

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Preferred Qualities of Variety Store Owners Towards Sustainable Retailing

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to identify the preferred qualities of variety store owners (VSO) as their guide to sustain their presence in their respective communities. This study is an experimental and descriptive correlational research. The 300 respondents were from the four urban barangays of the municipalities of Lupon and Banaybanay, Davao Oriental. Using a survey questionnaire containing 22 generated profile cards as the data collection instrument, the study revealed that educational attainment is not a prerequisite for owning a variety store. Even graduates of basic education can own a variety store, provided they value customers' loyalty, positive behavior, expertise, a wide variety of merchandise, a competitive advantage, and effective marketing strategies in their daily operations. Furthermore, the specific qualities preferred for VSO are honesty, attentiveness, ability to hire customer-oriented workers who understand pricing, good communication skills, understanding of product assortment, and organized goals. This study recommends that VSO must consider the values and preferences indicated to compete effectively. Additionally, the use of total utilities by local business bureaus and barangay officials for the operational assessment of VSO in their quest for effective strategies to meet the evolving needs of customers is highly recommended. Lastly, it is recommended that future researchers conduct a seminal study in different places to validate or negate the findings indicated herein and to evaluate other indicators not captured in this study.

Keywords: Banaybanay, Davao Oriental, entrepreneurial, millennials, utilities

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INTRODUCTION

Variety stores are found in every country and vary according to socio-cultural elements. In the Philippines, around 1.3 million variety stores are operating across the country (Lu, 2024), selling necessities, but not limited to groceries, snacks, meals, candy, soft drinks, tobacco and cigarettes, magazines, and newspapers, and serving as popular hangouts for urban youth in Southeast Asia (Singh, 2009). In urban areas, there exist variety stores known as sari-sari stores that cater to the local population's daily needs (Marvin, 2020). These small retail establishments are a significant source of consumer goods for many Filipino families, especially those residing in urban poor communities where access to supermarkets is limited (Kuang-Jung, 1997). Further, in Metro Manila, variety stores have been prevalent since the 1950s, serving as the primary

source of daily essentials for 94% of Filipinos (Bernardo, 2023). About 99.6% of registered businesses in the Philippines are MSMEs, including variety stores, which employ 62.3% of the nation's workforce. In comparison, the large corporations only account for 0.4 percent. As a close alternative to unemployment, a large portion of the marginalized have turned to entrepreneurship (Gano-An, 2020).

In Davao Oriental, DOLE Region XI successfully marked the distribution of livelihood starter kits to 40 deserving variety store owner beneficiaries, particularly in Baganga, Davao Oriental. Each receives a startup kit amounting to 25,000 as they begin their entrepreneurial journey (DOLE XI - Davao Oriental Field Office, 2024). Local governments support small businesses, such as variety stores, through initiatives that aim to foster a thriving local economy by empowering small business owners to grow and succeed. In Banaybanay and

Lupon, there are 149 and 144 variety store owners registered, respectively, according to the report of the local Business Permit and Licensing Office as of January to September 2023.

Retailing is the selling of goods directly to the public, usually in small quantities, like variety stores. Despite the constant changes in the retail landscape, variety stores remain essential for meeting the diverse range of needs and expectations of today's consumers. Most of the variety stores are family-run and located mainly in the owners' homes. These variety stores reduce extra transportation costs, especially in rural areas where some villages are distant from a grocery store or market. Although variety stores play a crucial role in communities and the local economy, their owners face numerous challenges. Ahmed et al. (2023) reported that micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), including variety stores, frequently face challenges related to competition, financial constraints, stock management, and customer demands. Most VSOs are not particular about these issues and operate on their own without addressing them. To support their competitiveness, this study aimed to inform VSO of the qualities they must possess to remain competitive in the retail sector. This topic is compelling since there are no existing forums discussing this, and the study will directly or indirectly shed light on the issues raised by Ahmed et al. (2023).

This study will specifically provide the importance values and the most preferred qualities in terms of positive behavior,

maintaining a competitive advantage over competitors, customer loyalty, expertise, variety of merchandise, and knowledge of the components of marketing strategy. Additionally, total utility is provided for use by local officials and business bureaus as a guide for assessing the improvement of variety store ownership in their community.

METHODOLOGY

This is an empirical study using an experimental and descriptive correlational analysis. Additive conjoint analysis was used to calculate the importance values and utilities or part-worth utilities that quantify respondents' preferences. This method is more structured, objective, and less biased, enabling researchers to gather more accurate data. It is relatively quick in collecting and analyzing numerical data, and it allows for generalizing results to wider populations.

