

Assessing the Role of Creative Marketing Strategies and the Challenges Faced by Pastry Businesses

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Abstract. This study explored the potential of creative marketing strategies and the challenges pastry businesses face in Iligan City. The principles of Consumer Behavior Theory and Community-Based Marketing Theory underscore the importance of understanding consumer preferences and leveraging local community engagement to improve business performance. By examining existing marketing practices and identifying areas for improvement, this research proposed innovative, cost-effective marketing strategies tailored to the unique characteristics of small-scale food enterprises. Through a combination of surveys and interviews, the study assessed the current state of these businesses, analyzed the effectiveness of their marketing efforts, and evaluated the potential benefits of social media marketing, product differentiation, community-based marketing, and other creative strategies such as branding, promotion, and visual merchandising. These strategies aimed to help businesses differentiate themselves, meet customer demands, and remain competitive. The findings provided business owners in Iligan City with practical information on implementing contemporary marketing strategies, boosting their visibility, customer base, and long-term viability. The objective was to equip local food entrepreneurs with the skills and knowledge needed to compete in an increasingly digital and dynamic market.

Keywords: Creative marketing strategies; Pastry businesses; Branding; Promotion; Visual merchandising.

1.0 Introduction

Micro enterprises are different from small businesses in terms of size and scope. Micro businesses tend to be smaller and focus on specific niches, such as freelancers, startup businesses, street vendors, and independent retailers (Nelson, 2023). These businesses are typically characterized by fewer employees than larger corporations, often with a workforce ranging from one person to a few employees, depending on the industry. According to Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Secretary Alfredo Pascual, there is an ongoing initiative to tweak the definition of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) amid changes in how entrepreneurs do business. Meanwhile, the Philippines Statistics Authority (PSA) classifies an enterprise as micro if it has fewer than 10 employees (Crismundo, 2022). Almeda and Pobre (2012) revealed that most local MSMEs are managed by their owners, especially among microenterprises, and women lead most (63%). The Philippine Statistics Authority's March 2022 Labor Force Survey revealed over 17 million informal sector workers, including flea market vendors, ambulant vendors, street vendors, and 1.3 million sari-sari stores, unregistered with the BIR, that offer goods and products that are readily available. These workers, classified as marginal income earners under Revenue Regulation 11-2000, may apply for BMBE (Barangay Micro Business Enterprises) certification (Jaymalin, 2022).

The thresholds for what constitutes a micro business can vary by country and industry, but the fundamental traits of limited size and scale are consistent. Micro enterprises have more flexibility than larger businesses and can more easily change how they structure operations and management. However, they can face difficulty raising capital, hiring, and bringing products and services to market. These businesses play an integral role in the local community and tend to draw more support from residents, who are potential customers and can collaborate with other local businesses to advertise each other's services (Shopify, 2023).

One of the fastest-growing microenterprises is the pastry industry. Sole proprietorship establishments typically offer a variety of baked goods, such as cakes, cookies, tarts, and other sweet treats. In the Philippines, the selection of desserts and pastries in many restaurants is not extensive, but those who have tried them appreciate traditional dishes' full flavor and texture (Larson, 2014). The pastry industry is experiencing significant growth, driven by consumer demand for high-quality, innovative, and diverse products. Social media trends, where visually appealing pastries often go viral, have amplified this interest. Operating a bakery could be interesting for those with a passion for baking and a love for serving tasty treats to customers. However, like any business, to make it possible, achieving the right path or success in the bakery industry requires careful planning, dedication, and attention to detail. From managing ingredients and perfecting recipes to maintaining a welcoming customer atmosphere, bakers must balance creativity with business acumen. Understanding market demand, managing costs, and continually innovating is crucial to staying competitive. While the work can be demanding, the reward of seeing satisfied customers and building a loyal community makes the effort worthwhile.

However, marketing is essential for driving business growth and achieving organizational goals. Marketing encompasses the activities, institutions, and processes involved in creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that provide value to customers, clients, partners, and society. It is the management process through which goods and services move from concept to the customer (Rane et al., 2023). Marketing efforts can fail for several reasons, leading to significant business challenges. Common problems include poor execution, an inability to adapt to new trends, and lacking time and resources. Additionally, businesses without a solid marketing strategy risk wasting resources, misaligning campaigns, and missing business goals. A well-thought-out marketing plan ensures long-term success in the highly competitive bakery market. As a result, they are likely to struggle amidst intense competition (Perco, 2024).

