

The Verge of Food Online Selling During Covid-19 Pandemic

Jeza F. Terado, Rene D. Osorno

University of Cebu Cebu City, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

With the surge of the Covid-19 pandemic, online sellers faced challenges particularly in managing their businesses amidst the uncertainties of the pandemic. This study aims to delve into the experiences of online sellers, focusing on the challenges and mitigating measures used by online sellers during pandemic. This qualitative study employs a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of food online sellers during the Covid-19 pandemic. A total of five participants, consisting of food online sellers based in the local community, were selected through purposive sampling to provide rich and diverse insights into the challenges and mitigating measures associated with online selling during the pandemic. The study takes place in Tacloban City, a first-class, highly urbanized city in the Eastern Visayas region of the Philippines. Using semi-structured interviews food online sellers shared their experiences related to the challenges faced and the strategies employed in navigating the complexities of online selling during the pandemic. The findings of the study revealed eight emergent themes that encapsulate the informants' experiences, challenges, and coping strategies in food online selling during the pandemic. Specifically, three themes described their experiences: Low in Sales, Struggling in Buying Stocks, and Resorting to Online Business, which illustrate their initial difficulties and adaptive responses in transitioning to digital platforms. Regarding the challenges they encountered, three themes surfaced: Purchasing Ingredients, Dealing with Complaints and Addressing It Properly, and Relying on Delivery Drivers, pointing to supply chain issues, customer service concerns, and dependence on third-party logistics. Lastly, two themes represented the mitigating measures employed: SellerCustomer Relationship and Advertise the Product on Social Media, emphasizing the strategies informants used to maintain customer trust and boost visibility in a competitive online marketplace.

Keywords: online sellers, challenges, Covid-19 pandemic, experiences

INTRODUCTION

Online selling is becoming a popular new trend and is gradually taking over as a key component of modern living. Online purchasing has grown significantly over the past few years as a result of widespread internet access among consumers and e-commerce use among merchants. Online selling has become more and more popular over time, largely because consumers find it convenient to buy food. One of the most alluring aspects of internet selling, especially around the holidays, is that it eliminates the need to stand in line or go from a restaurant in pursuit of specific foods. Online sellers that conduct their business online include rising in accordance with the younger generation's shifting buying preferences. People find online selling to be incredibly handy because they can easily obtain a variety of goods from different providers with a single click (Lee et al., 2016).

People who have been displaced from employment due to the pandemic must find ways to supplement their income; as a result, they prepare, cook, and distribute meals to their families and friends, which finally led to selling food online. Home food handlers are not provided with sanitary equipment.

Customers may be exposed to foodborne diseases if food preparation methods are dangerous and inappropriate, lack a permit, or are not required to apply for food safety certification. Foodborne Disease reported to be caused by several faulty home food preparation techniques, including improper cooking techniques, reheating, undercooking, cooling of food, inadequate preparation, cross-contamination, insufficient processing, and poor hygiene (Limon, 2021).

Reaching a global audience boosts sales potential, which is one advantage of online selling. Due to the outbreak, many people lost their employment options, and millions of people are now even more interested in using online sales as a means of income. Fulfilling the expectations of both buyers and sellers, as well as the convenience of online selling in light of the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 epidemic (Cruz et al., 2022).

With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, there are new challenges for food online selling. Furthermore, consumers have no idea if the food they order are safe from the virus. Food-borne disease is caused by incorrect cooking procedures, inadequate preparation, cross-contamination, and poor hygiene practices. This perception of ordering online could affect a customer's decision. Recognizing these situations, this research examined the activities of home-based food handlers who work in the online food industry.

As a hospitality management instructor, the researcher's goal in this study is to gather narratives from respondents' experiences by having them narrate their own stories to the researcher in an interview. This study looked into food handler experiences and observed Food Safety Protocols during a pandemic. Furthermore, the researchers hoped to use practical applications to solve any identified problems and get more profound insights about food handling in selling online. This is to look forward to more beneficial outcomes and to ensure better information which will eventually help online sellers achieve guest satisfaction.

Framework

This study was primarily anchored on the Theory of Reasoned Action by Fishbein & Ajzen (1975). Additionally, it has two supporting theories; Broaden and Build Theory by Fredrickson (2001) and Self- Efficacy theory by Bandura (1994). Theory of Reasoned Action of Fishbein and Azjen (1975) states that if people have a positive attitude toward the suggested conduct (attitude) and believe that others want them to do it, they will have a higher intention and are more likely to do it. Many research studies have found a strong link between attitudes and subjective norms and behavioral intention and conduct (Sheppard et al., 1988). Additionally, it was suggested the intervening influence of behavioral choice and behavior can be mainly anticipated by an individual's attitudes toward completing the activity in the issue. It is not adequate to analyze the individual's views more broadly in this process; the essential attitudes are specific to the specific action. Similarly, our behavior and behavioral intention are shaped by our beliefs (Schnitzer et al., 2020). In addition to the preceding discussion, all cognitive theories, including the Theory of Reasoned Action, are limited. They do not give mechanism knowledge on how individuals make decisions or how those decisions influence behavior. Findings appear to result from 'free will,' but this isn't a scientifically valid explanation. They developed a connectionist mechanism that explains personal decision-making in terms of natural science (Alhamad & Donyai, 2021). One or more processing nodes represent each element relevant to the decision process. When two nodes must be active simultaneously, the connection weight of the two nodes becomes positive. When one node must be active while another must be dormant, the connection weight of the two nodes becomes negative. Zero weighted connections are unlikely to exist.