Research locale

This study was conducted in the urban barangay of Lupon and Banaybanay, Davao Oriental (Figure 1). According to the 2024 Davao Oriental Census, there are four urban barangays in the identified response area, namely Bagumbayan, Ilangay, and Poblacion Lupon, with a total population of 29,029, while Poblacion Banaybanay has 9,193.

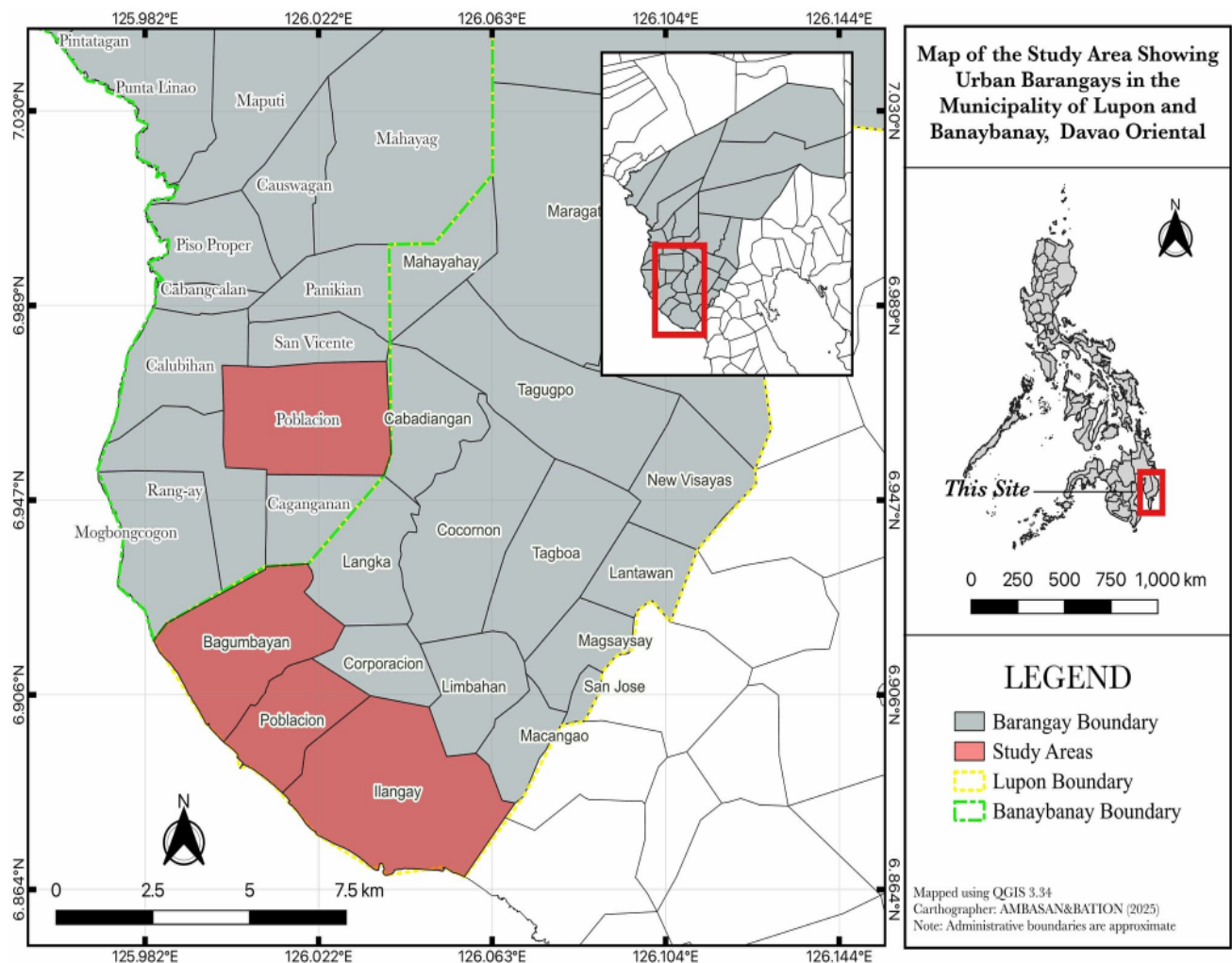


Figure 1. Map of the selected sites included in the study area.