Moreover, the essence of marketing is to understand customers' needs and develop a plan that addresses those needs. Marketing is more than just advertising and selling products; it involves all aspects of growing a customer base. The more effectively marketing is executed, the more successful it will be, and consequently, the more successful the business will become. No matter the effectiveness of the current campaigns, a fresh and creative marketing strategy can often bring new energy to a business. It can re-engage existing audiences excitingly or even connect with new ones (Gotter, 2018). A business is more likely to succeed through innovative marketing ideas than its competitors (Sharma, 2014). Every small business owner understands the need for actionable marketing strategies. Fortunately, business owners can employ creative marketing ideas today, such as branding, product and service promotion, customer experience enhancement, and visual merchandising. Branding involves creating a positive and strong perception of a company, its products, and its services through advertisements, promotions, designs, and other marketing techniques. Promotion entails communicating with customers to encourage them to purchase products. Customer experience encompasses the insights and feelings of customers toward a product or service (De Jesus & Tolentino, 2022). Building an online presence through a website or delivery service can also expand the reach of the business. Additionally, collaborating with local businesses or participating in community events can create a strong brand, and many will recognize it. A well-thought-out marketing plan ensures long-term success in the highly competitive bakery market.

The study aimed to provide a crucial understanding of micro-enterprise businesses in Iligan City, specifically pastry businesses. Additionally, there is a need to assess how effectively these businesses employ creative marketing strategies, including branding, promotion, product innovation, and visual merchandising. Also, specific challenges these businesses face remain underexplored, hampering the development of effective, localized solutions. Thus, this research examines the profiles and current practices to identify key improvement and operational enhancement areas.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive research design employing quantitative and qualitative methods to comprehensively analyze the creative marketing strategies and operational challenges experienced by micro pastry business owners in Iligan City. Descriptive research was used to systematically and accurately present the characteristics of the population, addressing questions such as what, where, when, and how, but not why (McCombes, 2023). A Key Informant Interview (KII) was also conducted to encourage respondents to share their honest opinions and personal insights on their challenges. The qualitative data gathered in this study provided a deeper understanding of the problems encountered while applying the strategies.

2.2 Research Locale

This research was conducted in Iligan City, focusing on local pastry businesses. The study aimed to enhance the success of these businesses by exploring and applying creative marketing strategies tailored to their needs and operational challenges.

2.3 Research Participants

This study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, to select individuals or groups based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. For this study, fifty (50) respondents were selected from micro business owners operating pastry establishments in Iligan City. All respondents possessed valid business licenses or permits and had been operating their businesses for at least two (2) years.

2.4 Research Instrument

The research instrument was adapted and modified from the questionnaire by Magboo et al. (2020). The instrument comprised twenty (20) indicators, each evaluated using a 4-point Likert scale. Table 1 presents the Cronbach's alpha coefficients corresponding to each construct. The overall Cronbach's alpha value of 0.93 indicates high internal consistency among the survey items. This value aligns with the widely recognized standards for reliability in empirical research. Consequently, the items within the questionnaire demonstrate strong internal coherence, suggesting that they reliably measure a familiar underlying construct.

Table 1. *Reliability Statistics*

Constructs	Cronbach Alpha	No. of Items	Remarks
Branding	0.84	5	Good
Promotions	0.82	5	Good
Products and Services	0.85	5	Good
Visual Merchandising	0.90	5	Excellent
Overall	0.93	20	Excellent

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering procedure for this study was conducted systematically. First, the final research instrument was prepared, which had already been validated and tested for reliability. Along with this, a consent letter was drafted to assure respondents of the confidentiality of their data. Approval to conduct the study was then sought from the department chairperson and the dean of the college. Next, the researchers notified Barangay officials in Iligan City about the study and requested their support. After securing the necessary approvals, the data collection began. During face-to-face interactions, researchers introduced themselves to the respondents, explained the purpose of the study, and presented the consent letter to reinforce confidentiality. Clear instructions were provided to guide the respondents in accurately completing the questionnaires. Once data collection was completed, the researchers systematically tallied and consolidated the information. Finally, the data was analyzed and interpreted to draw meaningful conclusions aligned with the study's objectives.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The researcher administered surveys to individuals who voluntarily expressed their willingness to participate. Participants were assured that the study posed no inherent risks and were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Before the survey, the study's objectives were clearly explained, and each respondent obtained informed consent. All data collected was kept strictly confidential. Respondents were identified only by unique codes, not by name, and access to both the data and survey results was limited to the researcher. These procedures adhered to Republic Act 10173, the "Data Privacy Act of 2012," underscoring the researcher's commitment to participant privacy and data security.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Respondents' Profile

