

Marketing Strategies of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat

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Abstract

Marketing strategies are crucial to enterprises' business performance. Marketing is the heart of a business and investing in marketing means investing in sustainability and growth. Given the emerging economic advancement, enterprises must keep pace with current marketing trends. Hence, this study was crafted to assess the Marketing Strategies of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat. The study evaluated marketing strategies of SMEs' business performance. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed to analyze and interpret data. To ensure total representation across various sectors, 114 respondents were identified through Total Enumeration Sampling. Results showed that SMEs in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat, consistently employ marketing strategies on product, price, and people with a verbal interpretation of "always" and promotion and place as "often."

Keywords: Marketing Strategies; Product; Price; Place; Promotion; People; Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

INTRODUCTION

Marketing strategies are crucial in the business performance of enterprises. In the emerging economic advancement, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) seek profitable opportunities for growth and development. They usually strive to be flexible and adaptive, creating an updated plan so the business is not left behind.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are the major composition of worldwide businesses, considered the backbone of economic growth and main contributors to job creation. Their impact is profound—over 90% of businesses globally fall into the SME category, illustrating their vital role in driving economic development and ensuring wealth is more evenly shared across societies (World Bank, 2021).

The Philippines is evidence that SMEs are essential in the national economy, contributing a large portion of total business establishments and offering employment to up to 62% of the population (Department of Trade and Industry [DTI], 2022). The Philippine government has implemented various programs to help SMEs, including the Go Negosyo Act and the SME Development Plan. (Department of Trade and Industry, 2022). Despite these inputs, Filipino SMEs encounter barriers that include but are not limited to financial aspects, limited market access, and weak relevance of digital marketing platforms. How businesses pursue marketing strategies is an increasingly complex subject that should be studied (Dibb et al., 2021).

According to the World Bank (2021), SMEs lack effective marketing skills and the common marketing tools used today. These include insufficient market intelligence due to a lack of resources and expertise, compromising its competitive edge in the larger markets. Cruz et al. (2020) observed that regional market and cultural characteristics add another challenge to implementing correct marketing strategies. Enterprises can work in unfriendly conditions, such as underdeveloped infrastructures, fewer customers, and sometimes even in

political turmoil. It suffices to point out that the marketing requirements of SMEs need to be established based on the local economic status and applicability to support improvement and development. Thus, this research aimed to explore the marketing strategies and their impact on the business performance of SMEs in the corridor, helping them navigate these obstacles.

Objectives of the Study

Generally, this study assessed the marketing strategies that affect the business performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat.

Specifically, it addressed the following question:

1. Which practices in marketing strategies are utilized by SMEs in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat, in terms of:
 - 1.1 product;
 - 1.2 price;
 - 1.3 place;
 - 1.4 promotion; and,
 - 1.5 people?

RESEARCH ELABORATIONS

Marketing Strategies for SMEs

According to Kumar et al. (2021), SMEs often rely on traditional and digital marketing strategies to compete effectively in local markets. Their research emphasizes that understanding local market dynamics and consumer behavior is essential for tailoring marketing efforts that drive growth. They found that SMEs that adopted a customer-centric approach and utilized targeted digital advertising experienced improved market penetration and customer engagement.

Similarly, Smith and Johnson (2021) highlight that SMEs in emerging markets benefit significantly from integrating diverse marketing strategies, including cause and relationship marketing. Their study underscores the effectiveness of cause marketing in enhancing brand reputation and building customer loyalty by aligning business activities with social causes. Relationship marketing, on the other hand, fosters long-term customer relationships and improves retention rates (Smith & Johnson, 2021).

On the other hand, SMEs play a crucial role in the economy, contributing significantly to employment and economic growth. Effective marketing strategies are essential for their sustainability and competitiveness in an increasingly digital and globalized market. According to Kotler et al. (2021), SMEs must adopt traditional and digital marketing strategies, such as social media marketing, relationship marketing, and value-based pricing, to enhance brand visibility and customer engagement. Similarly, Cruz et al. (2020) emphasize that Filipino SMEs benefit from localized marketing approaches, leveraging community-based promotions and word-of-mouth strategies to build customer trust.