Data collection

The respondents of this study were buyers of variety stores in selected urban barangays of Lupon and Banaybanay, Davao Oriental. Using Slovin's Formula at a 10% margin of error, the calculated sample size is 100.

$$n = N / (1 + (N * e^2))$$

$$n = 38,222 / (1 + (38,222 * 0.10^2))$$

$$n = 99.74 \text{ rounded off to } 100$$

However, this study proceeds with 300 respondents, which is above the required sample size because of the credibility rule mentioned by Bock (2019) stating that a sample size for conjoint analysis needs to be at least 300. The researchers equally stratified the sample by dividing 300 into four groups to ensure accurate and reliable research outcomes (Tri, 2017), thereby distributing 75 respondents equally across every identified rural barangay. The researchers randomly searched for variety stores in the identified barangays. They conducted data gathering with 5 to 10 residents within the store's premises.

To obtain data from the respondents, the researchers and enumerators obtained verbal consent by presenting their identities and stating their purpose. Using a two-part SQ (part 1 for the demographic profile and part 2 for the preferences), the qualified and conforming respondents were guided in their responses. Part 1 and Part 2 entries were reflected in the SQ responses, with Part 2 responses (verified through checking) according to respondents' quality preferences per attribute (vertical). After vertical responses, checks were summed up in every row to represent the ratings, with seven as the highest (preferred all the quality combinations) and one as the lowest (preferred only one quality). According to Sorenson and Bogue (2005), to avoid validity and reliability problems in a conjoint study, especially with a large number of responses for evaluation, a rating scale should be used. Before the conduct of data gathering, researchers secure permissions from the local barangays.

The voluntary participation of the respondents in the survey was taken into consideration. Informed consent was included in the survey questionnaire, duly made known to

respondents before the conduct of individual data gathering. If a respondent declined, the researcher proceeded to the following qualified respondent. Also, when the respondent opted not to disclose identity, the researcher considers it by virtue of anonymity and confidentiality. With the items of the questionnaire, it is identified that no harm was inflicted on the respondents, as it only gathered the qualities preferred for variety store owners. Finally, the data collected (raw and in spreadsheets) was kept confidential in a secure storage facility.

Attributes and Level Frame (ALF)

The seven quality attributes of VSO emerged from the following theories and literature. It is anchored in Peter Drucker's management theory, which states that a business can become profitable by attending to the needs of its customers, who should be highly valued (Table 1). He also emphasized the importance of skill level in making wise decisions and that choosing a goal will open the path to clearly defined endpoints. Valuing customers in terms of skills and goals needed by VSOs, the first theme is (1) educational attainment, namely elementary, high school, and college (Ildefe, 2010; Jahncke, 2022; Esmaili, Sadeghi, and Askari, 2015), followed by (2) positive behavior of friendliness, enthusiasm, and honesty (Anjani, 2018). Third, being attentive, responsive to customers, and encouraging them to offer suggestions and feedback is themed (3) as a competitive advantage over competitors (Al Badi, 2018), while Haryati (2010) posited that (4) consumers' loyalty can be positively impacted by appropriateness of price, place, and hired employees for customers. Fifth are the (5) skills required of VSOs in terms of communication, analytical, and presentation (Gabo-an and Gempes, 2020; Monica, 2016; Funahashi, 2023), followed by (6) know-how with merchandise variations, namely, product assortment, quantification, and distribution and consumption patterns (Sharkey et al., 2012; Funahashi, 2013). Last is the (7) components of marketing strategy, which involves embracing the statements towards prosperity in terms of mission, vision, and primary organizational goals (Menghani, 2022). The identified indicators of each theme are the levels forming the attribute-level frame.

Table 1. Attribute level frame.

| Attributes | Levels |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Educational Attainment | Elementary graduate High School graduate College graduate |
| Positive Behavior | Friendliness Enthusiasm Honesty |
| Competitive advantage | Being attentive over competitors Responsive to customers Encouraged them to provide suggestions and feedback |
| Customer's loyalty (sensitive to) | Appropriateness of price Appropriateness of place Appropriateness of people/employees to customers |
| Expertise | Communication skills Analytical skills Presentation skills |
| Variety of merchandise (know-how) | to quantify product assortment Distribution and consumption patterns Product assortment |
| Components of Marketing strategy | Mission Vision Major organizational goals |

Data analysis

The responses obtained from the survey were encoded in the Spreadsheet using a specified format. The reactions were sorted and assessed for duplication, misspelling, and missing words before proceeding with the analysis using the International Business Machine (IBM)- Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. After processing, tables of quality importance values, utilities, and correlations were produced for analysis.

Out of the importance values, the quality attributes most preferred were identified. Specific preferred qualities were structured from the utility summary, and total utility was also determined using tables produced after processing. To enhance the presentation of results, the data is recoded and presented in formatted tables and graphs. Total utilities (TOTUTIL) are calculated by adding the highest-level value in each attribute to the constant since utilities are all expressed in a standard unit

(SPSS, 2001; Bagcal, 2022). Bagcal (2022) utilizes TOTUTIL in classifying resorts in terms of facilities. In this study, to enhance sustainable variety stores, the utilization of TOTUTIL as a category to assess VSO qualities is proposed for collaboration with local business bureaus and barangay administrators, as they can directly connect with their community for monitoring purposes. TOTUTIL was translated into a table for further analysis.