Activating the nodes linked with relevant features of a particular challenge represents these features. The system then uses multivariate statistical approaches to satisfy all requirements as much as possible. The network's decision is based on the final solution (Tryon, 2014). Behavioral intention is measured by the relative strength of a person's choice to do an activity. Attitude comprises a person's ideas about the consequences of executing a behavior multiplied by the value of those consequences. A subjective norm is defined as perceived expectations from relevant individuals or groups and the intent to follow these expectations. In other words, "a person's view that the majority of key individuals in his or her life believe he or she should or should not engage in the activity in question" (Skewes & Gonzalez, 2013). This study is supported by the Broaden and Build theory by Fredrickson (2001), which suggests that positive emotions broaden an individual's momentary thought-action repertoire, leading to the building of enduring personal resources. These resources can be physical, intellectual, social, or psychological, and they contribute to an individual's overall well-being and resilience over time. Meanwhile, Jose et al. (2018) stated that positive emotions are essential for our wellbeing and positively impact our minds and bodies. Negative emotions cause problems for individuals and society, so academics are interested in them. Positive emotions, in this view, enable us to be creative, playful, curious, and experimental, and chances to get additional physical, social, and intellectual resources flow from these activities. Furthermore, the positive

feeling of curiosity leads to the acquisition of new learning, and the emotion of love helps develop social resources.

Negative emotions serve as a form of resistance. Fear, anger, and anxiety are known to occur in response to prospective risks, and they are known to shorten people's span of attention. The term "narrowing of attention" refers to people with negative emotions having a more limited range of awareness. Negative emotions are believed to be more focused on a limited set of sensations and thoughts while avoiding irrelevant information. They also tend to become defensive, reacting angrily to any material that threatens to question their ideas and viewpoints (Lam & Har, n.d.). Moreover, engaging in social interactions strengthens social relationships, allowing individuals to seek assistance from their fellow humans in the future; as a result, the ability to feel good emotions is evolutionarily advantageous. People predisposed to experience good emotions are more likely to explore new objects, people, or situations, exposing themselves to a wide range of stimuli and information, which improves their learning. Positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment, and affection have expanded people's momentary thought repertoires, allowing them to come up with new ideas and thoughts more easily (Fredrickson, 2001).

Self-efficacy theory, proposed by Bandura (1994), focuses on an individual's belief in their ability to perform specific tasks or achieve goals. According to this theory, individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to take on challenges, persevere through difficulties, and recover from setbacks. Bandura emphasized that self-efficacy influences not only how people think, feel, and motivate themselves but also how they behave. These beliefs are shaped by four main sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological or emotional states. Individuals with high self-efficacy believe in their ability to complete tasks they set out to accomplish. When faced with challenges, they view them as opportunities to overcome rather than obstacles to avoid. High self-efficacy has been linked to positive outcomes across various domains, particularly in academics and the workplace. Research by Richaud and Mesurado (2016) found that students with higher self-efficacy demonstrated greater participation and success compared to those with lower self-efficacy. The concept of self-efficacy, as outlined by Bandura (1994), provides a valuable framework for understanding the resilience and adaptability of online sellers during the pandemic. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to influence events that affect their lives, which became crucial for online sellers facing unprecedented challenges. Many sellers leveraged their confidence in learning new technologies and marketing strategies to pivot their businesses to an entirely online model, showcasing high self-efficacy. According to Bandura, individuals with strong self-efficacy are more likely to persevere in the face of difficulties, and this was evident as sellers innovated to meet shifting consumer demands during lockdowns. This study explores how self-efficacy among online sellers contributed to their ability to adapt, sustain, and grow their businesses despite the uncertainties of the pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered significant changes across various industries, with the restaurant sector undergoing a particularly notable shift towards ecommerce (Caboni & Pizzichini, 2021). The pandemic affected even small retailers, forcing them to rapidly adapt to survive. According to Samanta and Aithal (2022), seller's resilience and survival led them to embrace online platforms to continue with their operations. As the Philippines continues to deal with the effects of the Covid-19, in today's business owners who are facing enormous, complex barriers and unusual plans. Many businesses are putting themselves at risk by attempting to respond to the pandemic. Business owners are rebuilding themselves in response to the crisis, accelerating digital transformation, adopting variable cost structures, and operating in a fast-paced environment. The current scenario is quite disturbing, particularly for business owners. Taking steps and achieving progress in the face of today's situation is essential and involves making quick decisions amidst uncertainty; overthinking causes "analysis paralysis," where business leaders are unable to make decisions. Keeping the business running while adhering to the government's newly enforced restrictions would affect business owners daily (Bartolome et al., 2021). Small retailers who swiftly transitioned to digital channels, such as e-commerce websites and social media platforms, were better equipped to mitigate the disruptions caused by the pandemic and maintain their customer base. Despite facing challenges such as a lack of technological infrastructure and digital skills, those who adapted were able to enhance their reach and customer engagement through digital platforms like online marketing and delivery services. Samanta and Aithal (2022) suggested that resilience is achieved through investments in digital literacy, customer relationship management, and e-commerce infrastructure plays a crucial role in ensuring business survival and long-term growth during the crisis.

The pandemic presented an opportunity for online stores, resulting in a rise in online shopping, especially for food and grocery items, while also influencing customer behavior and preferences (Magableh, 2021). Similarly, Ewe and Ho (2022) highlighted the broader need for businesses to adapt to the changing landscape caused by the pandemic. Their study focused on personal selling processes, which were forced to shift from face-to-face interactions to virtual presentations and electronic documentation. The transformation was particularly evident in Malaysia, where businesses embraced digital tools to adjust to the "new normal." It was proposed that the development of psychological capital, learning orientation, and technological use were critical for businesses looking to improve their sales performance during and after the pandemic. Their study emphasized the importance of adaptability and continuous learning in overcoming the challenges presented by the crisis.

