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Describing the Marketing Strategies of Start-Up Micro Gasoline Station

Aljelyn Kate Y. Gerra¹, Jea Heart Cler T. Maalam¹, Eliezer T. Villanueva Jr.¹, Ace Virgel T. Batingal²

¹UG Student, ²Instructor

Saint Columban College, Pagadian City

Email: atbatingal.cbe@sccpag.edu.ph, ORCID ID: 0009-0008-9650-7784

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study examines the marketing strategies of start-up micro gasoline stations, focusing on promotional efforts, pricing models, customer engagement, and the challenges they face in a competitive market. The research was conducted in Zamboanga del Sur through semi-structured interviews with twelve micro gasoline station owners and field observations. The findings indicate that these small businesses employ various marketing strategies, such as raffle promotions, seasonal discounts, and social media engagement, particularly on Facebook. By leveraging digital marketing, price adjustments, and community-based promotions, micro gasoline stations build customer loyalty and differentiate themselves from competitors. However, they also encounter challenges such as fluctuating fuel prices, competition from unregulated fuel sellers, and inconsistent customer flow. To address these issues, owners implement flexible pricing strategies, extend business hours, and offer incentives like free coffee and discounts. The study highlights that a combination of traditional and digital marketing techniques, coupled with customer-centric strategies, is key to sustaining micro gasoline stations in a rapidly evolving market. This research contributes valuable insights for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and industry stakeholders aiming to enhance the viability and competitiveness of micro gasoline stations.

Keywords: Marketing strategies, start-up micro gasoline stations, customer loyalty, pricing strategies, social media promotion.

INTRODUCTION

The gasoline station industry plays a vital role in ensuring smooth transportation and economic activities. However, small-scale start-up gasoline stations often struggle to establish themselves in a market dominated by large corporations and well-known fuel brands. The competitive landscape necessitates strategic marketing efforts to attract and retain customers while ensuring business sustainability. This study explores the marketing strategies of start-up micro gasoline stations in Zamboanga del Sur, focusing on promotional techniques, customer engagement, and pricing models.

Literature Review

Marketing strategies in the gasoline retail industry have evolved significantly due to technological advancements and changing consumer behavior. Studies indicate that traditional promotional methods, such as discounts, loyalty programs, and raffle promotions, remain effective in attracting customers (Inobacan, 2019). Additionally, social media marketing has emerged as a powerful tool for businesses, enabling them to reach a broader audience and enhance customer interaction (Petrosoft, 2023). Research highlights that gasoline stations leveraging digital marketing techniques tend to achieve higher customer retention and engagement levels compared to those relying solely on conventional advertising (Lynch, 2023).

Consumer preferences in the gasoline industry are influenced by factors such as service quality, pricing strategies, convenience, and brand perception (Kongmee, 2018). Competitive pricing has been identified as a critical element in retaining customers, especially in highly competitive markets. Gasoline stations that adjust their prices based on competitor pricing trends often experience increased sales and customer loyalty (Remer, 2017). Moreover, customer service excellence and convenience, such as extended operating hours and personalized service, significantly impact customer satisfaction and business success (Jaureguiberry, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

The 7Ps Marketing Mix Framework is an upgraded version of the classic 4Ps Product, Price, Place, Promotion introduced by Jerome McCarthy, adding three more factors: People, Process, and Physical Evidence to better fit service-based businesses. It helps companies determine how to market their products or services by focusing on what they sell and how much it costs, who delivers the service, how smoothly everything runs, and what customers see and experience. For gasoline stations, this means offering good-quality fuel, competitive pricing, easy-to-access locations, effective promotions,

friendly and efficient staff, quick and hassle-free service processes, and a clean, well-maintained station. When all these elements work together, a gasoline station can attract more customers, keep them returning, and stand out.

The researcher likely chose the 7Ps Marketing Mix for the study because it provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how a business, particularly a start-up micro gasoline station, can structure its marketing strategies. This model goes beyond examining just the product, like the fuel offered, and includes essential elements such as pricing, promotions, location, and customer experience, all of which are critical for a small business trying to differentiate itself in a competitive market.

The researcher can apply the 7Ps framework to analyze how each of these factors influences the marketing strategies of a micro gasoline station. The researcher can explore how the station offers various products, such as different fuel options or additional services, how it sets pricing to remain competitive, and how its location attracts customers. The researcher can also examine promotional strategies, like discounts or loyalty programs. Using the 7Ps, the researcher will gain a detailed and holistic view of how these stations employ marketing strategies to succeed in the market.