RESULTS

Demographic profile

Demographic profile of the respondents is in terms of age, gender, marital status, education and employment (Table 2). More than half (56%) of the respondents are female, followed by male at almost two-fifth (38%), while the rest are LGBTs at 6%. Also, two-third belong to millennials and Generation Zs (70%) while one-third (30%) belongs to Generation X and Baby Boomers.

Table 2. Demographic profile in terms of age and gender.

| Gender | Frequency (n) | Percent (%) | Age | Frequency (n) | Percent (%) |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|
| Male | 114 | 38 | 20 and below | 79 | 26.3 |
| Female | 168 | 56 | 21-35 | 131 | 43.7 |
| Lesbian (L) | 10 | 3.3 | 36-50 | 59 | 19.7 |
| Gay (G) | 4 | 1.3 | 51 and above | 31 | 10.3 |
| Bisexual | 4 | 1.3 | | | |
| Total | 300 | | | 300 | |

Three-fourths (75%) of the respondents are from Lupon (57.3%) and one-third (37%) are single and married respectively while the rests (25%) are from Banaybanay. More than half while the rests (5.7%) are widowed and separated (Table 3).

Table 3. Demographic profile in terms of municipality and marital status.

| Municipality | Frequency (n) | Percent (%) | Marital Status | Frequency (n) | Percent (%) |
|--------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|
| Lupon | 225 | 75 | Single | 172 | 57.3 |
| Banaybanay | 75 | 25 | Married | 111 | 37 |
| | | | Widowed | 13 | 4.33 |
| | | | Separated | 4 | 1.33 |
| Total | 300 | | | 300 | |

The majority of the respondents are elementary and high school graduates (64.7%), and more than two-thirds (69%) of them have no income (Table 4).

In summary, the majority of respondents are elementary and high school graduates. Most of them belong to Millennials and Generation Z. More than half are female and single, two-

thirds are from Lupon and have no income, and almost two-fifths are male. Also, nearly one-third of the respondents belong to Generation X or Baby Boomers, and are married, respectively. Lastly, at less than one-tenth, respondents are LGBT, widowed, and separated.

Table 4. Demographic profile in terms of education and employment.

| Education | Frequency (n) | Percent (%) | Employment | Frequency (n) | Percent (%) |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| Elementary | 25.0 | 8.33 | Employed | 50 | 16.7 |
| High School | 169 | 56.33 | Unemployed | 75 | 25.0 |
| College | 106 | 35.33 | Self-employed | 43 | 14.3 |
| | | | Student | 132 | 44.0 |
| Total | 300 | | | 300 | |

Importance values

For quality-attributes of VSOs, respondents preferred educational attainment more than customer's loyalty and positive behavior. It is followed by expertise, knowledge of product variations, competitive advantage, and marketing strategy.

Utility values

Utility values determine the most preferred to the least preferred indicators among the respondents (Table 5). All attribute levels with corresponding utility estimates/values. In additive conjoint analysis, higher scores are assigned to the levels that respondents strongly prefer, and lower scores are assigned to rarely preferred levels (Trochim, 2022).

Table 5. Summary of utility estimates.

