporary interpreters (e.g., Pandey & Patnaik, 2021) suggest, thick description allows others to determine the relevance of the findings to their own contexts.

Finally, triangulation supported the overall trustworthiness of the study. This included methodological triangulation by combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, investigator triangulation through collaborative team analysis, and data triangulation by comparing information from diverse participants across different barangays in Maasim. These triangulation strategies follow the recommendations of Creswell and Creswell (2021) for enhancing the robustness and validity of mixed-methods research.

Through these sustained efforts, credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and triangulation, the researchers ensured that the study’s results are trustworthy, ethically grounded, and reflective of the true experiences of local rice sellers in Maasim.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers ensured that all ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study, following the guidelines set by Colon National High School, and contemporary ethical standards for research involving human participants. Ethical safeguards were implemented to prevent any form of exploitation, coercion, or harm, and to guarantee that respondents and key informants were treated with respect, dignity, and fairness. Special attention was given to the confidentiality, privacy, and

autonomy of all individuals participating in the study on the extent of economic strategies employed by the local rice sellers in response to price fluctuations in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

Informed Consent

Informed consent served as the cornerstone of ethical practice in this study. Before any survey or interview was conducted, the researchers provided a clear explanation of the study’s purpose, scope, procedures, risks, benefits, and the voluntary nature of participation. Consent was obtained in writing from each adult respondent and key participant, in accordance with ethical requirements for studies involving human participants. The researchers also clarified that participants could choose to withdraw at any point without consequence. For the qualitative phase, additional consent for video and audio recording was obtained separately to ensure participants’ comfort and transparency. This process safeguarded participant autonomy and promoted trust throughout the data collection.

Data Privacy and Confidentiality

The study adhered to the standards of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Data Privacy Act of 2012 to ensure responsible handling of personal information. All respondents were informed that their identities would remain anonymous and that their responses would be reported only in aggregate or coded form. Survey questionnaires, interview transcripts, and consent forms were stored securely, with digital files encrypted and physical documents kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to the research team. Upon completion of the study and publication of the findings, all data will be destroyed following ethical disposal procedures, digital files will be permanently deleted, and hard copies will be shredded, to prevent unauthorized access or misuse of information.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study was entirely voluntary. No respondent was compelled to participate, and declining or withdrawing from the study did not entail penalties or loss of benefits. This assurance was emphasized during the informed consent process to ensure that willingness, not obligation, guided every participant’s decision. Voluntary participation protected the integrity of the data and upheld the ethical principle of respect for persons.

Gender Sensitivity

The researchers maintained gender-sensitive practices throughout the study by ensuring that questions, interactions, and analyses were free from bias and respectful of all gender identities. Survey items and interview questions were worded in a gender-neutral manner to avoid stereotyping or exclusion. Additionally, the researchers acknowledged that economic strategies employed may differ across genders; therefore, all perspectives, regardless of gender, were valued equally and analyzed with fairness and inclusivity.

Cultural Sensitivity

Given that the study was conducted in Maasim, Sarangani Province, an area characterized by cultural diversity, the researchers were mindful of using respectful, non-discriminatory, and culturally appropriate language in the survey, interviews, and all field interactions. Participants were allowed to respond in Bisaya or English according to their comfort, ensuring inclusivity and reducing linguistic barriers. The researchers avoided questions or statements that might demean cultural beliefs or practices, reflecting a commitment to ethical business research, where respect for local cultures and communities is essential.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the quantitative results of the study gathered from the survey questionnaires administered to the local rice sellers. It discusses the demographic profile of the respondents and their extent of economic strategies employed in response to price fluctuations. The data are presented in tabular form and analyzed using frequency, percentage, and weighted mean. Each result is interpreted and supported with recent related literature to further strengthen the discussion. Through this analysis, the study may serve as bases for context-appropriate business support and market development initiatives.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

This part presents the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of gender, age range, and average monthly income to understand their importance since they influence the extent of economic strategies employed. The complete results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of the Respondents

| | VARIABLES | FREQUENCY | PERCENTAGE |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Gender | Male | 5 | 16.67% |
| | Female | 25 | 83.33% |
| | Total | 30 | 100% |
| Age Range | 21 to 25 years old | 2 | 6.67% |
| | 26 to 30 years old | 0 | 0 |
| | 31 to 35 years old | 1 | 3 |
| | 37 to 40 years old | 3 | 10% |
| | 41 to 45 years old | 9 | 30% |
| | 46 to 50 years old | 7 | 23.33% |
| | 51 and above | 8 | 26.67% |
| | Total | 30 | 100% |
| Average Monthly Income | 10,000 to 19,999 | 22 | 73.33% |
| | 20,000 to 29,999 | 3 | 10% |
| | 30,000 to 39,999 | 3 | 10% |

| | | |
|------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 40,000 to 49,999 | 0 | 0 |
| 50,000 to 59,999 | 2 | 6.67% |
| 60,000 and above | 0 | 0% |
| Total | 30 | 100% |

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the thirty (30) local rice sellers in Maasim, Sarangani Province in terms of gender, age range, and average monthly income. As shown in the table, the majority of the respondents were **female (83.33%)**, while only 16.67% were male. This result suggests that rice retailing in the selected barangays is predominantly managed by women. Similar findings were reported by Choudhury and Dutta (2022) and Amin et al. (2022), who noted that women are highly represented in small-scale food retailing due to its compatibility with household responsibilities and community-based trading practices. However, this result contrasts with studies in other regions where male dominance in agricultural trade was observed, particularly in wholesale or large-scale operations (Khan et al., 2021). These differences may be explained by the small-scale, community-oriented nature of rice selling in Maasim, where retail activities are often home-based and family-managed.

In terms of age range, most respondents were **41 to 45 years old (30%)**, followed by those 46 to 50 years old (23.33%) and 51 years old and above (26.67%). This indicates that rice selling is largely operated by middle-aged to older individuals, with very limited participation from younger age groups. This pattern is consistent with findings by Mishra et al. (2021) and Rao (2022), who observed that younger individuals are less likely to engage in traditional retail businesses due to preferences for salaried employment or technology-driven livelihoods. Moreover, older sellers tend to rely on established customer relationships and traditional selling practices, which may also help explain the limited adoption of digital platforms observed in this study. In contrast, some studies conducted in urban areas reported higher digital adoption among younger sellers (Patel, 2021), highlighting how age-related differences are shaped by local context and market structure.

Regarding average monthly income, a substantial majority of the respondents (**73.33%**) earned between **₱10,000 and ₱19,999**, indicating relatively low-income levels among local rice sellers. Only a small proportion reported incomes above ₱30,000, and none reached ₱60,000 and above. These findings align with studies by Basu and Shukla (2022) and Sullivan et al. (2023), which identified thin profit margins and income vulnerability among small-scale food retailers due to fluctuating prices, rising operational costs, and limited capital. Low-income levels may also constrain sellers' ability to invest in digital tools, internet access, or online marketing, further reinforcing reliance on traditional selling methods. While some literature suggests that digitalization can increase income opportunities for small retailers (World Bank, 2024), such benefits may not be immediately accessible to sellers operating within low-income and low-resource environments.