In the Philippines, the first confirmed case of Covid-19 in the Philippines was reported on January 30, 2020, the patient was a 38-year-old woman from Wuhan, China, who had arrived in Manila from Hong Kong on January 21 (Stanford University, 2020). Following the first reported case, stricter rules have been imposed to control the spread of the virus and many food and beverage businesses remain closed as the pandemic continues to disrupt the economy. Restaurants and food service businesses were among the first to feel the severe impact of the pandemic. Dining in restaurants came to a halt for an extended period as social distancing measures were enforced. These businesses experienced significant cash flow disruptions due to a sharp decline in consumer consumption, alongside ongoing operational expenses, leading to income losses. This situation made it particularly difficult for businesses, especially smaller ones, to remain operational during this crisis (Micabalo, 2022). Although experiences of restaurant owners in adopting online food selling during the pandemic have been varied. The shift to online platforms has allowed businesses to remain operational despite physical restrictions, enabling them to reach a wider customer base and maintain revenue streams (Grimmer, 2022). E-commerce facilitates consumers to procure goods and services irrespective of geographical constraints or time limitations (Ramli et al., 2021). Restaurants that were proactive in adapting to the changing market conditions were better positioned to serve their customers during the crisis (Wahyuningsih et al., 2022).

One of the advantages of an internet business is that it is low-cost but successful at attracting customers 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The use of digital and virtual worlds to advertise and offer products and services is known as online marketing. Internet technology allows consumers to make purchases online, and online shopping is becoming more popular as a convenient way to acquire products, particularly among young people. Designing a website that supports online purchasing is a challenge when creating a shopping experience, such as online shopping, that relies on limited virtual pathways to elicit emotional responses (Santos et al., 2020). In the Philippines, food handlers at home are often not provided with essential sanitary equipment, which can lead to the use of unsafe food handling practices (Dela Cruz, 2019). The lack of mandatory food safety certification for home-based food vendors contributes to the absence of regulated food safety standards, increasing the likelihood of foodborne illnesses (Santos et al., 2020). Moreover, many small-scale online food business owners, who are typically inexperienced in adhering to food safety protocols, continue to prepare and sell food without sufficient knowledge of the proper hygiene practices (Martinez & Garcia, 2021). These issues are particularly concerning in the context of home-based food preparation, where the risks of contamination are heightened due to improper handling and storage practices (Torres, 2021). As the demand for online food services grows, there is an increasing need for stricter regulations and educational initiatives to improve food safety among homebased food vendors (Bautista, 2023).

As proposed by Veloso et al. (2020), the concept of satisfaction is made up of two components: structural satisfaction, which relates to concrete elements, and emotional satisfaction, which pertains to intangible features such as the company's image. Customer emotional expectations are deducted from perceived satisfaction to determine overall satisfaction. Perception is a value judgment based on sensory input, yet it contains significant dynamic content. Lin and Wang (2006) emphasized that the interaction between e-service quality and customer satisfaction is crucial for fostering long-term loyalty in online platforms. They suggest that both tangible and intangible factors must be carefully managed to ensure a positive customer experience. This aligns with the findings of Santos (2003), who highlighted that emotional satisfaction, particularly through trust and perceived value, plays a key role in shaping consumer behavior in the e-commerce environment. Customer satisfaction is a direct result of service quality, and maintaining high service standards increases the likelihood of customer loyalty. Loyalty, often defined as the repeated purchase of goods or services from the same company, is essential

for sustaining online businesses. Moreover, customers who perceive high service quality are more likely to remain committed to supporting and strengthening an online business, ultimately contributing to its growth and stability (Veloso et al., 2020). The widespread restrictions have led to a significant rise in online shopping; prompting entrepreneurs increasingly embrace the growing internet trend (Arreola, 2020). While during the pandemic, shopping attitude shifted. Customer experience is still a crucial aspect. However, what exactly is customer experience, and how does it impact entrepreneurs especially when shifting from onsite to online retailing? These are common questions asked by business professionals. Essentially, customer experience is a strategy designed to prioritize the consumer, ensuring they feel comfortable and connected (Sinch, 2021). Barriero (2020) explains that, due to the circumstances, Filipinos were compelled to engage in e-commerce activities like online buying and selling to meet their basic needs. Online sellers rely on the income generated from their online businesses to cover daily expenses. Given the accessibility and convenience of online shopping, it has become a preferred option for many. However, external factors, such as global disruptions, can significantly impact both customer behavior and business operations. The Covid-19 pandemic, as studied by Geirdal et al. (2021), demonstrated how abrupt shifts in societal norms influenced consumer interactions with online services. Many employees were instructed to work from home, and educational institutions in Norway, the United States, and the United Kingdom transitioned to online learning. Additionally, restrictions on travel, social interactions, and business operations altered consumer needs and expectations. With most enterprises suspending operations and employees placed on part-time or full-time leave, digital platforms became even more critical for communication, shopping, and service delivery. This unprecedented reliance on online services further underscores the importance of e-service quality in maintaining customer satisfaction and loyalty, especially during times of crisis.