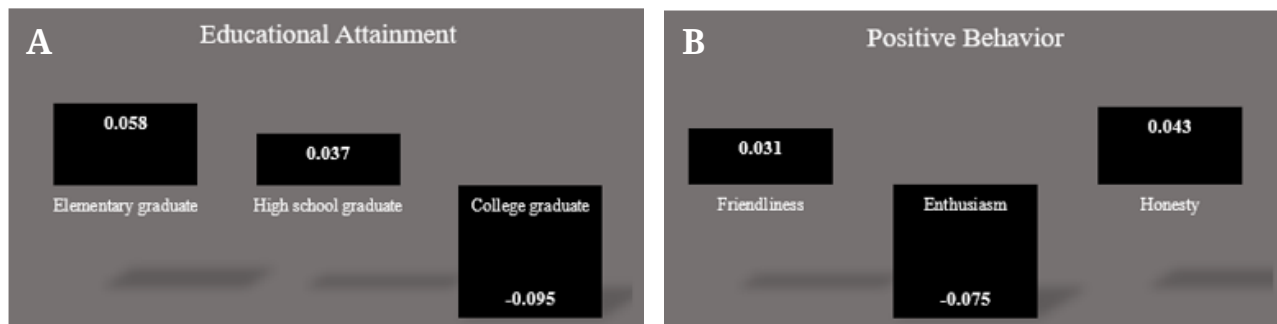
| Attributes | Utilities | Utility Est. | Std. error |
|---|---|--------------|------------|
| Educational Attainment | Elementary graduate (EG) | 0.06 | 0.04 |
| | High school graduate (HSG) | 0.04 | 0.04 |
| | College graduate | -0.10 | 0.04 |
| Positive Behavior | Friendliness (FR) | 0.03 | 0.04 |
| | Enthusiasm | -0.08 | 0.04 |
| | Honesty (HO) | 0.04 | 0.04 |
| Competitive Advantage Over competitors | Being attentive (BA) | 0.09 | 0.04 |
| | Responsive to customers | 0.002 | 0.04 |
| | Encourage them to provide suggestions and feedback | -0.09 | 0.04 |
| Customer's loyalty (by being sensitive to) | Appropriateness of price (AP) | 0.01 | 0.04 |
| | Appropriateness of place | -0.03 | 0.04 |
| | Appropriateness of people/employees to customers (APEC) | 0.01 | 0.04 |
| Expertise | Communication skills (CS) | 0.05 | 0.04 |
| | Analytical skills | 0.004 | 0.04 |
| | Presentation skills | -0.05 | 0.04 |
| Variety of merchandise (know-how to) | Quantify product assortment | -0.04 | 0.04 |
| | Distribute consumption patterns | -0.04 | 0.04 |
| | Product assortment (PA) | 0.08 | 0.04 |
| Components of Marketing Strategy | Mission | -0.04 | 0.04 |
| | Vision | -0.05 | 0.04 |
| | Major organizational goals (MOG) | 0.09 | 0.04 |
| Constant | | 5.31 | 0.03 |

Note: in bold are major utilities while italicized are secondary (close to major utilities)

The highest and the following highest utilities for every attribute are highlighted (bold and italicized) respectively. These utilities are: elementary and high school graduate (educational attainment); honesty and friendliness (positive behavior); being attentive (competitive advantage over competitors); appropriateness of people/employees to customers and price (sensitivity to customer's loyalty); communication skills (expertise); product assortment (know-how in variety of merchandise); and, primary organizational goals (components of marketing strategy). Figures 2 (A and B) graphically indicate specific utilities preferred by the respondents. All

boxes projecting upward from the horizontal line are of positive values, while those projecting downward are negative.

Figure 2A presents the positive and negative utilities for educational attainment. It shows that elementary and high school graduates have positive utility, while college graduates have negative utility. Demographically, most respondents are high school and college graduates; however, they prefer ownership of VSOs by elementary or high school graduates. For Figure 2B, friendliness and honesty are the positive utilities, while enthusiasm is negative. This means that VSO needs to be honest and friendly in their dealings with the community, being above all enthusiastic.

**Figure 2.** Utilities for educational attainment (A) and utilities for positive behavior (B).

In Figure 3A, being attentive is evidently a positive utility for competitive advantage, while appropriateness of price and people or employees for customer loyalty in Figure 3B. Respondents prefer that VSOs be attentive rather than

responsive, soliciting suggestions and feedback. Additionally, to maintain customer loyalty, VSOs are recommended to be sensitive in hiring employees who know how to deal with customers appropriately and at the right price for merchandise.

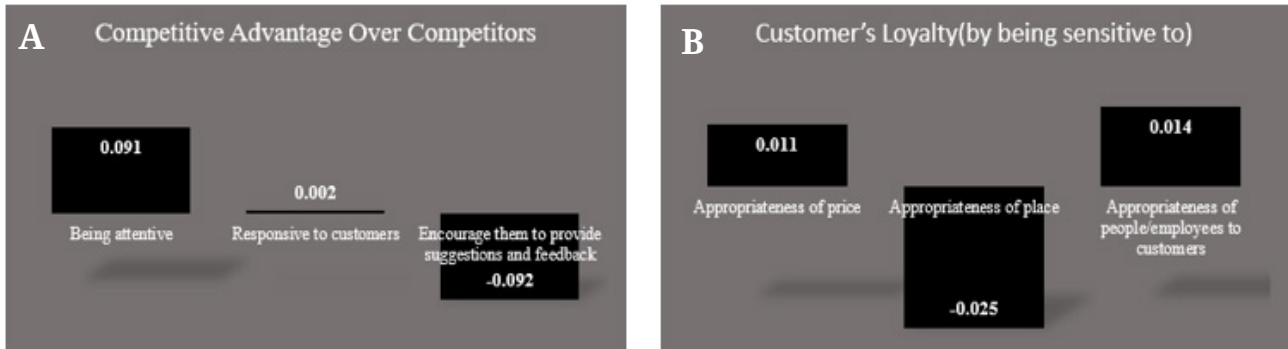


Figure 3. Utilities for competitive advantage (A), and utilities for customer's loyalty (B).