Table 2 presents the profile of pastry businesses in Iligan City based on key operational characteristics. In terms of years of operation, the majority (64.00%) have been in business for 2 to 5 years, indicating a relatively young industry. About 26.00% have operated for 6 to 9 years, while only 10.00% have operated for 10 years or more. Regarding the average number of customers served daily, the largest segment (44.00%) caters to 1 to 5 customers. This is followed by 26.00% serving 6 to 10 customers, 8.00% serving 11 to 20 customers, and 22.00% serving more than 21 customers daily. Regarding capital investment, most businesses (42.00%) reported having an initial capital of ₱10,000 to ₱15,000. Another 28.00% invested ₱16,000 to ₱20,000, while the remaining 30.00% reported capital exceeding ₱21,000. As for the number of employees, a significant majority (64.00%) operate with just 1 to 2 employees, underscoring the micro-scale nature of these enterprises. Meanwhile, 34.00% employ 3 to 5 people, and only 2.00% have more than six employees.

Table 2. *Demographic Profile of Respondent*

Demographics	Frequency (N = 50)	Percentage (%)
Years of Operation		
2-5 years	32	64
6-9 years	13	26
10 years and above	5	10
No. of Customers per Day		
1-5	22	44
6-10	13	26
11-20	4	8
21 above	11	22
Cost Capital		
₱10,000-₱15,000	21	42
₱16,000-₱20,000	14	28
₱21,000 above	15	30
No. of Employees		
1-2	32	64
3-5	17	34
6-9	1	2

3.2 Creative Marketing Strategies Employed by Pastry Businesses

Table 3 presents the creative marketing strategies employed by pastry businesses in Iligan City regarding branding. The statements have mean scores in the "In favor" and "Highly in favor range. The specific statements assessed about branding include the store having a unique feature that attracts customers (Mean = 3.76), the name of the store (Mean = 3.64), a creative logo (Mean = 3.54), a persuasive tagline (Mean = 3.46), and a competitive advantage (Mean = 3.42). The overall weighted mean is 3.56, indicating that the respondents highly favor these branding elements, effectively helping attract customers and enhance the business's competitive advantage.

Table 3. *Creative Marketing Strategies Employed by Pastry Businesses in Iligan City in terms of Branding*

Statements	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. The tagline that we have in the business is enough to persuade customers to choose our food.	3.46	0.54	In favor
2. The logo was creative enough to attract customers.	3.54	0.50	Highly in favor
3. The name of the store helps to attract more customers.	3.64	0.48	Highly in favor
4. The store has a unique feature that attracts more customers.	3.76	0.43	Highly in favor
5. Increase competitive advantage of the business operation enhances business branding.	3.42	0.50	In favor
Overall	3.56	0.49	Highly in favor

Among the items cited, the store has unique features that attract more customers, resulting in a higher score, while increasing the competitive advantage of the business operation, which got the lowest. The top-ranking item conveys a favorable impression of the shop, indicating that it offers distinctive attributes that attract more consumers. These findings are regarding pastry businesses' creative marketing strategies, particularly in branding, employed in Iligan City. As indicated by the literature, effective branding is vital in establishing a competitive advantage by enhancing the perceived quality of a product and boosting profitability. Branding elements such as the store's unique features, name, logo, and tagline were highly rated by respondents, suggesting that these factors are integral to attracting customers. Specifically, branding highlights that a unique brand

presence differentiates a product in the market, increasing consumer recognition and loyalty (Edsal, 2021; Kapferer, 2001).

A successful brand builds strong customer relationships, encouraging consumers to try new products even if the brand is unfamiliar. A product's brand distinguishes it, enhancing consumer and market recognition. The more familiar a brand is, the better its chances for increasing competitiveness. A strong brand fosters customer loyalty, making product launches easier. It is about the brand, the product's quality, and the benefits it offers consumers. This strengthens internal and external business connections, creating broader opportunities.