In a study by Teece (2010), a business model articulates how a company provides value to customers, entices them to pay for that value, and translates those payments into profit. On the other hand, Tran et al. (2016) emphasize that individuals and businesses are increasingly using digital applications and devices to enable access to cultural information, which enhances the consumer's experience. As corporations strive to expand their products into overseas markets to achieve more significant market shares, digital services are often judged primarily by the quantity sold rather than the margin obtained (Vendrell-Herrero et al., 2018). Similarly, a study by Choi et al. (2020) underscores the growing importance of digital transformation for businesses aiming to enter global markets. They found that businesses leveraging digital tools are not only able to broaden their reach but can also create more personalized consumer experiences, ultimately leading to stronger customer loyalty and a more competitive market position. Thomason and Williams (2020) highlighted that the rapid transition to remote work and online learning significantly impacted work-life balance, as many employees struggled with maintaining productivity and managing family responsibilities while confined to their homes. This transition not only affected employment but also disrupted social and educational systems globally, forcing societies to adapt quickly to new digital realities. Meanwhile, Chen et al. (2019) conducted a study on the motives and behaviors of people who engage in live streaming and the impact of live streaming on consumer behavior. They discovered that streamer identification and group identification—where streamer identification is driven by parasocial interaction and group identification is strengthened by coexperience among audiences—have a favorable impact on audiences' continuous watching behavior intention. Live streaming creates a very intimate experience with a remote partner, improves learning performance for new instructors, and promotes both pro- and antisocial behaviors by acting as a third virtual space for users to socially interact with others. A study by Li and Zhang (2020) found that live streaming enhances user engagement by fostering social interaction and influences purchasing decisions. Viewers often make purchases based on their emotional connection with the streamers. The emotional bonds formed between streamers and their audiences are significant factors in driving consumer loyalty and encouraging repeated viewing behavior, which further boosts the commercialization of livestreaming platforms. Similarly, a study by Cruz and Rivera (2020) highlighted that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Philippines faced challenges in adapting to the new normal. Their research found that many SMEs struggled with financial instability and operational disruptions but successfully navigated the crisis by embracing digital tools and pivoting their business models to meet the changing demands. This adaptability was essential for survival in a time of rapidly changing regulations and consumer behavior. A study by Chou and Chen (2021) found that high service quality significantly improves customer retention in the online retail sector. Their research revealed that factors such as reliability, responsiveness, and empathy were crucial in fostering customer satisfaction, which in turn promoted repeat purchases and long-term loyalty. Additionally, Kim and Kim (2019)

emphasized that customer satisfaction in e-commerce platforms is strongly linked to the perceived value and experience, as positive online interactions create an emotional connection that encourages repeat business. Nielsen (2020) noted that Covid-19 has significantly impacted shopping habits, out-of-home consumption, and general consumer behavior. In Vietnam, consumers have increasingly recognized the advantages of online shopping, particularly during the pandemic. In the study on the influence of Covid-19 on Vietnamese consumers, 25% of respondents reported that the pandemic had affected their shopping behavior.

Specifically, they have increased their online purchases while reducing out-of-home consumption (Wayne et al., 2020). Similarly, Nguyen and Luu (2022) found that during the pandemic, Vietnamese consumers exhibited a growing dependence on e-commerce platforms, driven by convenience and the perceived safety of avoiding physical stores. Furthermore, in the post Covid-19 era, the types of products purchased online are gradually shifting towards more health-conscious options. This trend highlights the growing preference for online shopping over traditional methods, as the percentage of online shoppers continues to rise (Pham et al., 2020).

The reviewed literature collectively reinforces the transformative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for rapid digital transformation across industries, with the food and beverage sector—especially small and medium enterprises—undergoing a significant shift toward online platforms and ecommerce. The global health crisis exposed vulnerabilities in traditional business models, compelling entrepreneurs to innovate and adopt digital tools to survive and remain competitive. From the Philippine context to international studies, literature consistently emphasizes the importance of resilience, adaptability, and customer-centric strategies in navigating the disruptions brought by the pandemic. Online marketing, digital literacy, e-service quality, and customer satisfaction emerged as key themes, highlighting the role of technology not only in sustaining business operations but also in reshaping consumer behavior and expectations. While online platforms offered accessibility and convenience, they also introduced new challenges, such as maintaining food safety and building emotional engagement in a virtual environment. Ultimately, the collective findings underscore that the successful transition to digital commerce relies on strategic investment in infrastructure, human capital, and service quality—elements that are now essential for long-term growth in the post-pandemic economy.

Objectives Of the Study

This study aims to delve into the verge of food online selling during Covid-19 pandemic in Tacloban City, Leyte. Specifically, the study seeks answers to the following questions: 1.) What are the experiences of the informants in food online selling during pandemic; 2.) What are the challenges encountered by the informants in online selling during pandemic; and 3.) What are the mitigating measures used by the informants in food online selling during pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design for this study was descriptive phenomenology. If the primary goal of the study is to explore and create a comprehensive description of a phenomenon, phenomenology is used as a design. In areas with limited current study, as was the case in the example we have provided of the experience of recreational camping, descriptive phenomenology is very helpful (Morrow et al., 2015). Applying descriptive phenomenology as the research methodology, the aim of this study is to offer insightful information about real-life experiences of recreational camping. Utilizing comprehensive depictions and analyses of the experiences of the participants, the research aims to augment comprehension of the phenomena and increase the body of knowledge in this domain.

Research Environment

The study takes place in Tacloban City, a first-class, highly urbanized city in the Philippines' Eastern Visayas region. Although it serves as the provincial capital, the city is autonomous from the province of Leyte. Tacloban

has a population of 251,881 people, making it the most populous city in the Eastern Visayas, according to the 2020 census. From October 20, 1944, until February 27, 1945, Tacloban City served as the Philippine capital under the Commonwealth Government. Tacloban is the economic hub of the Eastern Visayas, with a primarily agricultural, commercial, and tourism-based economy. For this reason, the study will focus on selected food online sellers in Tacloban City, Leyte.