In summary, the demographic characteristics of the respondents suggest that local rice sellers in Maasim are predominantly female, middle-aged to older, and low-income earners, operating within a traditional retail structure. These characteristics help explain sellers' cautious economic strategies and their limited engagement with digital platforms, as age, gender roles, and income constraints shape both capacity and willingness to adopt new marketing approaches.

Implications for Business Support and Market Development Initiatives

The findings of demographic profile have important implications for business support and market development initiatives targeting local rice sellers. Given the predominance of female sellers, support programs may adopt gender-responsive approaches, such as flexible training schedules and community-based learning models. Capacity-building initiatives should recognize women's dual roles in household and business management and provide practical, accessible interventions.

Moreover, the age distribution of respondents indicates the need for age-appropriate digital literacy and business training programs. Since many sellers are middle-aged or older, digital support initiatives may be simplified, hands-on, and focused on basic functionalities rather than advanced technologies. Peer mentoring, demonstrations, and assisted digital adoption may be more effective than purely online training modules.

Lastly, the low-income profile of the respondents highlights the necessity for financial and market access support, such as micro-financing, subsidized digital tools, and partnerships with local government units or cooperatives. Market development initiatives may prioritize incremental improvements, such as basic digital visibility, improved supply linkages, and pricing support, rather than assuming immediate readiness for full digital transformation. Addressing these demographic realities may help ensure that business support interventions are realistic, inclusive, and sustainable for local rice sellers in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

Extent of Economic Strategies Employed

This section presents the results on the extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in Maasim, Sarangani Province in response to rice price fluctuations. The findings presented in Tables 2-4 provide an overall assessment of how frequently and effectively these strategies were employed.

Table 2
Extent of Economic Strategies Employed in terms of Prices

| Indicators | Weighted Mean | Description |
|---|---------------|------------------------|
| 1. I monitor rice price trends daily to make timely adjustments to my selling price and avoid losses due to sudden fluctuations. | 4.50 | Always Practiced |
| 2. When wholesale prices drop, I take the opportunity to buy in bulk and increase my profit margin without raising retail prices. | 3.80 | Often Practiced |
| 3. I adjust my retail prices gradually, ensuring that changes remain affordable for customers while still covering my costs. | 4.50 | Always Practiced |
| 4. I compare prices with nearby sellers to stay competitive and avoid pricing myself out of the market. | 3.30 | Sometimes Practiced |
| 5. During price hikes, I offer smaller packaging options so customers can still afford to buy rice even in small quantities. | 4.23 | Always Practiced |
| 6. I communicate price changes transparently to build trust and retain loyal customers during times of price instability. | 4.53 | Always Practiced |
| 7. To attract buyers during high price periods, I offer promos like “buy 5 kilos, get 1 free” or loyalty rewards. | 1.97 | Rarely Practiced |
| 8. I mix different grades or varieties of rice to create a more affordable product line when premium prices become too high for average buyers. | 1.73 | Never Practiced |
| 9. I reduce my markup temporarily during peak price seasons to maintain customer volume and prevent losing sales | 3.50 | Often Practiced |
| 10. I collaborate with suppliers for better deals or delayed payments terms during price surges to stabilize my retail pricing strategy. | 3.63 | Often Practiced |
| OVERALL MEAN | 3.57 | Often Practiced |

Table 2 presents the extent to which local rice sellers in Maasim, Sarangani Province employed various **price-related economic strategies** in response to rice price fluctuations. The overall weighted mean of **3.57**, described as **“Often Practiced,”** indicates that *rice sellers actively engage in pricing strategies to cope with unstable market conditions*. This finding suggests that pricing remains a primary and accessible adjustment mechanism for small-scale rice sellers, especially in contexts where capital, technology, and market reach are limited.

Among the indicators, the **highest-rated strategy** was *communicating price changes transparently to build trust and retain loyal customers during times of price instability* ($\bar{x} = 4.53$, Always Practiced). This result highlights the importance of trust-based relationships in local rice retailing. Similar findings were reported by Choudhury and Dutta (2022) and Lal and Rao (2023), who emphasized that transparency in pricing helps small retailers maintain customer loyalty during inflationary periods. In community-based markets, sellers rely heavily on long-term relationships, making honest communication a crucial survival strategy. This finding is also consistent with behavioral economics perspectives, which suggest that fairness and trust often outweigh short-term profit maximization in small retail settings.

Closely related to this were strategies such as monitoring rice price trends daily and adjusting retail prices gradually to remain affordable while covering costs (both $\bar{x} = 4.50$, Always Practiced). These results indicate that sellers are highly attentive to market signals and prefer incremental price adjustments rather than sudden increases. Studies by Basu and Shukla (2022) and Sullivan et al. (2023) support this finding, explaining that gradual pricing helps prevent customer loss and demand shock, especially for staple goods like rice where consumers are highly price-sensitive despite inelastic demand.

In contrast, the **least-rated strategies** were *mixing different grades or varieties of rice to create more affordable products* ($\bar{x} = 1.73$, Never Practiced) and *offering promotions such as “buy 5 kilos, get 1 free” during high-price periods* ($\bar{x} = 1.97$, Rarely Practiced). These findings suggest that sellers have limited flexibility in product bundling and promotional pricing. This contrasts with findings from more urban or digitally integrated markets where promotions are commonly used to stimulate demand (Patel, 2021). However, local studies explain that small-scale rice sellers often lack sufficient inventory volume, storage capacity, and profit margins to sustain promotional schemes (Mishra et al., 2021). Thus, while promotions are effective in theory, they may be impractical in low-income, small-volume retail environments such as Maasim.

Other moderately practiced strategies included *buying in bulk during wholesale price drops* ($\bar{x} = 3.80$), *reducing markup temporarily during peak price seasons* ($\bar{x} = 3.50$), and *collaborating with suppliers for better deals or delayed payments* ($\bar{x} = 3.63$). These findings align with Khan et al. (2021), who observed that supplier relationships play a critical role in helping small retailers stabilize prices during inflationary shocks. However, the “often practiced” rather than “always practiced” rating suggests that access to capital and supplier flexibility remains uneven among sellers.

Generally, the results indicate that local rice sellers prioritize low-risk,

relationship-based pricing strategies over aggressive promotional or product-mixing approaches. This pattern reflects the constraints of small-scale retailing, where sellers must balance affordability, trust, and sustainability amid frequent price fluctuations.

Implications for Business Support and Market Development Initiatives

The findings of the extent of economic strategies employed in terms of prices suggest several important implications for business support and market development initiatives. First, the strong reliance on transparency and gradual pricing adjustments indicates that trust-building practices are already embedded in local rice retailing. Support programs may therefore strengthen these practices by providing sellers with basic market information systems, such as price monitoring bulletins or cooperative price updates, to improve decision-making accuracy.

Second, the limited use of promotions and product-mixing strategies highlights the need for capacity-building in pricing innovation. Local government units and development agencies may introduce simple, low-risk pricing techniques suitable for small sellers, such as flexible packaging guidance or cooperative-based promotions that reduce individual risk.

Third, the moderate reliance on supplier collaboration suggests potential for market linkage programs. Facilitating partnerships between rice sellers, wholesalers, and cooperatives may improve access to bulk pricing, credit arrangements, and stable supply chains. Lastly, support efforts may focus on small, practical improvements that are realistic for local rice sellers in Maasim.