Meanwhile, David et al. (2019) highlight the growing importance of e-commerce and online platforms, noting that SMEs in the Philippines that integrate digital tools, such as search engine optimization (SEO) and influencer partnerships, tend to experience higher sales growth. These studies underscore the need for SMEs to

implement innovative and cost-effective marketing techniques to ensure long-term business success in the country's highly competitive market.

Product

The concept of a product in marketing strategies extends beyond its physical attributes, encompassing branding, differentiation, and innovation to create a competitive advantage. Kotler et al. (2022) emphasize that a well-developed product strategy involves positioning, value creation, and continuous improvements to meet customer demands and sustain market relevance. Similarly, Armstrong et al. (2020) highlight the significance of product differentiation, where businesses tailor features, quality, and design to distinguish their offerings from competitors. In modern markets, Johnson and Nguyen (2021) argue that digital transformation has redefined product strategies, with smart and connected products enhancing customer engagement and competitive positioning. These perspectives suggest that a strong product strategy is essential for businesses to attract, retain, and satisfy customers while adapting to evolving market trends.

A well-defined product strategy is a fundamental aspect of marketing, as it influences consumer perception, brand positioning, and overall business success. Kotler et al. (2021) emphasize that a product is not just a physical good but also includes branding, packaging, and additional services that enhance customer value. In line with this, Solomon et al. (2020) highlight the importance of product innovation and differentiation, stating that businesses must continuously evolve their offerings to meet changing consumer needs and maintain a competitive edge.

Meanwhile, Jobber et al. (2019) discuss the role of the product life cycle in marketing strategy, noting that companies must adapt their product development, pricing, and promotional efforts based on the product's life cycle stage. These studies underscore the necessity of a dynamic and customer-oriented product strategy to ensure long-term success in the marketplace.

More so, the role of the product in marketing strategies is crucial in shaping consumer perceptions and driving business success. Doyle and Stern (2006) emphasize that understanding consumer preferences and market trends is essential in product development, as companies must tailor their offerings to meet evolving demands. These perspectives underscore the importance of a well-planned product strategy in achieving sustainable growth and differentiation in the marketplace.

Price

Pricing strategies play a fundamental role in shaping consumer behavior, market competitiveness, and business profitability. According to Dolan et al. (2020), effective pricing requires balancing cost considerations, perceived value, and competitive positioning to maximize short-term sales and long-term customer loyalty. Similarly, Hinterhuber et al. (2021) highlight that value-based pricing has become increasingly important. It allows businesses to align prices with customer perceptions of product benefits rather than relying on production costs.

Furthermore, Johansson et al. (2019) emphasize the role of dynamic pricing in modern markets, where businesses adjust prices based on demand fluctuations, competitor pricing, and consumer purchasing patterns. These studies reinforce the significance of strategic pricing in achieving business sustainability and competitive advantage in rapidly evolving markets.

Additionally, pricing is crucial in marketing strategies as it directly impacts consumer demand, competitive positioning, and profitability. According to Smith et al. (2021), businesses must carefully select pricing strategies, such as penetration pricing, skimming, and psychological pricing, to align with their target market and business objectives. Similarly, Hinterhuber et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of value-based pricing, where firms set prices based on perceived customer benefits rather than cost alone, leading to stronger brand positioning and customer loyalty.

Place

The "place" component of marketing strategy, also known as distribution strategy, is essential in ensuring that products are delivered to consumers efficiently. Hollensen (2021) emphasizes the role of globalization and digitalization in transforming distribution networks as businesses increasingly adopt omnichannel strategies that integrate physical stores with e-commerce platforms.

Furthermore, Lovelock and Wirtz (2019) highlight that service-oriented businesses must consider location convenience and accessibility as key factors in customer satisfaction and competitive advantage. Their study emphasizes the significance of a well-structured distribution approach in enhancing market reach, customer convenience, and business success.

According to Dibb et al. (2021), businesses must design distribution channels that align with consumer preferences through direct sales, intermediaries, or digital platforms. Similarly, Palmatier et al. (2020) emphasize that strategic placement decisions should consider factors such as market coverage, logistics efficiency, and the role of emerging technologies in optimizing supply chains.