Research Informants

The research subjects and respondents will be five selected food online sellers who lived in Tacloban City and have been online sellers during the pandemic. These informants are present throughout the full implementation of the program. Then, the selection of respondents is based on the marketplace and Facebook platform. I've chosen five food online sellers. The following inclusion criteria for identifying the online seller participants: 1. Filipino Citizen; 2. Do full-time online selling; 3. Age range of 21 and above; 4. Has Barangay Clearance 5. Must be residing at Tacloban City, Leyte; 6. Respondents who are willing to engage in the study and sign informed consent.

Research Instruments

This study utilized an interview guide with semi-structured questions consisting of three questions. This was chosen because it gathered information more quickly than any other way. The researcher used this to explore the informants' responses more profoundly. Furthermore, this method usually involves a conversation between the researcher and the participant, guided by a flexible interview protocol and supplemented by follow-up questions, probes, and comments. The method enables the researcher to collect unstructured data, investigate participant thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a specific topic, and delve deeply into personal and sensitive issues (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

The researcher prepared three questions to elicit the participant's views and experiences on their online selling. The questions were asked using the Waray Language to provide a comfortable conversation with the respondents. Then, the researcher submitted the interview guide questions to the adviser for correction, after which it was finalized. The researcher utilized notes and a voice recorder to accurately document the informant's responses to generate common themes.

Research Procedures

The study's protocol during the pandemic involves a series of procedures aimed at efficiently gathering data from food online sellers. Initially, the researcher will identify potential participants through online platforms such as facebook marketplace and collect their contact information, including phone numbers, email addresses, and permanent home addresses. Upon contacting the sellers, the researcher will introduce the proposed study, explaining its purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits, and seek permission to involve them as informants. Informed consent will be obtained from each participant. Subsequently, face-to-face interviews will be arranged with four selected online sellers, adhering strictly to safety protocols such as wearing masks, maintaining physical distance, and choosing well-ventilated interview locations. Additionally, one online seller will be interviewed via Facebook messenger to accommodate social distancing measures. The scheduling of interviews will be coordinated between the researcher and the informants, ensuring mutual agreement on convenient timings. Before the interviews, predetermined questions will be prepared to gather insights into the challenges, strategies, and reflections of online sellers in managing their businesses during the pandemic. Follow-up questions will be posed during the interviews to delve deeper into the informants' responses and explore additional perspectives. Data collection will be conducted either in-person or through digital means, with the interviews recorded with the participant's consent.

Treatment of Data

The data was gathered through interviews via messenger and face-to face with a voice recorder's aide. The informants are asked to answer the prepared questions wholly and honestly. The researcher will observe proper decorum will be done while listening to the story of the informants. To keep an appropriate record of the

statement, a schedule was plotted. Lastly, the informants' responses were recorded, transcribed, and coded for the generation of common themes.

Data obtained from the in-depth interview conducted was explicated using the 7-step procedures of Collaizi's (1978) phenomenological descriptive method. To start, transcribe all the subject descriptions. At this stage, the researchers read the transcribed data several times to get a sense of the experiences and stories shared by the participants while also ensuring data familiarization. The second step is to extract significant statements. Important statements and phrases related to the lived experiences of food online sellers were coded and code names were generated at this stage of the analysis. The third step is to develop formulated meanings. Factual statements were used to frame meanings. Each meaning was coded as a category, and each was given a detailed description. Fourth, established meanings are combined to form topic clusters. In this phase, the researchers categorized each formulated meaning in order to pinpoint the distinctive structure of topic clusters. The next step was to combine several topic clusters to form a theme composition. Fifth, write a thorough explanation. At this point in Collaizi's study, the emergence of the themes will be explored in detail. recognizing the fundamental structure phenomena is the sixth step. For the purpose of removing inaccurate or excessive representations from the overall framework, the findings were diminished or reduced throughout this step. then go back to the participants for confirmation. Fifth, theme clusters are formed by aggregating formulated meanings. During this stage, the researchers classified all formulated meanings to identify the distinct structure of clusters of themes. Following that, a theme composition was created using groups of theme clusters built together. Fifth, create a detailed description. Finally, returning to participants for validation. Through a member-checking technique, this stage sought to validate the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter contains the presentation and analyses of the data gathered from the food online sellers regarding experiences they have had during the pandemic. Consistent with this, it includes the description of all informants, all statements from them were properly documented or recorded, transcribed, and translated to English for the general understanding. Significant statements of the responses of informants during the conduct of the interview were extracted and core meanings were formulated. The formulated meanings were categorized into cluster themes from which emergent themes were created. For the clear context of this study, each lived experiences of the informants were taken mostly in the local dialect, so that they freely expressed their thoughts regarding their experiences during the pandemic. From the recorded responses of the five informants that were transcribed and translated, the researcher developed eight (8) emergent themes that best describes the responses of the informants which are contained in the following problems:

Experiences of the Informants in Food Online Selling During the Pandemic

The researcher created three (3) emergent themes out of the clustered themes from the formulated core meanings of the significant statements made by the informants.

Low in Sales.

During the pandemic, food sellers online had a big problem: they weren't selling as much. This shows how uncertain the online market was during that time. Several things could cause this, like people changing how they buy food, not having enough money or lots of other sellers competing for customers. Restrictions on going out might also mean fewer people wanted certain types of food. So, even though these sellers were trying hard, they struggled to sell enough and keep their businesses going. The above statement finds support from the concept of Bandura (1994) self-efficacy theory that he pointed out that the vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological/emotional states all have an impact on self-efficacy views. Low sales, therefore, could make sellers less confident in their ability to successfully negotiate the intricacies of the online economy, maintain client relationships, and adjust to shifting market conditions.