Table 3
Extent of Economic Strategies Employed in terms of Consumer Demand

| Indicators | Weighted Mean | Description |
|--|---------------|----------------------------|
| 1. I diversify my product offerings by selling different rice varieties-such as regular, premium, and organic-to meet the diverse preferences and income levels of my customers. | 4.20 | Often Practiced |
| 2. I adjust my pricing strategies by offering discounts or bulk pricing during periods of low demand to boost sales and maintain customer loyalty. | 4.10 | Often Practiced |
| 3. I often join cooperative buying groups with other vendors so I can purchase rice in bulk at lower wholesale prices, which helps me stay competitive in the market. | 2.97 | Sometime Practiced |
| 4. To respond to shifting consumer demand, I source rice from multiple suppliers to ensure a consistent inventory and avoid stockouts. | 3.07 | Sometime Practiced |
| 5. I offer flexible packaging sizes, like selling rice by the kilo or by the sack, to accommodate both budget-conscious customers and bulk buyers. | 4.33 | Always Practiced |
| 6. I keep tract of market trends and seasonal demand, increasing my supply ahead of harvest seasons or festivals when rice consumption usually spikes. | 3.13 | Sometime Practiced |
| 7. To build stronger relationships with my customers, I sometimes offer credit or installment options to my regular patrons, especially during financially difficult times. | 3.33 | Sometimes Practiced |
| 8. I use digital platforms and social media to promote my products. | 1.40 | Never Practiced |
| 9. I reduce my operational costs-such as labor, transportation, and storage by streamlining my delivery schedules and managing my inventory efficiently. | 2.10 | Rarely Practiced |
| 10. To ensure profitability despite market volatility, I sometimes mix local and imported rice varieties to balance costs while still meeting my customers quality expectations. | 1.77 | Never Practiced |
| OVERALL MEAN | 3.04 | Sometimes Practiced |

Presented in Table 3 is the extent to which local rice sellers in Maasim, Sarangani Province employed **consumer demand-related economic strategies** in response to market conditions. The overall weighted mean of **3.04**, described as “**Sometimes Practiced**,” indicates that *sellers moderately adjusted their strategies based on consumer demand*. This suggests that while sellers were responsive to customer needs, such strategies were applied selectively rather than consistently, likely due to operational and resource constraints.

The **highest-rated** indicator was *offering flexible packaging sizes, such as selling rice by the kilo or by the sack* ($\bar{x} = 4.33$, Always Practiced). These findings highlight sellers’ strong responsiveness to varying consumer budgets and purchasing capacities. Similar results were reported by Basu and Shukla (2022) and Rao (2022), who found that small-scale food retailers commonly rely on flexible packaging as an effective and low-cost strategy to retain customers during periods of economic uncertainty. Flexible

packaging allows sellers to accommodate both low-income buyers and bulk purchasers without significantly altering pricing structures.

Closely following this were strategies such as *diversifying rice varieties* ($\bar{x} = 4.20$) and *offering discounts or bulk pricing during low demand* ($\bar{x} = 4.10$), both rated as Often Practiced. These findings align with Sullivan et al. (2023), who noted that product variety and selective discounting help stabilize sales volume when consumer purchasing power fluctuates. However, unlike large retailers, small rice sellers apply these strategies cautiously to avoid eroding already thin profit margins.

In contrast, the **least-rated** indicator was *using digital platforms and social media to promote products* ($\bar{x} = 1.40$, Never Practiced). This result reinforces earlier qualitative findings of the study and is consistent with research by Mishra et al. (2021) and Amin et al. (2022), which reported low digital adoption among older and low-income food retailers due to limited digital literacy, lack of internet access, and preference for face-to-face transactions. This finding contradicts studies conducted in more urbanized settings where digital marketing significantly influenced consumer demand (Patel, 2021). The disparity suggests that digital promotion strategies may not be immediately viable in small, community-based markets like Maasim.

Other strategies, such as *joining cooperative buying groups* ($\bar{x} = 2.97$) and *sourcing from multiple suppliers* ($\bar{x} = 3.07$), were sometimes practiced, indicating partial engagement with collective and supply-based demand strategies. Studies by Khan et al. (2021) explain that while cooperative arrangements can reduce costs and stabilize supply, participation often requires trust, coordination, and capital that small sellers may lack. Additionally, *mixing local and imported rice varieties* ($\bar{x} = 1.77$, Never Practiced) was rarely used, possibly due to concerns about quality consistency and customer preference for familiar rice types.

Generally, the findings show that local rice sellers relied more on practical, customer-facing strategies, such as flexible packaging and product variety, than on technology-driven or structurally complex approaches. This pattern reflects sellers' preference for low-risk strategies that align with their customers' immediate needs and purchasing behaviors.

Implications for Business Support and Market Development Initiatives

The results of the extent of economic strategies employed in terms of consumer demand suggest that business support initiatives may build upon strategies that rice sellers already practice effectively. Since flexible packaging and product variety were widely used, training programs may focus on basic demand forecasting and inventory planning to further enhance these practices. Strengthening sellers' ability to anticipate seasonal demand could improve stock management and reduce losses.

The consistently low use of digital platforms highlights the need for context-sensitive digital support, rather than assuming immediate readiness for online promotion. Local government units and development agencies may consider introducing assisted digital marketing, such as cooperative-managed online pages or simple SMS-based promotion systems, which reduce the individual burden on sellers.

Furthermore, the moderate use of cooperative buying and supplier diversification suggests opportunities for market linkage programs. Facilitating partnerships among rice sellers, wholesalers, and cooperatives may help stabilize supply and improve responsiveness to demand fluctuations. Completely, market development initiatives may prioritize incremental and practical interventions that respect the realities of small-scale rice retailing in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

Table 4
 Extent of Economic Strategies Employed in terms of Production Supply

| Indicators | Weighted Mean | Description |
|---|---------------|---------------------|
| 1. I establish strong relationships with multiple rice farmers and suppliers to secure a consistent supply even during low-production periods. | 2.57 | Rarely Practiced |
| 2. When rice production is low, I reduce my daily allocation to prevent total stock depletion and continue serving more customers. | 3.80 | Often Practiced |
| 3. I evaluate suppliers to determine their capability and product quality. | 3.20 | Sometimes Practiced |
| 4. I conduct market surveys to find out the needs and preferences of consumers which helps in supply planning. | 3.90 | Sometimes Practiced |
| 5. I partner with local millers and small producers to access alternative sources of rice when major suppliers experience production delays. | 2.07 | Rarely Practiced |
| 6. I adjust my rice variety offerings depending on what is abundantly produced to ensure availability and affordability for my customers. | 4.23 | Always Practiced |
| 7. During supply shortages, I prioritize regular customer and limit bulk sales to avoid running out of stock too quickly. | 3.70 | Often Practiced |
| 8. I collaborate with other sellers to share stock or refer customers during severe supply disruptions, maintaining goodwill and market presence. | 3.10 | Sometimes Practiced |
| 9. I negotiate flexible delivery schedules with my suppliers to match the pace of fluctuating production levels and reduce spoilage or excess. | 3.23 | Sometimes Practiced |

| | | |
|---|-------------|----------------------------|
| 10. I educate my customers about temporary changes in variety or price during production shortages to manage expectations and retain trust. | 4.13 | Often Practiced |
| OVERALL MEAN | 3.29 | Sometimes Practiced |

Table 4 presents the extent to which local rice sellers in Maasim, Sarangani Province employed **production- and supply-related economic strategies** in response to fluctuations in rice availability. The overall weighted mean of **3.29**, described as **“Sometimes Practiced,”** indicates that *sellers applied supply-related strategies selectively, depending on the severity of supply constraints and their available resources*. This suggests that while sellers were responsive to production and supply issues, their actions were often constrained by factors beyond their direct control.