Promotion

Promotion is a critical component of marketing strategies, encompassing various tools and techniques for communicating value propositions and persuading target audiences. Abdeta and Zewdie (2021) conducted a systematic review highlighting that promotional mix elements—such as advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing, and personal selling—significantly impact organizational performance by enhancing customer relationships and driving sales. Similarly, Ayenew (2023) emphasized that these promotional strategies influence financial metrics like profitability, growth, and operational outcomes, including market share and customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, Ruswanti et al. (2019) analyzed the effects of advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, and direct selling on purchase intentions, revealing that integrated promotional efforts effectively stimulate consumer interest and purchasing decisions. These studies underscore the importance of a well-coordinated promotional strategy in achieving business objectives and fostering competitive advantage.

Promotion is a critical facet of marketing strategies, encompassing various tools and techniques to communicate value propositions and persuade target audiences. Kazmi (2015) provides an in-depth review of theoretical models related to promotion strategies, emphasizing the psychological aspects of consumer decision-making and the impact of price promotions on purchasing behavior. Similarly, Khan (2021) examines the influence of sales promotion, advertising, and direct marketing on the sales of cosmetic products, highlighting that tools such as coupons, free samples, and price discounts significantly affect consumer buying behavior and brand loyalty.

People

The 'People' element in marketing strategies emphasizes the pivotal role of individuals—both customers and employees—in shaping business success. According to Penpoin (2024), 'people' encompasses those who engage directly with customers, such as sales personnel and customer service representatives, whose interactions significantly influence customer satisfaction and loyalty. Thamizharasu (2019) further elaborates that understanding the target audience through detailed buyer personas enables businesses to tailor their offerings effectively. Investing in employee training ensures that staff members embody the brand's values and deliver exceptional service.

Byju (2020) highlights that individuals involved in production, marketing, promotion, distribution, and delivery are integral to the marketing mix, as their collective efforts directly impact the customer experience and perception of the brand. These perspectives underscore that a strategic focus on internal teams and external customers is essential for creating meaningful interactions, fostering loyalty, and driving sustainable business growth.

Garrido-Moreno et al. (2020) highlight that effective social media use fosters value creation through enhanced customer engagement, necessitating employees adeptly managing these platforms to build robust customer relationships. Mason et al. (2021) observe that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the importance of social media marketing, with businesses leveraging these channels to maintain customer connections. This underlines the need for skilled personnel in digital interactions.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the impact of marketing strategies on the business performance of SMEs in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat. A descriptive-correlational approach was used to describe the current marketing practices of SMEs in terms of product, price, place, promotion, and people.

The study focused on Isulan, Sultan Kudarat, as a key economic zone in the province. It examined various Small and Medium enterprises (SMEs) in Barangay Kalawag I, Kalawag II, and Kalawag III, which detailed the distribution of small enterprises into 50 and medium enterprises into 64, a total of 114 SMEs operating in the 3 barangays, being the center of economic trade in the municipality. This study employed a Total Enumeration Sampling, a type of purposive sampling technique where the researcher chooses to examine the entire population with a particular set of characteristics, ensuring a total representation across various sectors of the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

The researcher applied descriptive statistics, mean and standard deviation, which analysed and measured the marketing strategies, which provided a comprehensive overview of SMEs' overall business performance.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Marketing Strategies of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

The marketing strategies of SMEs are shown in Tables 1,2, 3, 4, and 5 on the succeeding pages to determine the overall mean in terms of product, price, place, promotion, and people.

Marketing Strategies of SMEs in terms of Product

Table 1 below shows the marketing strategies of the SMEs in terms of product.

Table 1. Marketing Strategies of SMEs in terms of Product

| Indicator | Mean | Standard Deviation | Interpretation |
|---|------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1. The business actively innovates and enhances product offerings to remain competitive. | 4.11 | 1.12 | Often |
| 2. Product branding ensures it appeals to people of all genders, ages, and backgrounds. | 4.11 | 1.15 | Often |
| 3. The business integrates sustainable and ethical marketing practices, such as ecofriendly packaging and responsible sourcing. | 4.30 | 0.97 | Often |
| 4. Offers products specifically tailored to meet unique customer preferences. | 4.42 | 0.88 | Always |
| 5. Considers customer suggestions to play a significant role in shaping product offerings | 4.35 | 1.02 | Always |
| Overall Mean | 4.26 | 1.02 | Always |

Table 1 presents key indicators reflecting the frequency and consistency of SMEs' marketing strategies in terms of product. The indicators include active innovation and enhancement of product offerings (mean: 4.11, SD: 1.12), inclusive product branding (mean: 4.11, SD: 1.15), integration of sustainable and ethical marketing practices (mean: 4.30, SD: 0.97), offering products tailored to unique customer preferences (mean: 4.42, SD: 0.88), and considering customer suggestions in shaping product offerings (mean: 4.35, SD: 1.02). The overall mean score across these indicators is 4.26, with a standard deviation of 1.02, indicating that SMEs consistently implement these marketing strategies.