In Figure 4A, communication skills are evidently the positive utility of expertise, while product assortment is for know-how, with a variety of merchandise, as shown in Figure 4B. With

expertise, good communication skills are most preferred by the respondents over analytical and presentation skills, as well as product assortment with a variety of merchandise.

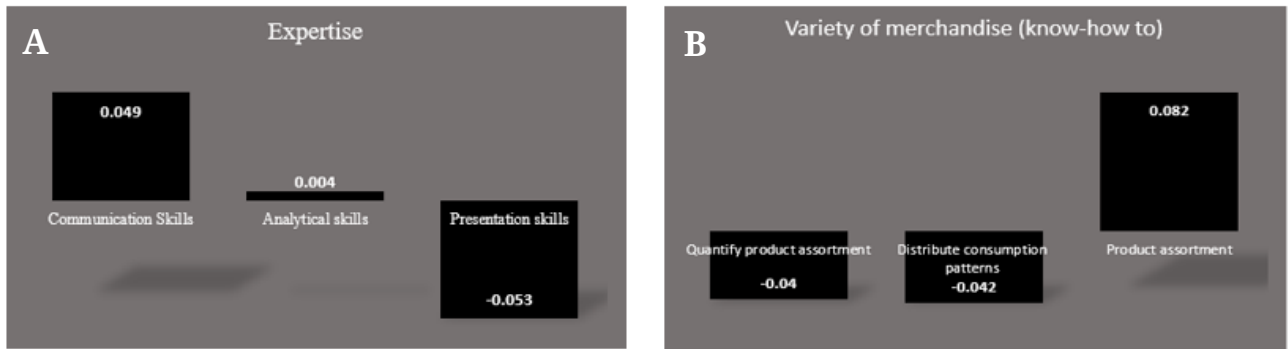


Figure 4. Utilities for expertise (A), and utilities for variety of merchandise (B).

Lastly, Figure 5 shows that the primary organizational goal is the only positive utility for the marketing strategy component. It shows that, with marketing strategies, the primary

organizational goal is preferred by the respondents. The formulation of mission and vision statements is not selected by the respondents and does not align with the variety stores.

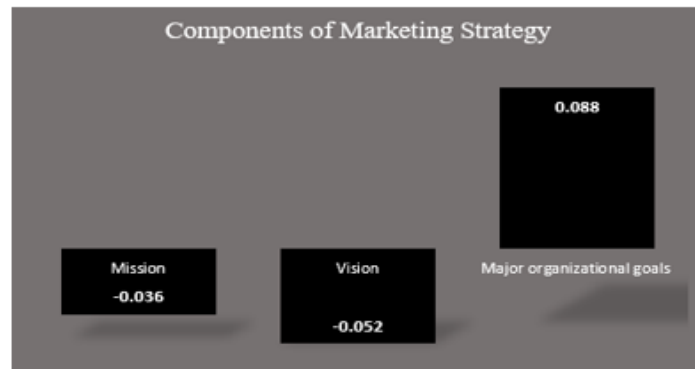


Figure 5. Utilities for components of marketing strategy.

Model for preferred qualities of variety store owners (PQVSO)

$$PQVSO = 0.058EG + 0.043HO + 0.091BA + 0.014APE + 0.049CS + 0.082PA + 0.088MOG + 5.309$$

Total Utilities (TOTUTIL)

When conducting a conjoint study, it is essential to calculate total utilities that can be used for evaluation and assessment at some

point in the analysis. Preference measurement techniques, such as Conjoint Analysis (CA), can help predict market share and reduce the risk of product failure by assessing customer preferences during the early stages of product development (Michalek et al., 2004). As a CA output, the total utility (TOTUTIL) of any defined profile is calculated as the sum of its part-worth utilities. One application of TOTUTIL is to evaluate the ability to predict respondents' actual preferences. It also measures predictive accuracy by comparing the expected preference order with the respondents' actual preference order (Hair et al., 2014). As a tool

for building sustainable communities, this study introduces another form of assessment. While most *assessments, evaluations and predictions* focus on products or services, this study shifts the perspective by allowing external entities to assess, evaluate and predict internal preferences.

Table 6 introduces the use of TOTUTIL in the assessment of

VSO qualities. Aside from indicating the highest preference, what is/are absent are considered as a basis for evaluation in terms of category (sustainable through poor). When the utility/ies is/are absent (meaning 0), the term/s is/are dropped, therefore reducing the total utility by its coefficient/s. If all the utilities are lacking, then VSO quality is poor, and, adversely, sustainable if complete.

