



Struggles and Strategies: A Qualitative Study on Buko Pie Owners' Experiences in Los Baños, Laguna

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ABSTRACT

Findings revealed that majority of the respondents are male high school graduate belonging to age bracket 55 years old and above, who are in the buko pie business for over 9 years. Data showed that the buko pie owners are highly challenged by high competition, supply chain issues, fluctuating coconut prices, limited capital, and operational constraints such as, production delays and seasoned fluctuations, unstable profit and customer relation issues.

The study also covered solutions and strategies to address these challenges, including alternative suppliers to handle supply disruptions, use social media for promotion, expanding product option to sustain sales during coconut shortages and outsourcing funds to support cash flows.

Keywords: Buko Pie Owners, Challenges, Strategies

1. Introduction

Los Baños, Laguna, is a town known for its rich cultural heritage and thriving agricultural industry, particularly the famous buko pie, a delicacy cherished by locals and tourists alike. The town's buko pie industry has become an integral part of its identity, attracting visitors who seek to experience the taste of this renowned treat. However, despite its popularity, buko pie business owners face various challenges that threaten the long-term sustainability of the industry. Issues such as intense competition, supply chain disruptions, and economic factors have been identified as major obstacles affecting the growth and profitability of buko pie businesses in the area.

The development of sustainable business practices within the buko pie industry is essential to ensure its continued success and to support local entrepreneurship. As the demand for buko pie continues to grow, there is an increasing need to address these challenges and develop effective strategies to enhance business operations. Furthermore, strengthening the buko pie industry can significantly contribute to the tourism sector of Los Baños, positioning the town as a key destination for food tourism and boosting local economic growth. However, limited research exists that comprehensively explores the experiences of buko pie owners and how they navigate these challenges. This study aims to fill this gap by employing qualitative research methods to gain a deeper understanding of the struggles and strategies of buko pie business owners in Los Baños.

Through interviews and thematic analysis, the study will identify key challenges faced by business owners and the strategies they employ to overcome these difficulties. By providing actionable recommendations, this research intends to contribute to the development of sustainable practices that will support the buko pie industry and ensure its long-term viability. Ultimately, the study seeks to empower buko pie owners with the knowledge and strategies necessary to thrive in a competitive market, benefiting both their businesses and the local community, and strengthening the tourism industry of Los Baños.

2. Conceptual Background

This study explores the relationship between the demographic profile of buko pie owners in Los Baños, Laguna, the business challenges they face, and the strategies they implement to achieve long-term sustainability. Demographic factors, including age, educational attainment, length of business operation, and monthly income, influence how owners respond to challenges such as supply chain disruptions, market competition, and economic fluctuations.

The study examines strategies like product diversification, marketing initiatives, and forming supplier partnerships as tools to address these challenges. Through interviews, critical business practices and areas for improvement were identified. Based on the findings, the study offers actionable recommendations focused on enhancing operational resilience and adapting to market demands to ensure the sustainable growth of the buko pie industry in Los Baños.

3. Research Question or Research Hypothesis or Research Problems

Although the buko pie business in Los Baños, Laguna is recognized as a popular and traditional local food, there is limited qualitative information about the challenges and strategies of buko pie owners. Issues such as high competition, fluctuating coconut prices, and supply chain disruptions have been identified as significant barriers to business sustainability. This research aims to address this gap by investigating the lived experiences of buko pie owners, identifying key challenges, and proposing actionable strategies to improve their business operations. a) Demographic Profile in terms of: Age, Educational Attainment, Length of Business and Monthly Income b) Business Experiences; What challenges did buko pie owners face in maintaining their businesses, what strategies did they implement to overcome these challenges, and how did they manage fluctuating market conditions? c) Actionable Plan; What strategies or improvements do buko pie owners believe could be introduced to enhance their business sustainability and ensure long-term success in the market.