The researcher's case describes the marketing strategies of start-up micro gasoline stations, aiming to explore how these small businesses develop and implement practical marketing approaches in a competitive industry. The study will examine the factors influencing marketing decisions, such as product offerings, pricing strategies, promotional efforts, and the station's location. Additionally, the researcher will explore how customer interactions, employee behavior, and the station's physical environment contribute to the overall customer experience. By understanding how start-up micro gasoline stations utilize these marketing strategies, the researcher intends to provide valuable insights into how these businesses can thrive and differentiate themselves in the marketplace, especially considering the challenges they face in gaining customer loyalty and competing with larger, established competitors.

Significance of the Study

The research on the marketing strategies of micro gasoline stations in Pitogo, Zamboanga del Sur, provided valuable insights for various stakeholders. Micro gasoline station owners and operators benefited from a better understanding of effective marketing strategies, which helped them make informed pricing, promotions, and customer service decisions. Entrepreneurs and investors who considered entering the market found the study helpful in understanding market dynamics, profitability, regulations, and customer preferences, allowing them to plan their businesses more effectively. Those in the transportation industry, such as taxi services, ride-hailing platforms, and delivery companies, also gained insights into how micro gasoline stations impacted their operations, helping them identify ways to save costs and improve fuel access. Local government units in Zamboanga del Sur used the findings to develop policies and programs that supported the growth of these stations, recognizing their role in the local economy. The study also contributed to the academic community by expanding knowledge of gasoline industry marketing strategies, serving as a reference for future research. Lastly, future researchers built on this study to explore emerging trends in the industry, including the rise of electric vehicles, renewable energy solutions, and digital innovations in fuel distribution.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to understand how the marketing strategies of micro gasoline station owners managed their businesses and helped the economy. The interview was conducted for those who owned the gas station, using data collected through interviews and observation in 2024.

Specifically, the study aimed to answer the central question: How do the start-up micro gasoline stations describe their marketing strategies to approach customers? It directly answered the following questions:

1. What marketing strategies do the start-up micro gasoline station owners use to approach customers?
2. How do start-up micro gasoline station owners leverage social media platforms to promote their micro gasoline station?
3. What challenges do start-up micro gasoline station owners face in applying their marketing strategies?
4. How do start-up micro gasoline station owners overcome the challenges of implementing those marketing strategies?
5. How do micro gasoline station owners differentiate their micro gasoline stations from existing gasoline stations?

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlined the research methodology employed in this study. The selection of the qualitative research approach depended on its capacity to explore complex phenomena and thoroughly comprehend the research topic. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders to gather rich, narrative data. These interviews allowed for a flexible and open-ended exploration of individual perspectives and experiences. The data collected was then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns.

Research Design

A qualitative study examined heavy subjects by gathering detailed, descriptive data instead of numbers. It focused on understanding individual experiences. Standard methods included interviews, focus groups, observations, and document reviews. Researchers analyzed data to identify patterns

and themes and ensured the credibility of findings by verifying with participants and using multiple sources. Ethical considerations involved obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and treating participants with respect. Overall, qualitative research provided deep insights into individual thoughts and behavior.

The study used a qualitative case study approach to explore the marketing strategies of start-up micro gasoline stations in Pitogo, Zamboanga del Sur. Merriam's case study approach was an in-depth investigation of a specific situation, organization, or event to understand real-world challenges better. This method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to examine how these small gasoline stations developed and applied their marketing strategies. The researcher identified patterns and themes that shaped their business decisions by gathering information through interviews, observations, and document reviews. This approach provided meaningful insights into how these stations attracted and retained customers, navigated competition, and managed their operations despite various challenges.

Merriam's case study approach guided the research, providing a clear and structured methodology (Merriam, 2009). This framework ensured a systematic process for the case study, allowing for thorough and methodical data collection and analysis. Merriam's guidelines assisted in selecting the cases to be studied, gathering data through interviews and observations, and analyzing the data to identify patterns, themes, and key insights. Following this structured approach, the research delivered reliable and detailed findings about the examined cases.

The mini gas stations in Pitogo, Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines, were the subject of the case study. These small-scale businesses played a vital role in the local economy, providing fuel and other essential services to the community. The research attempted to comprehend microbusiness owners' distinctive characteristics, especially in rural locations, by looking at these stations.

Research Environment

This study focused on the marketing strategies of micro gasoline stations in rural Pitogo, Zamboanga del Sur, where people lived in small, spread-out villages. This setting was necessary because the dispersed population influenced how these businesses reached and served customers. The micro gasoline stations, located far from the larger city stations, were essential in these rural areas, providing fuel to isolated communities. The study examined how these small businesses approached their marketing, adapting to the unique challenges of serving a scattered population. By focusing on their marketing strategies, the research highlighted how these stations successfully attracted and kept customers in rural areas, offering valuable lessons for similar businesses.