The **highest-rated** indicator was *adjusting rice variety offerings depending on what is abundantly produced to ensure availability and affordability* ($\bar{x} = 4.23$, Always Practiced). This finding indicates that sellers actively managed product assortment as a practical response to supply fluctuations. Similar findings were reported by Sullivan et al. (2023) and Baffes and Gardner (2021), who noted that small-scale food retailers frequently adjust product mix rather than prices alone to cope with supply shocks. This strategy allows sellers to maintain continuous availability while protecting customers from sharp price increases, reinforcing trust and customer retention.

Another highly practiced strategy was *educating customers about temporary changes in variety or price during production shortages* ($\bar{x} = 4.13$, Often Practiced). This aligns with studies by Choudhury and Dutta (2022), which emphasized that transparent communication helps reduce customer dissatisfaction during supply disruptions. Such practices reflect the relationship-oriented nature of local rice markets, where sellers rely on long-term patronage rather than short-term gains.

In contrast, the **least-rated** indicators were *partnering with local millers and small producers to access alternative rice sources* ($\bar{x} = 2.07$, Rarely Practiced) and *establishing strong relationships with multiple rice farmers and suppliers* ($\bar{x} = 2.57$, Rarely Practiced). These results suggest that direct engagement with upstream supply actors is limited among local rice sellers. This finding contrasts with studies conducted in more organized supply chains, where supplier diversification is a common risk-mitigation strategy (Khan et al., 2021). However, research by Mishra et al. (2021) explains that small retailers often lack the capital, bargaining power, and logistical capacity needed to build and sustain multiple supplier relationships, particularly in rural or semi-rural settings.

Moderately practiced strategies included *reducing daily allocation during low production* ($\bar{x} = 3.80$) and *prioritizing regular customers during shortages* ($\bar{x} = 3.70$), both described as Often Practiced. These findings are consistent with Rao (2022), who observed that sellers prioritize supply rationing and customer loyalty during periods of scarcity. Meanwhile, strategies such as evaluating supplier capability, conducting market surveys, collaborating with other sellers, and negotiating flexible delivery schedules were only sometimes practiced, indicating partial engagement with more structured supply management approaches.

In summary, the findings suggest that local rice sellers relied more on immediate, seller-controlled strategies, such as product adjustment and customer communication, than on structural supply chain interventions like supplier diversification or formal partnerships. This pattern reflects the realities of small-scale retailing, where sellers have limited influence over upstream production and supply systems.

Implications for Business Support and Market Development Initiatives

The results of the extent of economic strategies employed in terms of production supply highlight several implications for business support and market development initiatives. First, the strong reliance on adjusting product varieties and communicating with customers indicates that sellers already practice adaptive and relationship-based supply strategies. Support programs may strengthen these practices by providing basic training on inventory planning and demand forecasting, particularly during known production cycles and lean seasons.

Second, the limited engagement with multiple suppliers and local millers suggests a need for supply chain linkage programs. Local government units, cooperatives, and agricultural agencies may facilitate seller–supplier networking, enabling rice sellers to access alternative supply sources without bearing the full risk individually. Group-based sourcing or cooperative arrangements could reduce costs and improve supply stability.

Lastly, since many supply strategies were only sometimes practiced, market development initiatives may focus on incremental and feasible interventions, such as shared storage facilities, information-sharing platforms, or coordinated delivery schedules. These approaches may enhance sellers’ capacity to respond to production supply challenges while remaining realistic and appropriate for the small-scale rice retail environment in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

Table 5
 Summary of the Extent of Economic Strategies Employed by Local Rice Sellers

| Variables | Weighted Mean | Description |
|---------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| Prices | 3.57 | Often Practiced |
| Consumer Demand | 3.04 | Sometimes Practiced |
| Production Supply | 3.29 | Sometimes Practiced |
| OVERALL MEAN | 3.30 | Rarely Practiced |

Table 5 summarizes the extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers across three key dimensions: prices, consumer demand, and production supply. Among these dimensions, **price-related strategies** obtained the **highest weighted mean** ($\bar{x} = 3.57$) and were described as **often practiced**, indicating that pricing adjustments were the most frequently used response to market fluctuations. In contrast, **consumer demand–related strategies** recorded the **lowest weighted mean** ($\bar{x} = 3.04$), described as **sometimes practiced**, while production supply strategies also fell under sometimes practiced with a weighted mean of 3.29. The

overall weighted mean of 3.30 suggests that, taken together, economic strategies were applied inconsistently, reflecting selective and situation-based responses rather than systematic implementation.

The prominence of price-related strategies suggests that rice sellers relied most heavily on mechanisms directly within their control. This finding is consistent with studies by Basu and Shukla (2022) and Lal and Rao (2023), which found that small-scale food retailers commonly adjust prices, markups, and packaging sizes because these strategies require minimal capital and can be implemented immediately. Pricing adjustments are often preferred in local markets because they allow sellers to respond quickly to changes in wholesale costs and inflation without restructuring operations. Behavioral economics literature further explains that sellers in community-based markets prioritize affordability and customer trust, making gradual pricing a practical and socially acceptable strategy (Choudhury & Dutta, 2022).

In contrast, consumer demand-related strategies, which ranked lowest, required more proactive planning, innovation, or resource investment. Strategies such as digital promotion, cooperative buying, and demand forecasting were applied only sometimes, reflecting constraints related to digital literacy, age, income, and market structure. This result aligns with findings by Mishra et al. (2021) and Amin et al. (2022), who observed that traditional food retailers in developing contexts tend to rely on walk-in customers and personal relationships rather than demand-driven marketing tools. However, this finding contrasts with research in more urbanized settings where demand-oriented strategies, particularly digital marketing, significantly influenced sales and customer reach (Patel, 2021). The inconsistency highlights how local context shapes strategy selection.

Similarly, production supply strategies were only sometimes practiced, suggesting limited capacity to influence upstream supply conditions. Studies by Khan et al. (2021) and Sullivan et al. (2023) explain that small retailers often have weak bargaining power and limited access to multiple suppliers, making supply diversification difficult. As a result, sellers tend to react to supply changes, such as adjusting product varieties, rather than proactively managing supply chains. This helps explain why production supply strategies did not rank as highly as pricing strategies in the present study.

Overall, Table 5 reveals a clear pattern: local rice sellers prioritize strategies that are immediate, low-risk, and within their direct control, particularly pricing, while more complex demand- and supply-oriented strategies are applied selectively. This pattern reflects structural constraints faced by small-scale rice sellers, including limited capital, low income, age-related factors, and reliance on traditional market relationships.