Table 4 presents the creative marketing strategies employed by pastry businesses in Iligan City, specifically in terms of promotion. All of the statements assessed have mean scores in the “In favor” range, indicating the effectiveness of these promotional strategies as perceived by the respondents. The specific promotional elements assessed include: products being first in the customer's mind through advertising (Mean = 3.44), helping to increase sales (Mean = 3.44), use of social media (Mean = 3.42), building customer trust and confidence (Mean = 3.36), and creating more opportunities for the business (Mean = 3.34). The overall weighted mean of 3.40 suggests that respondents generally favor the idea that these promotional strategies play a significant role in attracting customers and boosting the competitive advantage of their businesses.

Table 4. *Creative Marketing Strategies Employed by Pastry Businesses in Iligan City in terms of Promotion*

Statements	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Social media has become helpful to your business.	3.42	0.73	In favor
2. Advertising helps position your product as the first choice in the minds of customers	3.44	0.70	In favor
3. Promotional strategies help to increase sales.	3.44	0.67	In favor
4. Promotion helps build customer trust and confidence in your brand.	3.36	0.69	In favor
5. Promotion creates new opportunities for business growth and expansion.	3.34	0.75	In favor
Overall	3.40	0.71	In favor

Among the items cited, the product being first in the customer's mind through advertising and helping to increase sales got the highest score. These findings of a study on creative marketing strategies used by pastry businesses in Iligan City align with existing research on promotional strategies. Using social media for promotion supports the idea that digital platforms are vital for expanding a business's reach, as Van Scheers and Radipere (2014) highlighted. Promotional strategies can help small and medium-sized businesses attract new customers and boost sales while minimizing advertising expenses (Bondarenko & Vyshnivska, 2023). The study also supports Carson and Gilmore's (2015) notion that promotions build customer trust and that effective strategies create growth opportunities. Findings emphasize the critical role of promotion in increasing visibility, trust, and competitive advantage for small businesses.

Promotion involves communicating a product, brand, or service to users, aiming to break through market competition and consumer noise. Businesses must create compelling, memorable campaigns that resonate with customers' needs, manage costs, and ensure consistent platform messaging. Customers now expect personalized, authentic, and value-driven advertising that aligns with their preferences. Trust, transparency, and social responsibility are key, alongside seamless experiences. For a business to be at the top of mind, it must avoid misleading information, low-quality products, or inconsistent experiences, as these can damage reputation and hinder growth.

Table 5 presents the creative marketing strategies employed by pastry businesses in Iligan City, focusing on products and services. All the statements assessed have mean scores in the “In favor” and “Highly in favor” range. The specific statements assessed include food presentation attracting customers (Mean = 3.78), customers' expectations being met (Mean = 3.50), customer satisfaction with the food (Mean = 3.48), affordability of the food (Mean = 3.44), and customer commitment to return due to good service (Mean = 3.40). The overall weighted mean of 3.52 suggests that respondents are highly in favor that the quality of products and services—such as food presentation, affordability, customer satisfaction, and service—plays a significant role in attracting customers and enhancing the competitive advantage of their businesses.

Table 5. *Creative Marketing Strategies Employed by Pastry Businesses in Iligan City in terms of Products and Services*

Statements	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. The customers are committed to coming back because of the good customer service.	3.40	0.53	In favor
2. The food presentation attracts more customers.	3.78	0.42	Highly in favor
3. The customers are satisfied with the food they eat.	3.48	0.58	In favor
4. The foods that have been offered are affordable.	3.44	0.73	In favor
5. The customers have met their expectations in our store.	3.50	0.54	Highly in favor
Overall Weighted Mean	3.52	0.56	Highly in favor

Among the items evaluated, the food presentation attracts more customers, and customer satisfaction has high ratings. A visually appealing presentation enhances the dining experience, stimulates appetite, and creates a lasting impression. These findings align with existing literature on the importance of product quality and presentation in attracting customers and fostering loyalty. Beuren et al. (2013) emphasize that appealing food presentation enhances brand attractiveness, while Hefer and Cant (2013) describe it as a "silent salesperson" conveying the business's values. The study also supports Styliadis et al.'s (2019) view that meeting customer expectations is crucial for retention and competitive advantage. Additionally, affordability aligns with Bayir et al. (2022), highlighting its role in customer decision-making for small businesses. The study confirms the significance of food presentation, customer satisfaction, affordability, and service in strengthening the competitive advantage of pastry businesses. A well-presented dish stimulates appetite and conveys quality and attention to detail, making the meal more enjoyable. Attractive food presentation often creates a sense of value and care, encouraging customers to share their experience and return for more.