Table 6. TOTUTIL as Assessment Tool for VSO Qualities.

| TOTUTIL (Range) | VSO Category | PQVSO present/absent |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| 5.73 | A-Sustainable | Possesses all the qualities |
| 5.64-5.72 | B | Any VSO quality is absent |
| 5.56-5.68 | C | Any 2 VSO qualities are absent |
| 5.47-5.63 | D | Any 3 VSO qualities are absent |
| 5.42-5.57 | E | Any 4 VSO qualities are absent |
| 5.37-5.49 | F | Any 5 VSO qualities are absent |
| 5.32-5.4 | G | Any 6 VSO qualities are absent |
| 5.31 | H-Poor | All 7 VSO qualities are absent |

Referring to the model:

$PQVSO = 0.06EG + 0.04HO + 0.09BA + 0.01APEC + 0.05CS + 0.08PA + 0.09MOG + 5.31 = 5.73$, the range of the TOTUTIL is computed in the next paragraph.

For any VSO absent, the range of TOTUTIL is $(5.73 - 0.09)$ up to $5.73 - (0.014)$ **5.64** up to **5.72**. For any two VSO absent, the range is equal to $(5.73 - (0.09 + 0.09))$ up to $5.73 - (0.01 + 0.04))$ **5.56** up to **5.68**. For any three VSO absent, the range is $(5.73 - (0.09 + 0.09 + 0.08))$ up to $5.73 - (0.01 + 0.04 + 0.05))$ **5.47** up to **5.63**. For any four VSO absent, the range is $(5.73 - (0.09 + 0.088 + 0.08 + 0.06))$ up to $5.73 - (0.01 + 0.04 + 0.05 + 0.06))$ **5.42** up to **5.57**. For any five VSO absent, the range is $(5.73 - (0.09 + 0.09 + 0.08 + 0.06 + 0.05))$ up to $5.73 - (0.01 + 0.04 + 0.05 + 0.06 + 0.08))$ **5.37** up to **5.49**. Lastly, for any six VSO absent, the range is $(5.73 - (0.09 + 0.09 + 0.08 + 0.06 + 0.05 + 0.04))$ up to $5.73 - (0.01 + 0.04 + 0.05 + 0.06 + 0.08 + 0.09))$ **5.32** up to **5.4**. Table 6 will be utilized as a tool to assess qualities of a VSO in terms of index. Index is a composite measure that provides data about the belief, attitude, or experience of the research participants (Crossman, 2025).

DISCUSSION

Summary of the importance value pattern reflects what is more, less, and least importantly valued attributes (Bagcal, 2022). VSO does not require a college graduate; however, they must develop customer loyalty, positive behavior, and expertise as primary qualities. Additionally, they must possess expertise in variations of merchandise, marketing competitiveness, and strategy. Based on high scores indicating a strong preference (Trochim, 2022), specifically, VSOs can be suitable for elementary to high school graduates. This contradicts Cruzat et al. (2019), who argue that higher educational attainment among store owners implies greater knowledge in their businesses. Additionally, they must be honest and friendly, attentive, and sensitive to hiring employees who are customer- and pricing-oriented, good communicators, knowledgeable about product assortment, and have a strong organizational focus.

For sustainable communities, concerns about the survival of variety stores stem strongly from their owners. Therefore, support through research outputs like this study is essential. Universities, local governments, particularly business bureaus, and barangay officials are recommended to work together as partners in developing the operations of variety stores. Coordination among these stakeholders is crucial in disseminating the identified qualities of VSOs. This is consistent with Vadeveloo (2013), who stated that local governments play a significant role in community development through better

cooperation with local people. Such initiatives can be implemented through policy briefs, posters, trainings, and seminars that discuss the identified importance values and their specific qualities. Policy briefs, in particular, are effective because they focus on communicating the practical implications of research to a specific audience.

According to TESDA Director General, Secretary Joel Villanueva, without the necessary managerial skills to handle the business, sari-sari store owners find it hard to make them prosper, or worse, just shut them down only after a few months in operation (TESDA, 2012). Also, by offering hybrid training sessions, sari-sari store owners are ensured to grow their businesses (Ong, 2024). VSO, also known as sari-sari store owner in the Philippines, as part of MSME sector needs collective improvement to be competitive and sustainable. According to Ramadhona et al. (2023), financial and non-financial support have an effect on the performance of MSMEs such as training, capital assistance and incentives in terms of their achievements. For example, as a reference in the provision of assistance or incentives in any form (government, NGOs, POs, and financial institutions), a survey of the qualities of VSO can be a tool to decide whether or not to grant the assistance or incentives.