Therefore, resolving these issues and coming up with workable solutions is essential for enhancing resilience in the face of difficulty as well as self-efficacy beliefs and sales performance.

Seller A stated that:

During pandemic, an akon mga experience is medyo gumutiay an akon sales kasi diri man gud needs an cakes ngan ng less an mga occasions an natatabo didi tacloban. As per pastry online seller, an akon pirimi na gnhehemo kay mga cakes for all occasions man gud (IDI 1). (During the pandemic, my experience is that my sales are a little low. There are orders of cake but no occasions are happening. As per pastry online seller, I always make cakes for all occasions as well).

Struggling in Buying Stocks.

During the pandemic, food online sellers faced a range of challenges, including difficulties in sourcing stocks. This issue arose from disruptions in supply chains, logistical obstacles, and heightened competition for limited resources. Lockdown measures and transportation restrictions strained supply chains, making it challenging to obtain necessary ingredients or products. Moreover, increased demand and panic buying led to shortages and price fluctuations. This struggle to acquire stocks not only affected operational efficiency but also posed threats to business sustainability and profitability. Despite these hurdles, many food online sellers exhibited resilience and adaptability, navigating the complexities of stock procurement to sustain their businesses amid the uncertainties of the pandemic. All participants stated that becoming an online seller during the pandemic generally experiences buying stocks.

Online Seller C shared:

Makuri an na experience lalo na an nagka covid. Labi na an pamalit an stock, lalo gehap an clients naibanan an mga nagorder kay bawal man gumawas an mga tawo (IDI 3). (It's a bad experience, especially during Covid. The stocks are bought but I don't have enough clients who want to order my products because people are not allowed to go out).

The experiences encountered by food online sellers amidst the pandemic resonate with the Broaden-and-Build Theory proposed by Barbara Fredrickson (2001). According to this theory, positive emotions broaden individuals' attention and cognitive processes, enabling them to employ adaptive coping mechanisms and problem-solving strategies. For instance, sellers diversified their sourcing approaches, established robust supply networks, and implemented proactive inventory management techniques. This adaptive response not only enabled them to surmount immediate challenges but also laid the groundwork for sustained business resilience and expansion.

Resorting to Online Business. Due to the global pandemic, many individuals have been negatively impacted. Laverty (2003) notes a significant rise in the number of people turning to online business via social media and e-commerce platforms to sell products, with many online sellers intending to continue even after the pandemic subsides. Despite the economic slowdown induced by Covid-19, there has been a notable uptick in online selling through social media. Additionally, Torres (2021) highlights how pandemics have prompted business owners to shift towards online commerce. For participants, engaging in online business during the pandemic has become a crucial means of survival. Earning income through online selling has enabled them to cope with financial challenges during these difficult times. All participants stated that becoming an online seller during pandemic generally helped them in their financial challenges.

Online Seller E shared:

So, when pandemic came at first it was scary because we don't know the effect to us. The food panda was launched in Tacloban during pandemic. That's the time we have an opportunity to sell our products online. During that time, only food Panda is the delivery services we have. We are one of the pioneers of food Panda and I can say that through food Panda, we were able to establish customer loyalty. And also, getting feedback from our customers to improve our product. Everytime we have complaints, we apologize and immediately compensate them and change the products, or meet the clients personally (IDI 5).

Likewise, Online Seller B shared the same sentiments.

Aside na nag school ako ha TESDA as a food and beverage, na inspire gehap ako ha may puhunan tv show kay nakita ko usa na owner an business na nag grow an iya business tas nakita iya hn damo na kwarta (IDI 2). (Aside from the fact that I went to school in TESDA in food and beverage, I was inspired by the investment from the TV show because I saw a business owner whose business grew and earned a lot of money).

Resorting to online business during challenging times, such as the global pandemic, can be understood through the lens of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). According to this theory, individuals' behaviors are influenced by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of online business during the pandemic, individuals may perceive online selling as a favorable option due to positive attitudes towards its convenience, accessibility, and potential for financial gain. Moreover, perceived behavioral control, which reflects individuals' beliefs about their ability to successfully carry out the behavior, may be heightened as people seek alternative income sources amidst economic uncertainty. Thus, resorting to online business during challenging times can be seen as a rational response driven by favorable attitudes, social influences, and perceptions of control, as posited by the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Challenges Encountered by the Informants in Online Selling During Pandemic

The researcher created three (3) emergent themes out of the clustered themes from the formulated core meanings of the significant statements made by the informants.

Purchasing Ingredients. Dealing with various challenges as an online seller is part of the job, as is dealing with various types of customers, which may cause frustration and stress. Purchasing ingredients are one of the challenges. Participants expressed various challenges they encountered while engaging in online selling during the pandemic. These challenges included difficulties arising from impatient and inconsiderate online buyers, unpredictable fluctuations in stock availability and prices, competition within the market, and concerns regarding the quality of items, which were not always guaranteed (Nolasco et al., 2022).

With this, online sellers also experienced similar struggles. These are evident in their narratives.