Table 6 presents the creative marketing strategies employed by pastry businesses in Iligan City regarding visual merchandising. All the statements assessed have mean scores in the "Highly in favor" range. The specific statements assessed include: the impact of good lighting and appropriate music on encouraging customers to spend more time in the store (Mean = 3.84), helping to attract customers (Mean = 3.72), differentiating the business from competitors (Mean = 3.68), enhancing the store image (Mean = 3.68), and creating good feedback for the business (Mean = 3.62). The overall weighted mean of 3.71 suggests that respondents highly favor visual merchandising strategies, such as lighting, music, and store image, which significantly attract customers and enhance their businesses' competitive advantage.

Table 6. *Creative Marketing Strategies Employed by Pastry Businesses in Iligan City in terms of Visual Merchandising*

Statements	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. An attractive retail display helps you attract customers.	3.72	0.54	Highly in favor
2. Well-executed visual presentation creates good feedback on your business.	3.62	0.53	Highly in favor
3. Storefront aesthetics helps to differentiate itself from other competitors.	3.68	0.55	Highly in favor
4. In-store visual design and layout enhance the store image.	3.68	0.55	Highly in favor
5. Good lighting and appropriate music played helps your customer to spend more time at your store.	3.84	0.37	Highly in favor
Overall	3.71	0.51	Highly in favor

Among the items cited, visual merchandising with good lighting and appropriate music helps your customer spend more time at your store. Adequate lighting highlights products and creates an inviting atmosphere, while carefully chosen music enhances the shopping experience by setting a pleasant mood. These findings align with Ali Soomro (2017), who highlights visual merchandising as crucial for drawing customers. The statement "creates good feedback on your business" reflects the impact of marketing strategies, as Kerfoot et al. (2003) noted, which help generate positive customer perceptions. "Helps to differentiate itself from other competitors" aligns with Tan (2024), emphasizing how visual merchandising aids in differentiation and gaining a competitive edge. Findings reflect the significant role of creative marketing strategies, especially visual merchandising, in attracting customers, enhancing store image, and differentiating businesses in competitive markets.

A visual merchandiser can execute various tasks, including retail interior design. It may pave the way for client contact by attracting their attention with the assistance of a visual merchandiser through shop designs and displays. However, creating good feedback in your business involves offering an appealing and memorable shopping experience that resonates with customers. You can encourage positive feedback by designing effective displays, maintaining brand consistency, and ensuring the store is well-organized and customer-friendly. This

feedback, in turn, boosts customer satisfaction, fosters loyalty, and can lead to increased sales and brand promotion.

3.3 Challenges Encountered

Table 7 presents the problems encountered by micro pastry businesses in Iligan City. The table shows the frequency and percentage of responses for various business challenges. The most common problem reported was the increase in the number of competitors, with 48 out of 50 businesses (96%) indicating this as a challenge. Other significant issues include the lack of budget (36%) and social media marketing (22%). A smaller percentage of respondents mentioned challenges such as the effect of the pandemic on operations (18%), not keeping up with trends (14%), and poor customer service (2.00%).

Table 7. Challenges Encountered by Pastry Businesses in Iligan City

Problems Encountered	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of budget	18	19%
Increase in the number of competitors	48	51%
Effect of the pandemic on the operation	9	10%
Lack of social media marketing	11	12%
Difficulty in introducing new products	0	0%
Not keeping up with trends	7	7%
Poor customer service	1	1%

The challenges pastry businesses face in Iligan City, as outlined in Table 9, reflect common issues discussed in the literature. The most prominent issue, an increase in competition, aligns with the findings of Bayir et al. (2022), who emphasized the pressure small businesses face in local markets, which can limit growth and profitability. Budget constraints, another major problem, are consistent with Martins et al. (2022), who highlighted how limited financial resources hinder investments in tools, technology, and marketing efforts crucial for business success.

The lack of social media marketing further underscores a gap in modern business strategies. Carson and Gilmore (2015) note that small enterprises often struggle to utilize online platforms effectively, missing opportunities to engage customers and promote products. Similarly, the operational disruptions caused by the pandemic echo global trends described by Bayir et al. (2022), as small businesses, particularly in food and retail sectors, faced rapid adjustments due to lockdowns and social distancing measures. The inability to keep up with market trends is another challenge, as Iyamabo and Utobanjo (2013) discussed, often stemming from a lack of resources and time to track shifts in consumer demand. Additionally, poor customer service remains a persistent issue, as Rane et al. (2023) highlight its critical role in customer retention and loyalty.