4. Data and Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the challenges and strategies of buko-pie vendors in Los Baños, Laguna. For Data Collection, Primary data were gathered through structured interviews, which were divided into four sections: demographic profile, challenges, solutions, and recommendations. The Demographic Profile includes information such as name, age, gender, monthly income, and educational attainment. The Challenges section discusses the difficulties faced by buko-pie vendors. The Solutions section identifies strategies implemented by vendors to overcome these challenges. Finally, the Recommendations section provides suggestions for individuals who wish to start or succeed in the buko-pie industry. The study utilized purposive sampling, selecting nine registered buko-pie stall owners in Los Baños. Interviews were conducted, documented, and transcribed with participants' consent. For data analysis, thematic analysis was used to identify and group significant statements and insights into broader themes. The research was conducted in Los Baños, a location known for its thriving buko-pie industry and its cultural and economic significance in the region.

5. Results and Discussion

For the result of demographic profile in terms of age there are 0 (0%) participants who are 24 and below in age, 1 (11.11%) who are 25-34 years old, 1 (11.11%) who are 35-44 years old, 2 (22.22%) who are 45-55 years old, and 5 (55.56%) who are 55 years old and above. Based on the result, individuals aged 55 and above represent the majority of respondents, indicating a potential trend towards a more mature demographic participating in this study. This finding suggests that older individuals may have different perspectives and experiences, particularly in contexts related to tourism and business ownership.

For the result of demographic profile in terms of educational attainment. There is 1 (11.11%) participant who is a college graduate, 3 (33.33%) who have completed college-level education, 4 (44.44%) who are high school graduates, 1 (11.11%) who is an elementary graduate, and 0 (0%) who have completed elementary education or have no formal education. Based on the result, high school graduates comprise the majority of respondents, indicating a diverse range of educational backgrounds among the participants.

For the result of demographic profile in terms of the length of business operation. There is 1 (11.11%) participant whose business has been in operation for 1-3 years, 3 (33.33%) whose businesses have been operational for 4-6 years, 0 (0%) participants with businesses in the 7-8-year range, and 5 (55.56%) whose businesses have been operating for 9 years or more. Notably, a significant majority of respondents (55.56%) have been in business for 9 years or more, underscoring the potential advantages of longevity in the business sector.

For the result of demographic profile in terms of monthly income. There is 1 (11.11%) participant with an income of 8,000 and below, 1 (11.11%) participant earning between 8,001 and 13,000, 1 (11.11%) with an income between 13,001 and 18,000, 2 (22.22%) participants earning between 18,001 and 23,000, and 4 (44.44%) with an income above 23,001. A notable finding is that the majority of respondents (44.44%) earn 23,001 and above, reflecting a significant variation in income levels among business owners.

Table 1 Shows the results of the Challenges encountered in buko-pie business.

Table 1

What is/are the challenge/s had you have encountered in your Buko-Pie business?

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
1. Competitive Environment	4	27%
2. Supply Chain	3	20%
3. Economic Factors	3	20%

4.	Customer Relations	2	13%
5.	Adaption and Market Strategy	2	13%
6.	Operational and Temporal Challenges	1	7%
Average		15	100%

The buko-pie business in Los Baños faces several challenges, with competition being the most prevalent, accounting for 27% of the responses. Vendors highlighted the intense rivalry in the market, making it difficult to stand out. This sentiment is echoed in studies emphasizing the need for constant innovation and differentiation to maintain a competitive edge. Supply chain issues (20%) also pose significant hurdles, as the availability and cost of coconuts often disrupt operations and profitability. Respondents noted that high prices and shortages directly impact their businesses, reflecting broader supply chain vulnerabilities in agricultural industries.

Economic factors (20%) further exacerbate these challenges, with limited investment and resource shortages affecting business sustainability. Vendors also emphasized the importance of customer relations (13%), both with end consumers and fellow vendors. While building strong relationships is critical for growth, interactions with demanding or rude customers can be a source of frustration. Adaptation and market strategy (13%) emerged as another crucial theme, with respondents noting the need for strategic pricing, product quality, and innovative approaches to stay competitive.

Lastly, operational and temporal challenges (7%) highlight the impact of seasonal fluctuations on customer demand and resource availability. Vendors must adjust their operations to align with these changes, ensuring steady business flow throughout the year. Collectively, these challenges underscore the need for effective strategies in competition, supply chain management, economic resilience, and market adaptation to ensure the sustainability of the buko-pie industry in Los Baños.

Table 2 Shows the results of the effects of challenges.

Table. 2.2

How do these challenges affect your Buko-pie business?