Seller A shared:

Challenges first are the ingredients, sabi ko nga lahat nagmahal need ko mahemo hn paraan para di ma compromise yung quality ng prdukto ko. Pangalawa sa delivery ko, since during pandemic lahat lockdown kulang ng transportation (IDI 1). (Challenges are the ingredients. Ingredients increased, so I need to find ways not to compromise the quality of my product. Second, delivery, since during pandemic there is lack of transportation). Likewise, Online Seller B and Seller D shared the same sentiments:

Makuri talaga during COVID is that an akon product makuri talaga makabiling hin ingredients labi na an akon mango kay from davao pa tas kun igship dd tacloban mahal an fee. Naghitaas man gud an presyo, diri gud ako maka adjust an akon price tungod sometimes an mangga barato a danay liwat mahal. SO, nag struggle ako kun ano tak change price para makabawi ako. Usa gehapon transportation kay waray kami motor kun paano kami magdedeliver tas mangongompra. Very struggle talaga (IDI 2). (It's really difficult during Covid. Ingredients are difficult to keep especially mangoes because they are from Davao, shipping fee is expensive. The price has also increased, I can't adjust my price because sometimes mangoes are cheap and sometimes they are expensive. So, I'm struggling as how to change the price so that I can recover. One challenge also was transportation. We don't have motorcycle; how can we deliver).

The obstacles encountered by food online sellers in acquiring ingredients during the pandemic can be interpreted using Self-Efficacy Theory. In terms of ingredient procurement, sellers may face challenges like disruptions in the supply chain, logistical complexities, and heightened competition for resources. These difficulties may diminish sellers' confidence in their ability to effectively obtain the necessary ingredients for their online businesses. Thus, Self-Efficacy theory sheds light on how individuals' confidence in their abilities influences

their actions in overcoming challenges associated with acquiring ingredients for online selling during the pandemic (Bandura, 1977).

Dealing with Complaints and Address it Properly. Being an online seller, transactions and communication are always done via internet. One of the challenges in online business are dealing with complaints. Most of the participants stated that they already encountered some and most of them handled professionally, being apologetic and calm as well. Online Seller A, Online Seller C, and Online Seller D answered:

Of course, first is to accept their complaints. And observe syempre titingan mo din kung tama ang complain and then apology even it's not true, sabi nga customer is right but not all the time customers are right (IDI 1). (Of course, the first is to accept their complaints, apologize assuming that customer is always right).

Actually ha christmas mayda ako customer na nagreklamo kanan akon cake kay tungod an iba an rasa. Gin take ko iton as a challenge para pag next time niya order utro aayuson ko an quality an cake. Pero an new year nag repeat order man gehap iya. Pero na challenge gehap ako kay bagat mas mauupay pa tak paghemo an cake (IDI 3). (Actually, during Christmas, I had a customer who complained about my cake because it has a different taste. I took it as a challenge so that the next time he orders, I will improve the quality of the cake. During New Year, he made a repeat order).

Instead of solely emphasizing product or service pricing, placing importance on cultivating and earning customers' trust is crucial for sustained revenue in the long run. Sellers should engage in active listening, utilize social media platforms to enhance value, and establish personal connections with clients. Additionally, online sellers must address various other aspects of their business, including ensuring customer satisfaction (Cruz et al., 2022). In handling complaints, Self-Efficacy Theory of Bandura (1994) suggests that individuals' confidence in their ability to manage such situations influences their actions and outcomes. When confronted with challenges in addressing complaints, those with higher self-efficacy are more likely to approach the issue confidently, employing effective problem-solving strategies and communication skills to resolve it satisfactorily.

Relying on Delivery Drivers. During the pandemic, online sellers encountered difficulties relying on delivery services. The surge in online food selling coupled with restrictions on movement stretched delivery infrastructure, leading to delays and increased costs. Moreover, uncertainties around health protocols added complexity to logistics, requiring sellers to ensure the safety of customers and delivery personnel. These challenges made it challenging for sellers to meet customer expectations and maintain reliable service. Overall, reliance on delivery services posed significant hurdles for online sellers during the pandemic.

Like what Online Seller B and Online Seller C shared:

Actually, ginkurian la talaga ako how to deliver. Aside may food panda ako diri man gud tanan na customers may internet tas waray cellphone. Very expensive man gud liwta an delivery fee an food panda. During pandemic, maupay an abot ha amon negosyo kay damo an kwarta an mga tawo tas nakaka sales kami hin maupay (IDI 2). (Actually, it was really hard to deliver. Aside from my food Panda, all the customers here have no internet and no cellphones. The food Panda delivery fee is also very expensive. During the pandemic, the income of our business is good because people have a lot of money and we have good sale).

Time management, imporatanti talaga kun sugad iton na day to day operations. Gabi palang nagplaplan kana kun paano pag handle ngan paano ka ma survive it usa ka adlaw nimo nga aatubangon kanan im business (IDI 3). (Time management is really important when it comes to day to day operations. At night, you have to plan on how to handle and how to survive).

In this study, most of the participants confirmed that patience was essential to online sellers as they worked to control customer expectations and guarantee the smooth delivery of orders. Online Sellers might better adjust to the situation, interact with clients, and preserve their companies' good names if they could be patient and comprehend the challenges faced by delivery providers. The difficulties experienced by online sellers in depending on delivery drivers during the pandemic can be analyzed using the Theory of Reasoned Action. Additionally, sellers' perceptions of their control over the delivery process, including factors such as

communication with drivers and logistical coordination, play a significant role in shaping their behavior. Therefore, by considering these factors within the framework of the Theory of Reasoned Action, a deeper understanding of how online sellers navigate challenges in relying on delivery drivers during the pandemic can be achieved (Cruz et al., 2022).

Mitigating Measures Used by the Informants in Food Online Selling During Pandemic

The researcher created two (2) emergent themes out of the clustered themes from the formulated core meanings of the significant statements made by the informants.

Seller-Customer Relationship. All of the participants said that professional behavior, respectful communication, and good customer relations can all help to foster positive seller-customer relationships. Understanding and consideration are essential for keeping seller and consumer relations happy. As stated by Online Seller B and Online Seller C:

Long patience man gud la. Diri man kita robot. Para ma control kita inin tas maka rest kita gehap (IDI 2). (It's patience. I am not a robot, that we rest all the time).