Despite the many advantages businesses can have, these challenges, if unaddressed, can severely impact performance and even lead to bankruptcy. However, such obstacles can be mitigated through innovative and creative marketing strategies. Employing unique ideas and artistic approaches allows businesses to engage effectively with their target audience while balancing creativity and functionality. Micro businesses can navigate challenges and strengthen their position in competitive markets by focusing on customer needs and leveraging clever marketing.

An interview with key respondents revealed valuable insights into how they encountered the other challenges. One notable approach was addressing smelly surroundings, which affected the customer experience. Respondents mentioned that maintaining a clean and fresh environment was essential in creating a welcoming atmosphere, encouraging customers to spend more time in the store. By using air fresheners, improving ventilation, and regularly cleaning, businesses could enhance the overall ambiance and improve customer satisfaction, ultimately contributing to increased sales and customer loyalty.

One pastry shop owner in Iligan City shared that they encountered bankruptcy. According to her:

“Way back 2021, first month, second month, third month, fourth month og fifth month is ok gyud akong negosyo dayon ayha nako nakabantay nga nagka anam nakog kalugi nga ang stock sakong mga ingredients is nanga gamay na until ga observe nako sa akong trabahante na ila diayng kuhaan ang akong mga gepang stock og aside ana is mangupit pagyud diay sila sa halin, timing lang pod wala pako na ka butang dayon ccto monang na dayon na gyud dayon og ka bankrupt akong buisness. But last year lang ga reopen ko and gina make sure na nako nga naay saktong plano og pag manage akong business aron de

nato mausab sa akoo ang nahitabo.” (Back in 2021, my business was doing well during the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth months. Then I started noticing that I was gradually losing money – my inventory of ingredients was slowly decreasing. I eventually discovered that my workers were taking from my stocks, and aside from that, they were also stealing money from the sales. It just so happened that I had not installed a CCTV system yet, which is why the business quickly went bankrupt. However, just last year, I reopened the business and now make sure I have proper planning and management in place so that what happened before will not happen again.)

The owner emphasized that they could have avoided these issues with better planning, creative marketing, and more focus on customer needs, and turned the business around.

Pastry business owners in Iligan City face several challenges that significantly impact their operations and profitability. One common issue is a lack of budget, which hinders investment in essential areas such as marketing, staff training, or product quality improvement. Cash flow management also poses a problem, limiting businesses' ability to cover operating costs or expand. Additionally, customer complaints, even due to minor mistakes, create challenges that owners must manage with care to maintain customer satisfaction.

Addressing these challenges requires proactive solutions. Business owners can diversify their suppliers, conduct market research, offer unique products, and implement strict quality control measures to differentiate themselves in the market. Cost management and energy optimization are also vital to reducing expenses. Ensuring compliance with health and safety standards further builds trust with customers. Strong financial management, particularly effective cash flow control, is critical for long-term stability and success. By adopting these strategies, businesses can overcome challenges, enhance operations, and achieve sustainable growth.

4.0 Conclusion

The findings show that branding, promotion, product offerings, and visual merchandising play crucial roles in the success of pastry businesses in Iligan City. These creative marketing strategies enhance the business's visibility and appeal and influence customer behavior, often leading to unexpected purchases. Additionally, the challenges encountered, including competition and limited resources, were consistent with the principles of Consumer Behavior Theory and Community-Based Marketing Theory. These theories underscore the importance of understanding consumer preferences and leveraging local community engagement to enhance business performance (Roy & Datta, 2022; Miyazo, 2022). The alignment of the results with the theoretical frameworks highlights the practical relevance of these strategies in addressing real-world challenges micro food enterprises face.

By strategically crafting these aspects, these entrepreneurs are meeting basic consumer needs and shaping positive consumer perceptions, enhancing satisfaction, and encouraging repeat business. Pastry businesses need to ensure that their operations are efficient and adaptable to meet the rising demand by creative marketing strategies. This approach helps them build a brand identity that resonates with the community, creating long-lasting consumer relationships. To meet the standards set by the marketing initiatives, operational issues, including inventory control, upholding cleanliness, and guaranteeing consistency in food quality, must be resolved.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

All authors contributed to the conceptualization of this study.

Authors 1, 2, and 3 led the research design, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript finalization.

Author 4 helped in the data analysis and finalization of the manuscript.

Authors 5 and 6 helped in critiquing and finalizing the manuscript.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare relevant to this article's content.

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