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All these research articles by the Multidisciplinary Journal of UV-Toledo align with the thematic areas of research contributions under the UNSDG. The journal endeavors to foster scholarly discourse and promote interdisciplinary collaboration to advance knowledge across various fields of study.

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University of the Visayas

MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF UV –TOLEDO
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A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF UV TOLEDO (MJUV-T)

ABOUT

Aims and Scope

The Multidisciplinary Journal of UV-Toledo is committed to publishing an annual journal exploring key research areas across diverse education fields. Our goal is to deepen understanding and encourage scholarly dialogue on these important topics. This edition features research contributions from students in Education, Business Administration, Hotel and Restaurant Management, and Criminology Education. The MJUV-T is anchored in the pillars of Education, Technology, and Livelihood, Resiliency, Law and Order, and other themes below:

THRUST	SUBPRIORITIES
Holistic Approaches to Health and Wellness	Determinants of Health
Ensuring Ecological Integrity, Clear and Healthy Environment	Sustain Biodiversity and Functioning of Ecosystem Services
	Climate Change Resilient Environment
	Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural
Life on Land and Below Water	Resources
	Knowledge, Attitude, and Behavior
	Equity and Human Rights
Societal Impact	Socio-economic Studies
	History, Arts, Culture, and Sports
	Outcomes-Based Education and Institutional Sustainability
Quality Education	Mathematics, Language, and
	Performing and Visual Arts
	Inclusive Nation Building Pedagogies in Philippine Educational System (Kto12 And HEI Studies)
	Disaster Risk Reduction and Health
Health Resiliency	Emergencies
	Climate Change
Social Resiliency	Environmental Threats to Health
Policy Impact	Sustainable Development Outcomes
Knowledge Development, Technology	Policy Making
Generation, Transfer and	
Commercialization	Technology Development
Industry, Energy and Emerging	
Technology	Competitive Industries
	School and Classroom Operation
Educational Management	

POLICY AND GUIDELINES

The Multidisciplinary Journal of UV-Toledo (MJUV-T) recognizes the importance of research and advocates for the development of new knowledge and processes that may improve existing practices not only in the academe but in the community as well.

Pre-checking

Once researchers submit their full paper, the editor will review it for content completeness.

During the pre-checking phase, the paper will undergo plagiarism checking, with a maximum acceptable plagiarism rate of 15%. If the plagiarism rate exceeds this limit, the paper will be returned to the researchers for revision and rechecked until it meets the acceptable rate.

Following the plagiarism check, the paper will be reviewed for grammar and adherence to APA formatting. Once the grammarian and APA formatting checker mark the paper as ACCEPTED, it will be forwarded for peer review.

If the paper is found to be mostly incomplete and unfit to proceed to the peer review phase, it will be rejected with no further processing.

Peer Review

There will be at least three reviewers for every paper submitted. The following are the qualifications of the reviewers:

➢ Master’s degree holder.
➢ Have no conflict of interest with the authors.
➢ Have recent publications in the field of the submitted paper.

The managing editor will collect the reports from the reviewers together with one of their recommendations:

- Accept without revision
- Consider after minor revision
- Consider after major revision
- Reject: Manuscript is flawed or not sufficiently novel

Editor Decision

The managing editor has the final say on the papers subjected for review, with decisions falling into one of the following categories:

• Accept
• Reject
• Ask author for revision

The managing editor may disagree with the reviewers' recommendations, provided they justify their decision for the authors' benefit.

If the managing editor recommends "Accept without revision," the manuscript will be double-checked by the editorial office. Once this is done, the authors will be notified of the manuscript’s acceptance.

If the managing editor recommends rejecting the manuscript, the rejection is immediate.

If the managing editor recommends "Ask author for revision," the manuscript will enter the revision process.

Revision

Authors will be informed immediately if their paper requires revision. The revised manuscript will be reviewed by the original reviewers, who will provide suggestions on whether the authors have complied with the recommendations. The managing editor will check the revised version, the author’s response, and the second-round comments before making a final decision. Once the managing editor is satisfied with the final manuscript, it will be accepted.