Amo na iton, maging resourceful ka, Maming ka pamaagi na makaplit like ha shoppee or ha iba na nagbabaligya. Ngan syempre, need mo maka communicate it im mga clients na ma aware hra na iba na designs diri available gehap (IDI 3). (That's it, be resourceful, and choose a method that can be used like shoppee or other online sellers).

Additionally, online sellers cope with these failures and rejections by offering freebies or giveaways for things that are not sold and promoting continuous recovery programs.

Advertise the Product on Social Media. All participants concurred that as online sellers, a crucial aspect involves understanding how to effectively promote their products on social media platforms to attract a larger customer base. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of acquiring knowledge about marketing strategies to enhance sales amidst the pandemic.

As stated by Online Seller D and Online Seller E:

My mitigating measures are to buy the ingredients in bulk. I usually buy ahead of time. For my food online selling, I make sure that I advertise my products using Facebook and repost to create an audience for my paluto and kakanin. To have an income at least twice a week. It helps us to survive in our daily consumption (IDI 4).

I think during pandemic, you have to be patient all the time. Especially if you are dealing with the problems with the drivers. Be creative or innovative in terms of offering services or foods that are not offered by other competitors. Being innovative is a way to boost our profit for our business (IDI 5).

Food online sellers during the pandemic employed various mitigating strategies to address the challenges they faced. These measures involved adapting to changes in consumer behavior, boosting their online visibility through marketing efforts, and implementing strict hygiene protocols. To cater to evolving customer preferences, sellers diversified their product offerings and focused on essential items in high demand. They also utilized social media and digital marketing to attract and retain customers. Additionally, sellers prioritized hygiene by implementing thorough sanitization practices and offering contactless delivery options. Through these proactive measures, sellers effectively managed the impact of the pandemic on their businesses while continuing to serve their customers.

In employing mitigating measures during the pandemic, online sellers effectively adapted to challenges, demonstrating resilience and resourcefulness in their endeavors. These proactive actions align with the principles of the Broaden-and-Build Theory of Fredrickson (2001), where positive emotions broaden individuals' cognitive and behavioral repertoires, enabling them to overcome obstacles and foster longterm well-being. By implementing strategies such as diversifying product offerings, enhancing online visibility, and prioritizing

hygiene and safety, online sellers not only addressed immediate challenges but also built resilience and resourcefulness that may contribute to their long-term success and well-being (Jose et al., 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

After meticulously examining the gathered data, the researcher was able to formulate eight themes that best represent the experiences of the informants in food online selling during pandemic, challenges encountered by the informants in online selling, and mitigating measures used by the informants in food online selling during pandemic. The emergent themes are as follows: For the experiences of the informants in food online selling during pandemic, there are three (3) themes: Low in Sales, Struggling in Buying Stocks, and Resorting to Online Business. In challenges encountered by the informants in online selling during pandemic, there are three (3) themes: Purchasing Ingredients, Dealing with Complaints and Address It Properly, and Relying on Delivery Drivers. And lastly, the mitigating measures used by the informants in food online selling during pandemic, there are two (2) themes: Seller- Customer Relationship and Advertise the Product on Social Media.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With this noble study, the researcher was able to come up with relevant suggestion and recommendations that find applicability to the current institutions and for future studies.

Implications for Practice.

This study gathered ample data from actual experiences, challenges and mitigating used by the online sellers during pandemic. In view of findings of the study, the following implications for practice are recommended:

Local Government Units (LGUs) aiming to bolster the resilience of food online sellers in their jurisdictions. Firstly, LGUs can focus on improving delivery services' reliability and efficiency by allocating resources and enhancing infrastructure. This might involve initiatives such as upgrading transportation networks or fostering partnerships with delivery companies. Secondly, LGUs can assist food online sellers in navigating regulatory requirements, particularly regarding food safety standards, through training and support programs.

By facilitating compliance, LGUs can help sellers maintain the quality and safety of their products, thereby fostering consumer trust. Moreover, LGUs can promote collaboration and knowledge-sharing among sellers by facilitating networking opportunities and platforms for sharing experiences and strategies. Lastly, LGUs can collaborate with various stakeholders to develop tailored programs and initiatives addressing the specific needs of food online sellers. By implementing these measures, LGUs can play a vital role in supporting the growth and sustainability of the food online selling sector within their communities.

Delivery Services Providers, to ensure product support and care, delivery services should focus on providing comprehensive training to their staff on handling and transporting delicate or sensitive products. This training should cover proper handling techniques, safety protocols, and best practices for loading and unloading items. Additionally, it is essential for delivery services to invest in quality packaging materials and methods to minimize the risk of damage during transit. Finally, establishing clear communication channels with customers regarding product care instructions and support services will help to build trust and satisfaction with the delivery service.

Implications for Future Studies

The implications derived from the current discussion provide valuable insights for future studies in the field of online food selling. These implications shed light on the evolving landscape of digital commerce and its impact on various aspects of business operations. One important area for future studies is the exploration of the long-term effects of technological support and platform improvements. As technology continues to advance and online selling evolve, it is essential to investigate how these advancements influence the success and sustainability of food online sellers. Furthermore, future studies can explore the intersection of online selling and sustainability. Investigating sustainable packaging solutions and consumer attitudes and behaviors toward sustainable online food purchase can contribute to the development of environmentally friendly practices in the industry. These

future studies will not only enhance our understanding of the digital marketplace but also provide valuable insights to guide businesses in adapting to the ever-changing landscape of online commerce.

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