Implications for Business Support and Market Development Initiatives

The results of the summary of the extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers have important implications for business support and market development initiatives. First, the strong reliance on pricing strategies suggests that support programs may enhance sellers' pricing decision-making capacity, such as providing regular market price updates, basic costing tools, and simple margin analysis training. These interventions build on existing practices rather than introducing unfamiliar systems.

Second, the relatively lower application of consumer demand and production supply strategies indicates a need for incremental capacity-building initiatives. Rather than promoting full digital transformation, agencies may introduce assisted or cooperative-based demand strategies, such as shared online promotion platforms, group purchasing arrangements, or community-managed market information systems.

Lastly, since overall strategies were applied inconsistently, market development initiatives may prioritize feasible and context-sensitive interventions that respect sellers' limitations while gradually expanding their strategic options. Strengthening linkages among sellers, suppliers, and local institutions may improve resilience without overburdening small-scale rice retailers. Such targeted support may help local rice sellers transition from reactive coping mechanisms to more sustainable economic strategies.

Difference in the Extent of Economic Strategies Employed

This study also determined the difference in the extent of economic strategies employed when the respondents are grouped according to average monthly income. Using the One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), the complete results were generated as shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6

Difference in the Extent of Economic Strategies Employed According to Average Monthly Income

| Source of Variation | Sum of Squares (SS) | Degrees of Freedom (df) | Mean Square (MS) | F | P-Value | Description |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------|--------|---------|--------------------------------|
| Between Groups | 0.4735 | 3 | 0.1578 | 0.4468 | 0.7217 | With No Significant Difference |
| Within Groups | 9.1862 | 26 | 0.3533 | | | |
| Total | 9.6597 | 29 | 0.3331 | | | |

Table 6 presents the results of the One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in the extent of economic strategies employed by local rice sellers when grouped according to their average monthly income. The computed F-value of 0.4468 with a p-value of 0.7217, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, indicates that no significant difference exists among income groups. This means that rice sellers, regardless of whether they belonged to lower or relatively higher income brackets, employed economic strategies at a comparable extent.

This finding suggests that average monthly income did not significantly influence how rice sellers responded to price fluctuations. Similar results were reported by Mishra et al. (2021) and Amin et al. (2022), who found that small-scale food retailers often adopt similar coping strategies regardless of income level because they operate under shared market constraints such as volatile prices, limited bargaining power, and dependence on walk-in customers. These studies explain that in traditional retail settings, income differences do not necessarily translate into strategic diversity, as sellers rely on familiar and low-risk practices accessible to all.

However, this result contrasts with studies conducted in more urbanized or digitally integrated markets, where higher-income retailers were found to adopt more advanced strategies, such as digital marketing and supplier diversification (Patel, 2021; Sullivan et al., 2023). These studies suggest that income can influence strategy adoption when market environments provide greater access to technology, capital, and formal supply networks. The absence of such differences in the present study may be explained by the uniform operating conditions faced by rice sellers in Maasim, where limited infrastructure and market scale constrain strategic variation regardless of income level.

Other studies help explain the present findings by emphasizing the role of context over income. Choudhury and Dutta (2022) argued that in community-based food markets, sellers' strategies are shaped more by customer relationships, trust, and shared market norms than by financial capacity. Likewise, Lal and Rao (2023) observed that staple food sellers often prioritize stability and affordability over expansion-oriented strategies, resulting in similar economic behaviors across income groups.

Generally, the results indicate that economic strategy adoption among local rice sellers is relatively homogeneous, driven more by shared market realities than by differences in income. This reinforces the idea that small-scale sellers respond to price fluctuations using practical, experience-based strategies rather than income-dependent innovations.

Implications for Business Support and Market Development Initiatives

The findings of Table 6 have important implications for business support and market development initiatives. Since income level did not significantly affect the extent of economic strategies employed, support programs do not need to be income-segmented. Instead, interventions may be designed to target all local rice sellers collectively, focusing on common challenges such as price volatility, supply uncertainty, and limited access to market information.

Furthermore, capacity-building initiatives should emphasize shared skill development, such as basic pricing analysis, inventory planning, and customer communication strategies, rather than assuming that higher-income sellers are more capable of adopting advanced practices. This approach ensures inclusivity and prevents the exclusion of lower-income sellers from development programs.

Lastly, the lack of income-based differences suggests that improving market conditions, such as strengthening supply linkages, providing access to reliable price information, and facilitating cooperative arrangements, may have a broader impact than income-focused interventions. Addressing structural constraints may enable rice sellers, regardless of income level, to enhance their economic strategies and improve resilience in the face of price fluctuations in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the qualitative findings of the study derived from the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with selected local rice sellers in Maasim, Sarangani Province. The qualitative phase was designed to complement and deepen the quantitative results by capturing the sellers' experiences, perspectives, and explanations, particularly regarding their reasons behind the limited use of digital platforms and social media in promoting their products, which could not be fully explained by survey data alone.

Through semi-structured interviews, the rice sellers provided detailed narratives that clarified the challenges, constraints, and considerations influencing their promotional practices, including issues related to digital literacy, perceived customer demand, and operational limitations. Thematic analysis was employed to organize the interview responses into meaningful themes that reflected common patterns and variations across participants' experiences. These qualitative insights enriched the interpretation of the quantitative findings by explaining why certain economic and promotional strategies were only rarely or sometimes practiced, thereby strengthening the overall conclusions of the study.

What are the reasons behind the limited use of digital platforms and social media by local rice sellers in promoting their products?

This section presents the qualitative findings on the reasons behind the limited use of digital platforms and social media by local rice sellers in promoting their products. The qualitative data were analyzed using a systematic thematic approach, which involved careful coding, comparison of responses, and clustering of related ideas to ensure rigor and credibility in interpretation. Interview transcripts from the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were thoroughly reviewed and segmented into meaningful units based on the central focus of digital adoption and promotional practices among rice sellers.

After identifying initial codes, the researchers developed core ideas by condensing participants' statements into concise summaries while preserving the original meaning of their experiences. These core ideas were then subjected to cross-case analysis, allowing similar responses to be grouped into broader theme clusters. This process enabled the researchers to identify recurring patterns and shared explanations across participants regarding why digital platforms were seldom used for product promotion.

The qualitative results revealed a dominant theme cluster identified as "**Barriers to Digital Adoption in Rice Retail Promotion.**" Within this cluster, three interrelated themes emerged: (1) *perceived irrelevance of digital platforms due to customer buying behavior*, where sellers believed online promotion was unnecessary because customers preferred in-person purchases; (2) *limited digital literacy and skills for online promotion*, wherein sellers lacked knowledge and confidence in using social media for business purposes; and (3) *physical limitations and technological difficulty as barriers to digital adoption*, particularly among older sellers who experienced difficulty operating mobile devices or faced eyesight-related challenges.