Publication Online

Once a paper has been accepted for publication, it will be sent to the authors for final proofreading before being scheduled for publication.

Editorial Board Roles of the Editorial Board

In response to the current research culture at the University and in pursuit of its vision and mission, the Editorial Board undertakes the following tasks:

➢ Review submitted manuscripts.
➢ Advise on journal policy and scope.

➢ Identify topics for special issues, which they may guest edit.

➢ Attract new authors and submissions.
➢ Promote the journal to their colleagues and peers.
➢ Assist the editor(s) in decision making over issues such as plagiarism claims and submissions where reviewers cannot agree on a decision.

Selecting Editorial Board Members

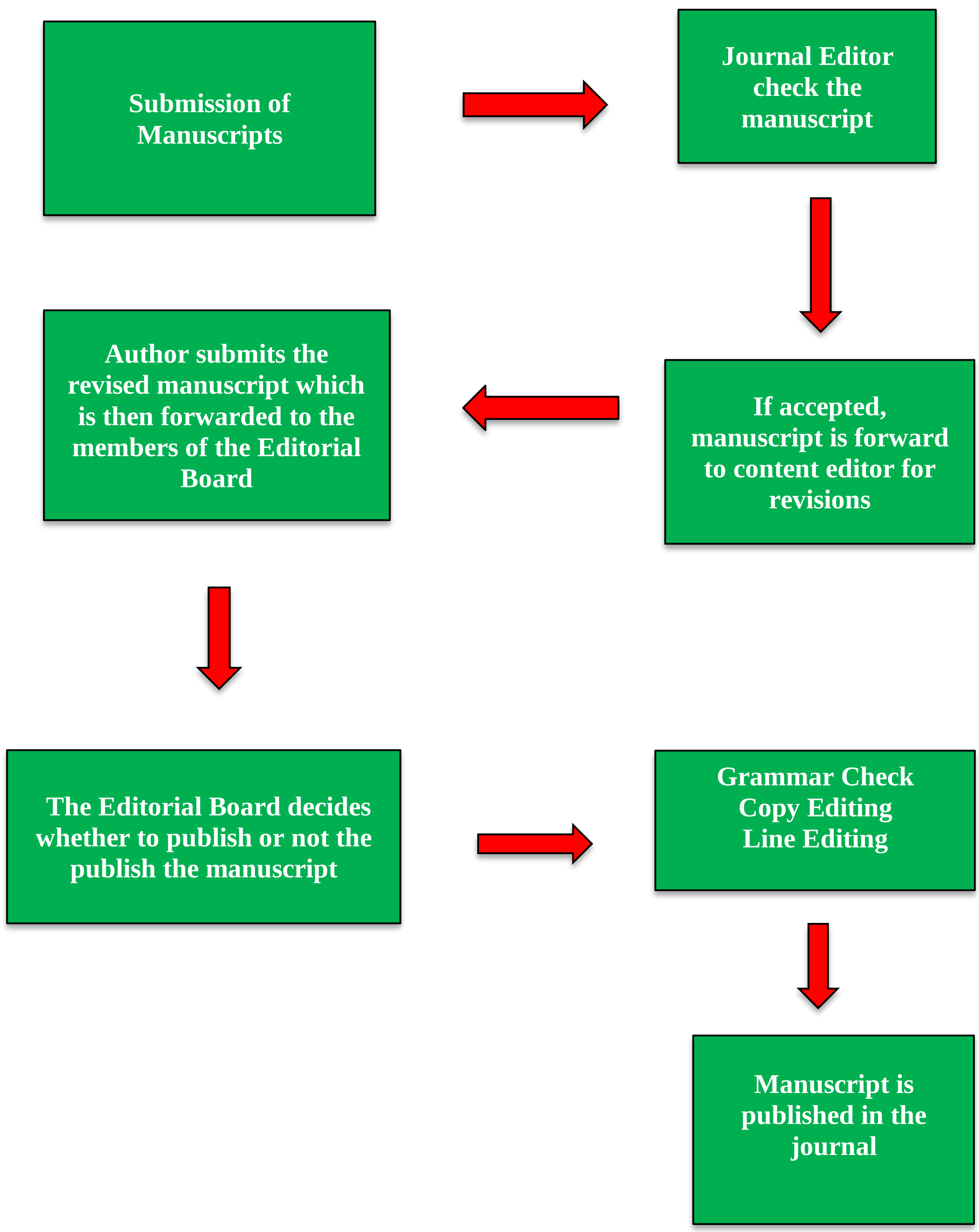
Editorial Board members are selected by the journal's editor(s), with input from the publisher. Editorial boards generally undergo a complete revision every two or three years, with members joining, stepping down or continuing for another term. Changes also occur in the interim, for example if a member resigns.