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
1. Low Sales Performance	3	19%
2. Supply Chain Economic Factors	2	13%
3. Action Planning	1	6%
4. Maintaining Positive Outlook	1	6%
5. Production Constraints	3	19%
6. Pricing Adjustment	2	13%
7. Production Shortage	2	13%
8. Operational and Temporal Challenges	1	6%
9. Transportation Issues	1	6%
Average	16	100%

Buko-pie vendors face a variety of challenges that affect their business operations. Low sales performance is a significant issue, with 19% of vendors attributing poor sales to factors such as weather, low demand, and competition. This is often compounded by ineffective sales strategies or a lack of brand

awareness. Additionally, supply chain economic factors, such as shortages in key ingredients like coconuts, account for 13% of the challenges. These shortages, influenced by global economic fluctuations, result in operational inefficiencies and difficulties in meeting customer demand. While some vendors recognize the importance of action planning to address these issues, only 6% report its effectiveness, suggesting the need for more robust market strategies to improve performance. Maintaining a positive outlook, though only mentioned by 6% of vendors, is also crucial for sustaining morale and driving the business forward.

Other challenges include production constraints and pricing adjustments. Nineteen percent of vendors reported limitations in their ability to produce enough buko pies to meet demand, often due to shortages of raw materials, inefficient cooking processes, or lack of skilled labor. Pricing adjustments also pose a problem, with 13% of vendors discussing the difficulty of managing fluctuating production costs. Sudden price drops can damage customer perception and brand reputation. Production shortages and operational delays due to weather or unforeseen disruptions are additional concerns for 13% of respondents, affecting delivery timelines and customer satisfaction. Finally, 6% of vendors mentioned transportation issues, which hinder their ability to serve customers efficiently.

Overall, these challenges from declining sales and increased operational costs to customer dissatisfaction highlight the need for strategic planning, market adaptations, and resilience. Addressing these issues is essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability and growth of buko-pie businesses.

Table 3 Shows the results of Solutions to Resolved Challenges in The Buko-Pie Business

Table 3

What is/are the solutions that you have tried in resolving those challenges?

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
1. Knowledge transfer	1	10%
2. Supply chain and ingredient sourcing	1	10%
3. Marketing and promotion	2	20%
4. Financial struggles and resilience	1	10%
5. Product Diversification	1	10%
6. Competitor awareness and product quality	3	30%
7. Operational and temporal challenges	1	10%
Average	10	100%

The buko pie business implemented several strategies to overcome various challenges, with each solution contributing to its success. One key approach was knowledge transfer (10%), where the owner learned the importance of precise ingredient measurements from a previous employee. This ensured consistent product quality. Additionally, the business tackled supply chain issues (10%) by securing additional suppliers for coconut, a crucial ingredient, which helped maintain a steady supply and meet demand. These efforts enhanced operational efficiency and product consistency.

To expand its market reach, the business focused heavily on marketing and promotion (20%), using social media platforms to engage customers and offer free samples. This increased brand visibility and customer loyalty, allowing the business to maintain sales even during surplus production. Furthermore, financial resilience (10%) played a role, with the owner borrowing money during tough periods to sustain operations. This approach allowed the business to weather financial struggles and continue serving customers.

Addressing market fluctuations, the business introduced product diversification (10%), offering alternative pies such as macapuno and cassava pies when buko pie was in short supply. This strategy helped maintain customer interest and expanded product offerings. Meanwhile, competitor awareness (30%) ensured that the business stayed competitive, focusing on high-quality products and customer preferences. By offering well-made alternatives, the business stood out in a crowded market.

Finally, the business faced operational and temporal challenges (10%), such as continuing production despite adverse weather conditions. This resilience kept the business operational even during difficult times, ensuring that customers could rely on its products. These combined efforts reflect the business's adaptability and strategic responses to challenges, allowing it to thrive in a dynamic market environment.

Table 4 Shows the Results of Applied Strategies

Table 4

What are the results after applying these strategies?