Marketing Strategies of SMEs in Terms of Price

Table 2 below shows the marketing strategies of the SMEs in terms of price.

Table 5.2. Marketing Strategies of SME in Terms of Price

| Indicator | Mean | Standard Deviation | Interpretation |
|--|-------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1. The business sets product prices based on market demand and competition while ensuring compliance with pricing regulations. | 4.37 | 1.09 | Always |
| 2. The business regularly assesses and adjusts pricing strategies to maintain profitability and affordability. | 4.32 | 1.13 | Always |
| 3. The pricing strategy considers production costs, markup policies, and consumer purchasing power. | 4.37 | 1.01 | Always |
| 4. The business offers discounts and promotions, a major part of our sales strategy. | 4.32 | 1.11 | Always |
| 5. The business uses pricing strategies to encourage customers to make quick purchase decisions. | 4.31 | 1.11 | Always |
| Overall Mean | 4.34 | 1.09 | Always |

Table 2 shows five key indicators reflecting the pricing practices among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Each indicator consistently received a mean score above 4.3, with standard deviations around 1.1, indicating that these pricing strategies are regularly and effectively implemented. The overall mean score is 4.34, with a standard deviation of 1.09, reinforcing the consistent application of these strategies.

Marketing Strategies of SMEs in terms of Place

Table 3 below shows the marketing strategies of the SMEs in terms of place.

Table 5.3. Marketing Strategies of SME in terms of Place

| Indicator | Mean | Standard Deviation | Interpretation |
|--|-------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1. The business strategically selects distribution channels to ensure customers' accessibility and convenience, following DTI's market expansion guidelines. | 3.94 | 1.31 | Often |
| 2. Actively participate in trade fairs and local markets to reach a wider audience. | 3.67 | 1.39 | Often |
| 3. The business optimizes delivery and logistics processes to enhance customer satisfaction. | 4.12 | 1.19 | Often |
| 4. Utilizes online marketplaces to sell products. | 3.82 | 1.44 | Often |
| 5. Consistency in the business' strategic location. | 4.33 | 1.2 | Always |
| Overall Mean | 3.98 | 1.3 | Often |

Table 3 shows the distribution and accessibility practices among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The data reveals that SMEs often strategically select distribution channels to ensure customer accessibility and convenience, aligning with the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) market expansion guidelines, as indicated by a mean score of 3.94 and a standard deviation of 1.31. Participation in trade fairs and local markets to reach a broader audience also occurs often, with a mean of 3.67 and a standard deviation of 1.39.

1.39. Optimization of delivery and logistics processes to enhance customer satisfaction is another common practice, reflected by a mean score of 4.12 and a standard deviation of 1.19. Utilization of online marketplaces for product sales is practiced often, with a mean of 3.82 and a standard deviation of 1.44. Notably, maintaining consistency in strategic business locations is a practice that SMEs always engage in, evidenced by a mean score of 4.33 and a standard deviation of 1.20. The overall mean across these indicators is 3.98, with a standard deviation 1.30, indicating that SMEs frequently implement these distribution strategies.

Marketing Strategies of SMEs in terms of Promotion

Table 4 below shows the marketing strategies of the SMEs in terms of promotion.