During actual vicinity survey, when results indicate that the VSO is not honest, then their index is B with a TOTUTIL of 5.69. If the VSO is not honest and attentive, then their index is C with a TOTUTIL of 5.6. If the VSO is not honest and attentive, and insensitive in hiring workers, then their index is D with a TOTUTIL of 5.59. If the VSO is not honest and attentive, insensitive in hiring workers and did not go to school, then their index is E with a TOTUTIL of 5.53. If the VSO is not honest and attentive, insensitive in hiring workers, did not go to school and not a good communicator, then their index is F with a TOTUTIL of 5.48. If the VSO is not honest and attentive, insensitive in hiring workers, did not go to school, not a good communicator and no knowledge about product assortment then their index is G with a TOTUTIL of 5.40. Lastly, If the VSO is not honest and attentive, insensitive in hiring workers, did not go to school, not a good communicator, no knowledge about product assortment and organizational goals – all qualities are absent - then their index is H with a TOTUTIL of 5.31. VSO cannot afford to be poor to sustain their retailing. Poor can be indicated if PQVSO index is from E to H.

It is strongly recommended that study results be widely disseminated to increase the impact (Grant, 2012) significantly. The stakeholders of this study include local business bureaus, key local government officials (from municipal to barangay levels), NGOs, POs, and owners of variety stores. However, providing them with the results will not warrant efficient implementation.

Firstly, a policy brief should be presented to a forum to strengthen its path through critical reviews of the panel. Design of modules follow with what are valued importantly as qualities of the VSOs (customer loyalty, behavior, expertise, variations of merchandise, marketing competitiveness and strategy) and the specific preferred attributes (honesty, friendliness, attentive, sensitivity to price and hiring of employees, communications, product assortment and organizational goals) as a tool in the conduct of seminars and trainings for the VSO. Third, conduct actual training and workshops for VSOs using the created modules.

Additionally, as part of assessing the ESS, which includes local business bureaus, barangay officials, financial institutions, universities, and other HEIs, training on the use of TOTUTIL should be conducted. This will help measure the level of collaboration among these stakeholders in improving retail operations. It can be inferred that if VSOs are not capacitated, most of them being unaware of these qualities, then their poor PQVSO scores would reflect a failure of the ESS. Implementations aligned with the results of this study may serve as best practices for local implementing agencies.

Lastly, a seminal study was conducted in other LGUs to identify the similarity or differences of the results and to uncover any other variables not captured by this study.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the essential qualities that variety store owners must possess to sustain their operation and remain relevant in their communities. While formal education is not a requirement, customer loyalty, positive behavior, product expertise, and strategic competitiveness are vital for long-term success. Also, the findings emphasize the importance of honesty, friendliness, attentiveness, and strong communication skills as critical qualities of effective VSO. To ensure sustainability, collaboration among universities, local governments, business bureaus, and community organizations is imperative in transforming these findings into actionable policies, training, and support systems. By translating these results into concrete programs, variety store owners can be better equipped to thrive and contribute to stronger, more resilient communities.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Dr. John Bagcal, is the corresponding author of this submission. He is in-charge of monitoring the study progress from the conceptualization, variable/attribute and level (VAL) design, uncovering of its title, through the design of a completed paper. Analiza Alilian, spearheaded the conceptualization and searching of the VAL. In constant consultation with Dr. Bagcal, the group developed a study title that fits the searched VAL. She assigned tasks to the rests of the members, especially, in the references and citations of the utilized variables and its levels. She also is in-charge of the qualifications/disqualifications of the VAL recommended by the rest of the members. In the data gathering, Ms. Alilian and Ms. Cadagat was in-charge with Lupon area. Sitti Sarrah Abdulkarim, works on the document especially

in the integration of the parts composed for the study. She also contributed with the composition of the VAL. Together with Ms. Sitti Safia Abdulkarim, they worked on the data gathering for Banaybanay covered respondents. Sharmaine Cadagat and Sitti Safia Abdulkarim, contributes in the build-up of the variables and the searching of the related literature. They forwarded the same to their Ms. Alilian for finalization of its fit to the study.

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DECLARATION

Informed consent statement

The study was completed before the establishment of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB). As such, formal clearance or exemption from the UREB was not secured. However, informed consent was clearly stated and explained by the enumerators before the interviews began, and this consent was documented in the survey forms. Enumerators were adequately trained to ensure voluntary participation and ethical data collection.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. No financial, professional, or personal relationships have influenced the content and findings of this research.

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