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
1. Product Longevity	2	20%
2. Supply Chain Stability	1	2%
3. Sales Growth	3	30%
4. Positive customer experience	1	2%
5. Financial Resilience	1	2%
6. Market Visibility	1	2%
7. Sales Continuity through Alternatives	2	20%
8. Business Functionality	2	20%
9. Tourist Demand	1	2%
Average	14	100%

The application of various strategies for buko pie businesses led to varied results, with some themes showing more prominent impacts than others. The most notable result was Sales Growth, which had the highest frequency (30%), indicating that strategies focused on improving product quality and customer satisfaction directly contributed to increased sales. This growth is often driven by positive word-of-mouth and repeat purchases, reflecting strong market demand. Product Longevity (20%) also had a significant impact, as extending the shelf life of buko pies through proper storage and preservation techniques allowed for reduced waste and expanded market reach.

On the other hand, strategies focused on Supply Chain Stability, Positive Customer Experience, and Financial Resilience showed minimal frequencies, each at 2%. These strategies helped ensure business consistency and improved financial stability but were less impactful in driving immediate results. Market Visibility, Sales Continuity through Alternatives, Business Functionality, and Tourist Demand were also noted but with lower frequencies (2%-20%), suggesting that while these factors contributed to operational success and customer engagement, they did not have as large a direct influence on growth as Sales Growth and Product Longevity.

Overall, the application of these strategies highlighted the importance of balancing operational efficiency with customer satisfaction to foster sustainable business growth. The results suggest that focusing on long-term product quality and strategic market positioning can yield the most significant benefits for buko pie businesses.

Table 5 Shows the results of Recommended Strategies for Future Buko Pie Owners

Table. 5

What would be your advice or recommended strategies for future buko pie sellers/owners?

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
1. Financial Planning and Investment	1	6%
2. Supply Chain	3	19%

3.	Consistency in Product Quality	1	6%
4.	Essential Production Equipment	1	6%
5.	Effective Resolution	1	6%
6.	Strategic Location	4	25%
7.	Market Visibility	1	6%
8.	Resilience in Business	2	13%
9.	Effective Promotion	2	13%
Average		16	100%

The table presents the recommended strategies for future buko pie sellers/owners, with various themes and their corresponding frequency and percentage. The most frequently mentioned strategy is "Strategic Location," which accounts for 25% of the responses. This emphasizes the importance of choosing a prime location to attract customers, improve accessibility, and increase business profitability. Close behind is "Supply Chain" at 19%, highlighting the significance of establishing strong relationships with reliable coconut suppliers to ensure consistent product quality. "Resilience in Business" and "Effective Promotion" each received 13% of responses, underlining the necessity for business owners to be adaptable and proactive in marketing their products.

Additionally, "Financial Planning and Investment," "Consistency in Product Quality," "Essential Production Equipment," and "Effective Resolution" each received 6% of responses, suggesting that these factors also play crucial roles in the long-term success of the business. Financial planning helps owners allocate resources effectively, while consistent product quality fosters customer trust and retention. Investments in essential equipment streamline production, and effective resolution strategies enable entrepreneurs to address challenges swiftly, ensuring smooth business operations. "Market Visibility," also at 6%, emphasizes the importance of strong branding and strategic marketing efforts to distinguish the business from competitors and drive sales.

Overall, the findings suggest that a combination of strategic location, effective supply chain management, resilience, and promotion are key to success in the buko pie business. These strategies, supported by financial planning, quality consistency, and proper equipment, provide a comprehensive approach for future entrepreneurs to navigate challenges and achieve growth.

6. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study on the struggles and strategies of buko pie owners in Los Baños, Laguna, the majority of buko pie business owners are experienced entrepreneurs, aged over 55, with high school education and over nine years of experience in the industry. These findings indicate significant knowledge and experience in the buko pie business. Key challenges identified include high competition, supply chain disruptions, fluctuating coconut prices, limited capital, and operational issues such as seasonal demand fluctuations and production delays. In response, business owners employ strategies such as establishing alternative supplier networks, utilizing social media for promotion, diversifying product offerings, and implementing sound financial practices.

The study emphasizes the importance of product quality, unique product innovations, and strong customer relationships in sustaining business operations. It highlights the need for adaptability and strategic management to navigate challenges and ensure long-term success. Future entrepreneurs are advised to focus on maintaining product quality, securing reliable supply chains, integrating digital marketing into their business operations, and adapting to market changes to support growth and sustainability in the buko pie industry in Los Baños, Laguna.

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