Research Participants

The participants in this study consisted of twelve micro gasoline station owners operating in Pitogo, Zamboanga del Sur. Participants were selected based on their active involvement in business operations and their willingness to participate in the study. These owners were deeply involved in the daily operations of their businesses, giving them firsthand knowledge of their marketing strategies. The study also used triangulation to gather data from other sources to make the research findings more robust. Speaking with employees and observing station operations: This approach gave the study a more complete and well-rounded view of how these micro gasoline stations operated.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher gathered data through interviews and a consent letter. The interviews used carefully designed questions to capture diverse perspectives on the study. The methodology was developed under the adviser's supervision and required approval from the panelists before implementation. Micro gasoline station owners were informed about the open and transparent nature of the dialogue, emphasizing the importance of accuracy and reliability in the findings.

Before conducting the research, the study had to obtain approval from the research instructor, dean, and school president. The questionnaire was presented for verification to these authorities, and data collection did not proceed until this approval was secured. The research protocol involved obtaining permission to conduct the study, validating the interview and questionnaire with panel members and the chair, and ensuring informed consent from participants.

The researchers verified that it was error-free before proceeding with the interviews. Once this verification was complete, they sought consent from participants with micro gasoline stations. During interviews, the researcher meticulously documented all information participants provided to ensure accurate and reliable findings.

Data Analysis

The data collected through interviews were analyzed using Merriam's case study approach. Categorical aggregation involves grouping similar data from interviews, observations, and documents into specific categories to identify patterns and trends. Thematic coding assigned codes to portions of the information, such as challenges and strategies, to uncover key themes and insights. To ensure objectivity, the researcher disclosed any biases in participant evaluation. Confirming their answers was made more easily by member checking, and consistency was ensured by triangulating data from many sources. These methods of internal validation contributed to the assurance of reliability. Each data analysis employed the following techniques to identify primary

topics: transcription and voice recording analysis, which were used for thematic insights, surveys, pattern recognition, document identification, and interview coding. The categorization of observations highlighted operational trends.

Ethical Considerations in Research

The ethical considerations of this study were a set of rules that governed the research designs and protocols. These principles included informed consent, confidentiality, the Data Privacy Act of 2012, autonomy, beneficence, and justice. Protocols guaranteed that subjects were correctly informed and consented willingly, that their privacy was maintained, that their choices were honored, that the study maximized benefits while lowering risks and that the learning required oversight. It was possible to finish every item on this list rigorously and equitably. These practices guided the ethical conduct of the research and ensured the integrity and respect of the study process.

Informed consent. Participants received detailed information about the research, including its purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. They were given ample time to consider their participation and were free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality. Participant information was treated with the utmost confidentiality, guaranteeing that no study output would reveal the individual names, and complied with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, which protected the personal information of individuals.

Autonomy. Participants were treated with decency and had the right to make independent judgments about their participation. They were neither coerced nor under any duress to participate in the research.

Beneficence. The research maximized participants' benefits and minimized potential risks. They ensured that the research questions were relevant and vital and that the data collected could be used responsibly.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

This study investigated the marketing strategies employed by start-up micro gasoline station owners in Zamboanga del Sur. The qualitative approach utilized in-depth interviews with twelve (12) micro gasoline station owners to gain insights into their marketing approaches, promotional activities, customer engagement techniques, and the challenges they faced in sustaining their businesses. The findings revealed that start-up micro gasoline stations applied various marketing strategies to attract and retain customers, leveraging social media for business promotion, addressing competitive pricing, and enhancing customer loyalty through unique services. The discussion follows the categorization of themes that emerged during data analysis.

The study found that one of the most common marketing strategies employed by micro gasoline station owners was the use of raffle promotions and discounts to attract customers and encourage repeat purchases. Several participants stated that for every PHP 100 spent on fuel, customers received a raffle ticket for a chance to win prizes, typically given at the end of the year. This strategy not only incentivized customers to purchase more fuel but also fostered a sense of loyalty. Additionally, many owners implemented seasonal discounts and free giveaways during special occasions, such as Christmas, to make customers feel valued and appreciated. Another widely utilized strategy was ensuring good customer service, which participants identified as a key factor in retaining customers. Owners and staff focused on greeting customers warmly, ensuring quick and hassle-free service, and offering small tokens of appreciation, such as free coffee in the morning. Some stations even went as far as providing credit to long-term customers who occasionally lacked cash, reinforcing trust and loyalty among patrons.

Social media played a significant role in how micro gasoline stations promoted their businesses and engaged with their customers. The research indicated that Facebook was the primary platform used by gasoline station owners to announce promotions, update customers on fuel prices, and maintain engagement through community interactions. Many participants stated that they frequently posted updates regarding fluctuations in fuel prices, recognizing that price-sensitive customers relied on these updates to decide where to refuel. This marketing strategy helped them attract price-conscious customers who actively searched for lower fuel costs. Moreover, some owners leveraged Facebook promotions to offer additional incentives, such as free deliveries for bulk fuel purchases or bonus raffle entries for online engagement. The integration of social media marketing into their business operations enabled them to compete with larger, more established gasoline stations by reaching a broader audience at minimal cost.