In conclusion, the qualitative findings complement the quantitative results by explaining why the use of digital platforms and social media was rarely practiced among local rice sellers. The narratives demonstrate that limited digital adoption was not

merely a matter of choice but was shaped by market realities, skill constraints, and physical limitations. By systematically organizing participants' experiences into coherent themes, this analysis provides a deeper understanding of the contextual and personal factors influencing promotional practices and highlights areas where targeted, context-sensitive support may help improve digital engagement among local rice sellers in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

Table 7
Reasons Behind the Limited Use of Digital Platforms and Social Media by Local Rice Sellers in Promoting Their Products

| Significant Statement | Code | Formulated Mean | Theme Cluster |
|---|-----------|---|---|
| "I haven't tried selling online because no one really orders. Our store is open anyway. If someone buys online, then we just sell to them, but we haven't experienced that yet. No one buys online either." | SP-1 (SC) | Perceived Irrelevance of Digital Platforms Due to Customer Buying Behavior | Barriers to Digital Adoption in Rice Retail Promotion |
| "None, because I don't know how. I have Facebook just for myself, but I don't know how to use it or make posts." | SP-2 (RT) | Limited Digital Literacy and Skills for Online Promotion | |
| "I only recently started using a cellphone, I have a hard time using it since I don't really know how. Also, my eyesight makes it difficult for me." | SP-3 (YC) | Physical Limitations and Technological Difficulty as Barriers to Digital Adoption | |

Table 7 presents the qualitative findings derived from the Key Informant Interviews, summarizing the emerging themes and their integration into the broader theme cluster: **Barriers to Digital Adoption in Rice Retail Promotion**. The findings reveal that the limited use of digital platforms and social media by local rice sellers is shaped by interconnected market, personal, and physical factors rather than by a single constraint.

Perceived Irrelevance of Digital Platforms Due to Customer Buying Behavior. The perception that digital platforms are irrelevant to rice selling emerged strongly from the interviews. Seller (SP-1/SC) consistently emphasized that customers preferred face-to-face transactions, valuing immediate product inspection, personal interaction, and trust-based exchanges. In staple food retailing, particularly rice, purchasing decisions are often habitual and community-oriented, reducing the perceived advantage of online promotion. This finding supports Choudhury and Dutta (2022), who argued that in informal food markets, consumer trust is built through repeated physical interactions rather than online visibility.

Furthermore, rice sellers associated online selling with products that are non-perishable or discretionary, rather than staple goods consumed daily. According to Mishra et al. (2021), traditional retailers are less likely to digitalize when products are low-margin and frequently purchased, as transaction costs may outweigh benefits. This helps explain why sellers viewed social media promotion as unnecessary, even when they were aware of its existence.

In addition, seller's perceptions were shaped by observed customer behavior rather than potential demand. Since customers rarely asked about online ordering, seller interpreted this as confirmation that digital promotion would not generate sales. This aligns with Lal and Rao (2023), who emphasized that small retailers rely on experiential learning rather than market experimentation when resources are limited.

However, studies from urban contexts report contrasting findings, where online visibility significantly influenced consumer choice and convenience (Patel, 2021). The inconsistency suggests that digital relevance is context-dependent, reinforcing the idea that market readiness must precede digital adoption.

Limited Digital Literacy and Skills for Online Promotion. Limited digital literacy was another critical barrier influencing seller's reluctance to use digital platforms. While some sellers owned smartphones and had social media accounts, they lacked the skills to use these tools for business purposes, such as posting content, responding to inquiries, or managing online transactions. Amin et al. (2022) similarly found that access to technology does not automatically translate into effective use among small food retailers.

Moreover, seller's expressed fear of making mistakes, such as posting incorrect information or being unable to respond promptly to online inquiries. According to Reddy and Qureshi (2022), fear of technological errors and embarrassment discourages older micro-entrepreneurs from experimenting with digital tools. This fear often results in avoidance rather than gradual learning.

The lack of digital skills was also linked to absence of training opportunities. Sellers reported learning business practices informally through experience rather than structured instruction. World Bank (2024) emphasized that without localized, hands-on training, digital initiatives often fail to reach micro-enterprises effectively.

Although some studies highlight successful digital upskilling among micro-retailers (Sullivan et al., 2023), these programs typically involve sustained mentoring and infrastructure support, conditions not present in the sellers' local environment. Thus, limited digital literacy remains a significant constraint in this study.

Physical Limitations and Technological Difficulty as Barriers to Digital Adoption. Physical limitations, particularly age-related challenges, further restricted digital adoption among rice sellers. Participants described difficulty operating smartphones, reading text on screens, and navigating applications. These constraints made digital promotion physically uncomfortable and mentally taxing. Meyer and Rojas (2021) similarly found that physical and cognitive limitations significantly reduce technology use among older small-business owners.

The issue of eyesight problems was especially prominent, affecting sellers' ability to read messages, create posts, or manage online content. According to Amin et al. (2022), health-related barriers are often overlooked in digital inclusion programs, despite being a major determinant of technology adoption among aging entrepreneurs.

Additionally, technological difficulty interacted with limited digital skills, compounding barriers. Sellers who struggled physically were less motivated to learn digital tools, reinforcing non-adoption. Mishra et al. (2021) explained that when effort required exceeds perceived benefit, micro-retailers are unlikely to adopt new technologies.

In contrast, younger sellers in other studies demonstrated higher digital engagement (Patel, 2021), suggesting that age and physical condition significantly mediate digital adoption. In this study, physical limitations were not isolated issues but part of a broader set of constraints influencing sellers' decisions.

Barriers to Digital Adoption in Rice Retail Promotion. Taken together, the emerging themes converge into this broader theme cluster. The findings show that digital non-adoption is not due to resistance to change but is shaped by rational decision-making within constrained contexts. Sellers evaluated digital platforms based on customer demand, personal capability, and physical feasibility.

This theme cluster reflects what Lal and Rao (2023) describe as contextual rationality, where small retailers prioritize stability, familiarity, and low risk over innovation. Sellers chose strategies aligned with their lived realities rather than abstract benefits of digitalization.

The interaction among barriers is particularly significant. Limited customer demand reduced motivation to learn digital skills, while physical difficulties further discouraged experimentation. Choudhury and Dutta (2022) argue that such layered barriers create a cycle of digital exclusion that cannot be addressed through technology provision alone.

Contrary to studies suggesting rapid digital transformation among micro-enterprises (Sullivan et al., 2023), the present findings highlight the uneven and selective nature of digital adoption. Digital strategies may succeed only when structural, personal, and market conditions align.

Finally, the theme cluster underscores that digital adoption must be gradual, supported, and context-sensitive. Without addressing underlying barriers, digital platforms will remain underutilized in traditional rice retailing.

Implications for Business Support and Market Development Initiatives

The expanded findings suggest that business support initiatives may begin with market readiness assessments, ensuring that digital promotion aligns with actual consumer behavior. Introducing digital tools without customer demand risks low adoption and wasted resources.

Second, capacity-building programs may prioritize simplified, assisted digital training, particularly for older sellers. Peer mentoring, community facilitators, and cooperative-based digital management may be more effective than individual training models.

Finally, market development initiatives may adopt hybrid approaches, combining traditional selling methods with limited, supported digital exposure. By addressing skill, physical, and market barriers simultaneously, interventions may gradually improve digital inclusion while respecting the realities of local rice sellers in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

IV. SUMMARY & INSIGHTS, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS & CONCLUDING REMARKS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents the summary, insights, conclusions, implications, and recommendations of the study. It revisits the research problem and briefly restates the procedures undertaken to examine the economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to rice price fluctuations in Maasim, Sarangani Province. The chapter synthesizes the major findings derived from both quantitative and qualitative analyses, highlighting key patterns related to pricing practices, responses to consumer demand, production and supply management, and the reasons behind the limited use of digital platforms and social media for product promotion.