Table 4. Marketing Strategies of SME in terms of Promotion

| Indicator | Mean | Standard Deviation | Interpretation |
|--|-------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1. Implements effective promotional strategies, such as advertising, discounts, and social media campaigns, to increase brand awareness. | 4.09 | 1.27 | Often |
| 2. Actively engage in digital marketing efforts, including social media, email marketing, and influencer collaborations, to promote products and services, following ecommerce and digitalization initiatives. | 4.00 | 1.30 | Often |
| 3. Ensures all promotional materials and advertisements comply with fair trade practices and consumer protection guidelines. | 4.07 | 1.29 | Often |
| 4. The business uses paid advertising to increase customer awareness of our products significantly. | 3.88 | 1.41 | Often |
| 5. The business understands the spending capacity of the target customers. | 4.31 | 1.06 | Always |
| OVERALL MEAN | 4.01 | 1.26 | Often |

Table 4 indicates that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) frequently implement effective promotional strategies, such as advertising, discounts, and social media campaigns, to increase brand awareness, with a mean score of 4.09 and a standard deviation of 1.27. They actively engage in digital marketing efforts, including social media, email marketing, and influencer collaborations, to promote products and services, following e-commerce and digitalization initiatives, scoring a mean of 4.00 and a standard deviation of 1.30. Ensuring compliance with fair trade practices in promotional materials is common, with a mean of 4.07 and a standard deviation of 1.29; the same is the use of paid advertising to boost product awareness, with 3.88 mean and 1.41 standard deviation.

Notably, SMEs consistently strive to understand their target customers' spending capacity, reflected by a mean score of 4.31 and a standard deviation of 1.06. The overall mean across these indicators is 4.01, with a standard deviation of 1.26, indicating these promotional strategies' regular employment and effectiveness.

Marketing Strategies of SMEs in terms of People

Table 5 below shows the marketing strategies of the SMEs in terms of people.

Table 5. Marketing Strategies of SMEs in terms of People

| Indicator | Mean | Standard Deviation | Interpretation |
|---|-------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1. Invests in employee training and development to enhance customer service and operational efficiency. | 4.39 | 0.97 | Always |
| 2. Prioritize customer satisfaction by ensuring staff provide professional, friendly, and responsive service, following Consumer Protection Guidelines. | 4.55 | 0.89 | Always |
| 3. Fosters a positive work environment that motivates employees and promotes ethical business practices. | 4.58 | 0.79 | Always |
| 4. Considers loyalty rewards to encourage repeat purchases from customers. | 4.47 | 1.00 | Always |
| 5. Long-term customer relationships are prioritized over one-time sales. | 4.61 | 0.84 | Always |
| OVERALL MEAN | 4.50 | 0.89 | Always |

Table 5 reveals that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) consistently implement key personnel and customer relationship strategies. These include investing in employee training and development to enhance customer service and operational efficiency (mean: 4.39, sd: 0.97), prioritizing customer satisfaction by ensuring professional and responsive staff (mean: 4.55, sd: 0.89), fostering positive work environments that motivate employees and promote ethical practices (mean: 4.58, sd: 0.79), offering loyalty rewards to encourage repeat purchases (mean: 4.47, sd: 1.00), and emphasizing long-term customer relationships over one-time sales (mean: 4.61, sd: 0.84). The overall mean across these indicators is 4.50, and the overall standard deviation is 0.89, indicating a strong and consistent emphasis on these strategies.

Summary of the Marketing Strategies of Small and Medium Enterprises

Table 6 below shows the summary result of the Marketing Strategies employed by the SMEs.

Table 6. Marketing Strategies of SMEs

| Indicator | Mean | Standard Deviation | Interpretation |
|---------------------|-------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1. Product | 4.26 | 1.02 | Always |
| 2. Price | 4.34 | 1.09 | Always |
| 3. Place | 3.98 | 1.30 | Often |
| 4. Promotion | 4.50 | 0.89 | Often |
| 5. People | 4.35 | 1.06 | Always |
| OVERALL MEAN | 4.28 | 1.07 | Always |

Table 6 shows the summary of the marketing strategies of SMEs in terms of product (mean: 4.26, sd: 1.02), price (mean: 4.34, sd: 1.09), place (mean: 3.98, sd: 1.30), promotion (mean: 4.50, sd: 0.89), and people (mean: 4.35, sd: 1.06), with a corresponding interpretation of “Always”, “Always”, “Often”, “Often”, “Always”,

respectively. The overall mean is 4.28, and the overall standard deviation is 1.07, with an interpretation of “Always”.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat consistently employs their marketing strategies, as ranked from highest to lowest, in terms of promotion (mean: 4.50, sd: 0.89), people (mean: 4.35, sd: 1.06), price (mean: 4.34, sd: 1.09), product (mean: 4.26, sd: 1.02), and place (mean: 3.98, sd: 1.30), respectively.

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