Despite the effectiveness of these strategies, micro gasoline station owners faced multiple challenges in their marketing efforts. One of the most prevalent challenges was price competition, particularly against larger gasoline stations and informal fuel resellers. Some participants noted that nearby competitors deliberately undercut their prices by offering lower rates, forcing them to either match the price or risk losing customers. Others struggled with informal fuel vendors who sold gasoline in small quantities (per-liter pricing), often at lower costs due to bypassing regulatory requirements. Additionally, many owners highlighted the issue of slow customer flow, with sales fluctuating unpredictably due to economic conditions and seasonal trends. Fuel price surges discouraged customers from refueling in large volumes, impacting overall revenue.

To cope with these challenges, micro gasoline station owners adopted various strategies to sustain their businesses. One key coping mechanism was adjusting fuel prices competitively, ensuring that their rates remained attractive compared to nearby competitors. Owners frequently monitored market trends and adjusted their prices accordingly, often lowering prices slightly below competitors to retain customer loyalty. Another significant approach was offering customer loyalty programs, such as reward-based promotions and free item giveaways. By providing incentives like free fuel top-ups after a certain number of visits, station owners ensured that customers returned rather than switching to competitors. In addition, some owners strategically extended their operating hours, opening earlier and closing later than competing stations, which provided convenience for motorists who refueled at non-peak hours. This operational flexibility distinguished them from competitors and enabled them to capture additional sales.

The study also found that micro gasoline stations introduced innovative services to create memorable customer experiences, thereby differentiating themselves from larger competitors. One such innovation was the introduction of emergency fuel delivery services, where some owners provided on-demand fuel deliveries to stranded motorists in nearby areas. This service-built goodwill within the community and positioned the stations as reliable and customer-centric. Another initiative involved hosting customer appreciation events, such as year-end raffles, during which loyal customers had opportunities to win prizes like groceries, household essentials, and even fuel vouchers. Some micro gasoline stations engaged in community-based marketing, partnering with nearby businesses to cross-promote services and attract a more extensive customer base. These innovative efforts strengthened their brand presence and cultivated stronger relationships with customers.

In analyzing the research findings, the study aligns with the 7Ps Marketing Mix Framework, which highlights the interconnected role of Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence in shaping business strategies. The findings emphasized that micro gasoline stations primarily leveraged Promotion, Price, Process, and People to sustain their businesses. Promotions, such as raffle draws, seasonal discounts, and social media marketing, played a crucial role in customer attraction and retention. Price adjustments based on competitor analysis and market fluctuations ensured that the stations remained competitive. Process enhancements, including extended operating hours and streamlined fueling services, improved customer convenience and service efficiency. Finally, the emphasis on personalized customer interactions reinforced the role of People in creating strong relationships between the business and its clientele.

The study's insights contribute valuable knowledge to the field of micro-enterprise marketing by illustrating how small-scale businesses navigate competitive industries through strategic adaptability. The findings highlight that successful micro gasoline stations rely not only on price-based competition but also on customer engagement, service differentiation, and digital marketing adoption. Future research could explore the long-term sustainability of these marketing strategies, particularly in relation to the rising trend of electric vehicles and alternative fuel sources, which may disrupt the traditional gasoline station business model. Additionally, a comparative study between urban and rural micro gasoline stations could provide further insights into how location influences marketing strategies and consumer behavior.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The marketing strategies of start-up micro gasoline stations in Zamboanga del Sur revolve around customer-centered approaches, where personalized service, promotional incentives, and social media engagement play significant roles in attracting and retaining customers. Despite challenges such as price competition and fluctuating demand, owners have demonstrated resilience by implementing strategic pricing adjustments, loyalty programs, and extended service hours. Furthermore, innovative services such as emergency fuel deliveries and customer appreciation events have enabled these businesses to create unique and memorable experiences for their customers. By applying the 7Ps Marketing Mix Framework, micro gasoline station owners continue to refine their marketing strategies to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving market. The study underscores the importance of adaptability and customer-focused business models in sustaining growth within the micro gasoline industry, providing valuable implications for entrepreneurs, industry stakeholders, and future researchers.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that micro gasoline station owners continue to leverage digital marketing strategies, such as social media engagement, to maintain a competitive edge. Additionally, they should explore strategic partnerships with local businesses to enhance their promotional reach and customer base. Implementing automated pricing systems that adjust fuel prices in real-time based on competitor rates could help optimize pricing strategies. Future researchers should consider conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of these marketing strategies on business sustainability. Policymakers and industry regulators should also ensure fair competition by addressing the presence of informal fuel vendors, which pose challenges to licensed micro gasoline station owners.

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