Based on these findings, conclusions were drawn in direct response to the research questions and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding the study. Finally, the chapter presents practical implications and recommendations aimed at supporting business sustainability, market development initiatives, and policy interventions for local rice sellers, as well as directions for future research on small-scale food retailing and price adaptation strategies.

Summary of Findings

This study was conducted to examine the economic strategies employed by local rice sellers in response to rice price fluctuations in Maasim, Sarangani Province. Specifically, the quantitative component sought to determine the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of gender, age range, and average monthly income, as well as to assess the extent of economic strategies employed by rice sellers in response to price fluctuations with respect to pricing practices, consumer demand adjustments, and production and supply management. In addition, the study tested whether significant differences existed in the extent of economic strategies when respondents were grouped according to average monthly income.

To address these objectives, the study employed a descriptive-survey research design. The respondents consisted of 30 local rice sellers who owned and operated physical rice retail stores in selected barangays of Maasim and met the inclusion criteria set by the study. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, weighted means, and One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The analysis was guided by Supply and Demand Theory, Price Elasticity of Demand Theory, Market Adaptation Theory, and Behavioral Economics Theory, which provided the theoretical basis for interpreting how rice sellers adjust their business strategies amid fluctuating market conditions.

Based on the results and interpretation of the data, the findings of the study were the following:

1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

- 1.1 Out of 30 respondents, 25 (83.33%) were female and 5 (16.67%) were male, indicating female dominance in local rice retailing.
- 1.2 In terms of age, the largest group of respondents belonged to the 41–45 age range (30%), followed by those aged 46–50 (23.33%) and 51 years old and above (26.67%), showing that most rice sellers were middle-aged to older adults.
- 1.3 Regarding average monthly income, 22 respondents (73.33%) earned between ₱10,000–₱19,999, 5 respondents (16.67%) earned ₱20,000–₱29,999, and only 3 respondents (10%) earned ₱30,000–₱39,999, indicating generally low-income levels among local rice sellers.

2. Extent of Economic Strategies Employed by Local Rice Sellers

- 2.1 Price-related strategies obtained the highest overall weighted mean of 3.57, interpreted as Often Practiced, indicating that pricing adjustments were the most frequently used strategies.
- 2.2 Consumer demand-related strategies yielded an overall weighted mean of 3.04, described as Sometimes Practiced, reflecting moderate adjustments based on customer demand.
- 2.3 Production and supply-related strategies recorded an overall weighted mean of 3.29, also interpreted as Sometimes Practiced, indicating selective responses to supply and production conditions.
- 2.4 Overall, the composite weighted mean of 3.30 suggests that economic strategies were sometimes to often practiced, showing situational rather than consistent application of strategies.

3. Difference in the Extent of Economic Strategies Employed by Local Rice Sellers When Grouped According to Average Monthly Income

- 3.1 The One-Way ANOVA produced an F-value of 0.4468 and a p-value of 0.7217, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Since $p > 0.05$, the result indicates no significant difference in the extent of economic strategies employed when rice sellers were grouped according to average monthly income. This finding implies that rice sellers across different income groups employed similar levels of pricing, consumer demand, and production supply strategies in response to rice price fluctuations.

Insights

The qualitative findings reveal that the limited use of digital platforms and social media by local rice sellers is largely shaped by perceived customer buying behavior rather than technological availability. Participants acknowledged that digital tools and social media exist and are accessible; however, they consistently observed that customers preferred in-person transactions when purchasing rice. This insight suggests that sellers evaluate the usefulness of digital platforms based on actual customer behavior in the local market, not on the potential advantages of online promotion. In this context, digital adoption is assessed through practical outcomes rather than theoretical benefits.

Another key insight is that rice sellers perceive digital promotion as incompatible with the nature of rice as a staple commodity. Participants explained that rice is a necessity purchased regularly and habitually, reducing the need for advertising or online visibility. Unlike discretionary goods, rice does not rely on promotional appeal to stimulate demand. This perception highlights that sellers' promotional decisions are influenced by the characteristics of the product itself, reinforcing the idea that not all commodities benefit equally from digital marketing strategies.

The qualitative data further indicate that digital literacy limitations significantly constrain sellers' ability to engage in online promotion, even when basic access to technology exists. Participants reported owning mobile phones and social media accounts but lacked the skills and confidence to use these platforms for business purposes. This insight underscores that digital exclusion among rice sellers is not simply a matter of access, but of capability and self-efficacy, where uncertainty and fear of making mistakes discourage experimentation with digital tools.

A critical insight emerging from the interviews is the role of age-related physical limitations in reinforcing digital non-adoption. Sellers described difficulties such as poor eyesight and challenges navigating mobile applications, which made digital engagement physically demanding. These constraints increased reliance on familiar, non-digital practices and reduced motivation to learn new technologies. This suggests that digital adoption barriers are not only cognitive or economic but also physical, particularly among older sellers.

The qualitative findings also reveal that sellers' preference for traditional selling methods reflects a broader tendency toward risk avoidance and stability-oriented decision-making. Participants favored face-to-face transactions because they allowed immediate payment, clear communication, and direct trust-building with customers. Digital promotion, by contrast, was perceived as uncertain and potentially disruptive to established routines. This insight highlights that sellers prioritize business practices that minimize uncertainty and preserve predictable income flows.

Another important insight is that digital non-use represents a deliberate and rational choice rather than resistance to change. Sellers demonstrated awareness of digital platforms but consciously chose not to adopt them after weighing perceived benefits against effort, risk, and relevance. This finding challenges assumptions that non-digital sellers are unwilling or incapable of innovation; instead, it shows that innovation decisions are shaped by contextual constraints and lived experience.

Finally, the synthesis of qualitative insights suggests that individual digital adoption may be unrealistic without assisted or collective support mechanisms. Given the combined influence of customer behavior, limited skills, and physical constraints, expecting sellers to independently adopt digital platforms may widen existing gaps. The findings imply that any future digital engagement among rice sellers would likely require shared, assisted, or cooperative approaches that reduce individual burden while respecting existing market practices.

Implications of Qualitative Findings

1. Theory and Knowledge Building

The qualitative findings contribute to theory by demonstrating that digital adoption among micro-retailers is contextually rational rather than deficit-driven. Sellers' decisions not to use digital platforms were shaped by perceived customer behavior, product characteristics (rice as a staple), personal capability, and physical constraints. This extends existing technology adoption theories by emphasizing situated usefulness, the idea that adoption depends on real-market relevance rather than availability alone. The findings support a more nuanced understanding of behavioral and market adaptation theories, where rational non-adoption can be an optimal response under specific socio-economic and demographic conditions.

2. Educational and Professional Practice

From an educational and professional standpoint, the findings highlight the need for practice-oriented and inclusive capacity-building approaches. Training programs for small-scale sellers may move beyond generic digital literacy and instead focus on basic, assisted, and application-specific skills tailored to older and low-income participants. Professional development initiatives must recognize physical limitations and learning pace, suggesting the use of hands-on demonstrations, peer support, and simplified tools rather than purely online or self-directed learning modules.

3. Program and Policy Implications

The qualitative results imply that one-size-fits-all digitalization policies may be ineffective for traditional food retailers. Programs promoting digital commerce should be preceded by market readiness assessments and aligned with actual consumer behavior. Policies may support collective or assisted digital models, such as cooperative-managed social media pages or LGU-supported digital intermediaries, rather than requiring individual sellers to adopt technology independently. Addressing structural barriers, such as access to support personnel and age-inclusive tools, may improve policy relevance and impact.

4. Creativity and Innovation

The findings suggest that innovation among local rice sellers does not necessarily mean full digital transformation. Instead, creativity may emerge through hybrid and low-risk innovations, such as combining traditional selling with limited digital exposure managed by younger family members, cooperatives, or community facilitators. Innovation may be reframed as adaptive problem-solving within constraints, encouraging solutions that respect sellers' capacities while gradually introducing new practices. This expands the notion of innovation beyond technology to include social and organizational creativity.

5. Socio-Cultural Implications

The qualitative findings underscore the enduring importance of trust-based, face-to-face interactions in local rice retailing. Selling rice remains embedded in community relationships, shared routines, and social familiarity. Digital platforms, when perceived as impersonal or unnecessary, may conflict with these socio-cultural norms. This implies that any market development initiative must be culturally sensitive and reinforce, rather than replace, existing social capital. The findings affirm that modernization in local markets should coexist with, not disrupt, community values.

6. Ethico-Moral Implications

Ethically, the findings raise concerns about digital exclusion and equity, particularly for older sellers and those with physical limitations. Expecting universal digital adoption without addressing capability differences may unintentionally marginalize vulnerable groups. The study highlights the moral responsibility of institutions to ensure that development initiatives are inclusive, respectful, and non-coercive. Ethical practice requires recognizing sellers' autonomy in decision-making and avoiding narratives that frame non-digital sellers as backward or resistant to change.

Conclusions

Considering the findings of this study, it is concluded that:

1. Local rice retailing in Maasim, Sarangani Province is predominantly managed by female, middle-aged to older sellers, indicating that rice selling remains a livelihood largely sustained by women and older adults within the community. Moreover, the generally low average monthly income of local rice sellers suggests limited financial capacity, which may influence their reliance on practical, low-risk economic strategies rather than capital-intensive or innovative approaches.
2. Local rice sellers most frequently employed price-related economic strategies, indicating that pricing adjustments are the primary and most accessible means of responding to rice price fluctuations. Furthermore, consumer demand-related and production supply-related strategies were only moderately applied, suggesting that sellers respond selectively to changes in demand and supply rather than implementing comprehensive or systematic strategies. The overall extent of economic strategies being sometimes to often practiced indicates that rice sellers adopt strategies situationally, depending on immediate market conditions and resource availability.
3. There was no significant difference in the extent of economic strategies employed when rice sellers were grouped according to average monthly income, implying that income level does not substantially influence sellers' strategic responses to price fluctuations.

Concluding Remarks

The journey of conducting this study was both academically enriching and personally transformative for the researchers. From conceptualizing the research problem to analyzing and interpreting the data, the process required patience, adaptability, and critical reflection. Initially, the study was shaped by assumptions that economic strategies and digital adoption among rice sellers would vary significantly based on income and access to technology. However, as the research progressed, the data revealed a more

nanced reality, one grounded in shared market conditions, lived experiences, and practical decision-making rather than purely economic capacity.

One of the key challenges encountered during the research process was engaging local rice sellers who were often occupied with daily business operations. Scheduling interviews and administering questionnaires required flexibility and sensitivity to the sellers' time constraints. Additionally, translating abstract research concepts into language that was easily understood by participants demanded careful preparation and ethical consideration. These challenges, however, strengthened the researchers' appreciation for field-based research and the importance of building rapport and trust with participants.

An unexpected discovery emerged during the qualitative phase of the study. Rather than expressing resistance to digital platforms, rice sellers demonstrated thoughtful reasoning behind their limited use of technology, anchored in customer behavior, product characteristics, and personal capability. This realization prompted the researchers to reassess initial assumptions about digital exclusion and to recognize non-adoption as a rational and context-sensitive choice. Such insights deepened the analytical rigor of the study and highlighted the value of listening attentively to participants' narratives.

Throughout the research process, the researchers experienced significant personal and professional growth. Conducting mixed-method research enhanced skills in data organization, statistical analysis, thematic interpretation, and academic writing. More importantly, the study cultivated a deeper sense of empathy and respect for small-scale entrepreneurs whose decisions are shaped by constraints often overlooked in policy and academic discourse. The researchers learned that meaningful research extends beyond data collection, it involves reflexivity, ethical responsibility, and openness to findings that challenge preconceived notions.

In conclusion, this research journey reaffirmed the importance of context-driven inquiry and grounded analysis. The experiences gained throughout the study not only contributed to the completion of the research but also shaped the researcher's perspective as an emerging scholar. The study stands as both an academic contribution and a reflective learning experience, underscoring the value of research that is responsive to real-world conditions and the voices of those at the center of the inquiry.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers therefore recommend the following:

National Policymakers and Regulatory Agencies. National policymakers and regulatory agencies are encouraged to design context-sensitive rice market policies that recognize the realities of small-scale rice sellers, including low-income levels and shared market constraints. Strengthening price monitoring and information dissemination systems may help stabilize markets and protect both sellers and consumers during price fluctuations. Policies may also promote inclusive digitalization approaches, such as assisted or collective digital participation, rather than imposing uniform digital requirements on all small retailers.

Local Government Units (LGUs). Local government units may implement localized business support programs focused on practical skills such as pricing analysis, inventory planning, and access to market information. LGUs may facilitate cooperative-based initiatives that encourage group sourcing, information sharing, and assisted digital promotion, while ensuring that training programs are age- and ability-sensitive. Strengthening seller-supplier linkages may further help stabilize rice supply during production shortages.

Local Rice Sellers. Local rice sellers are encouraged to continue practicing transparent pricing and open communication with customers to maintain trust and long-term relationships. They may benefit from adopting simple and low-risk improvements, such as basic record-keeping and flexible packaging, to support better decision-making. Participation in cooperative or LGU-supported initiatives may help reduce individual risk while improving access to market support services.

Consumers and Households. Consumers and households are encouraged to practice informed and responsible purchasing behavior, particularly during periods of price fluctuation. Supporting local rice sellers through consistent buying relationships may contribute to market stability and community food security. Increased awareness of price changes and market conditions may also foster mutual understanding between sellers and consumers.

The Academic Community and Future Researchers. The academic community and future researchers are encouraged to conduct comparative, longitudinal, and multi-stakeholder studies to further explore the economic strategies of rice sellers across different contexts. Future research may focus on assisted digital models, cooperative approaches, and policy impacts to deepen understanding of inclusive market development. Such studies may build on the findings of this research to inform both theory and practice.

ABM Students. ABM students may use the findings of this study to enhance their understanding of real-world business decision-making in small-scale and community-based enterprises. Applying economic, marketing, and operations concepts to local market contexts may deepen analytical skills and practical awareness. Students are encouraged to view innovation as adaptive and context-sensitive, rather than purely technology-driven.

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