A journal's editorial board can affect its quality, so editors should consider the following:

➢ The location of board members should represent the reach of the journal.
➢ Board members' expertise should represent the journal's scope.
➢ Representatives should be appointed from key research institutes.
➢ Former guest editors of special issues, authors of key reviews, and top reviewers may be suitable.
➢ Existing board members may have suggestions for new members.

Editorial Board Members

Journal Publication Process



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MEASURING THE LEVEL OF DIGITAL PROFICIENCY AMONG GRADUATING MARKETING STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE VISAYAS TOLEDO CITY CAMPUS

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the digital proficiency of graduating marketing students at the University of the Visayas Toledo City Campus and explored the challenges and barriers they faced in acquiring digital skills, using a mixed-methods approach involving Qualitative-Thematic Analysis and Quantitative Descriptive Statistics. A total of 60 respondents, equally divided between male and female students, were selected through quota sampling. Data was gathered using structured observations and a researcher-made questionnaire checklist and analyzed using weighted mean, standard deviation, and variance analysis. Descriptive statistics indicated that students were proficient in using Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Neo LMS, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Mail, and Canva. However, Microsoft Outlook and Google Meet proficiency could have been more moderate. Thematic analysis identified three primary barriers to digital proficiency: technical issues, learning and familiarity challenges, and time management and distractions. Most respondents needed help understanding and familiarity with digital tools. The findings align with the Digital Competence (DigComp) framework, which outlines digital literacy, competence, and skills as essential components of digital proficiency. The study concludes that while graduating marketing students demonstrate proficiency in most digital tools, challenges in technical aspects, learning curves, and time management persist. These insights underscore the need for targeted training programs to enhance digital competencies, bridging the gap between current proficiency levels and the demands of the digital landscape.

Keywords: *Digital proficiency, marketing students, digital tools, digital literacy, digital competence*

I.INTRODUCTION

Digital proficiency was a crucial skill in the digitally advanced world of that time. As technology continued to advance and shape every aspect of society, it became essential for all individuals, especially graduating students, to have an advanced level of digital proficiency.

A digitally proficient person can generally conduct their work using online methods and technology with ease (Rogers & Hendricks, 2022).

With the growth in technology, it became increasingly important to establish digital proficiency. In the workplace, it infiltrated all aspects of the professional world, such as clocking in, getting trained, and presenting material in meetings. Many employers and schools transitioned to complete their work, at least in part, using online methods. In an organization, increasing digital skills specific to the workplace is imperative to help workers complete their tasks more efficiently and offer them a path to promotions. Even organizations that didn't specialize in technology-related fields used technology more as the market adapted to new concepts, such as online orders, online resources to connect to the company, and mobile apps (Kristen Rogers, 2022).

Digital proficiency in the classroom was necessary for students as it promoted academic growth and taught them how to use digital tools effectively. It focused on the skill to discover, evaluate, and deploy information utilizing digital tools like social media, web browsers, and online assemblies. Teachers could use digital proficiency strategies tailored to the materials their students learned in class, such as joining discussions in online communities and researching the validity of information (Digital, n.d., para 1).

A study by Deng and Yang (2021) confirmed that FGS underperformed in digital proficiency compared to their peers, and digital proficiency had a significant effect on individual psychological well-being, regardless of a student's generational status. Another study by Lucas et al. (2022) demystified the idea that ICT students were more digitally competent than those in other fields of study but suggested that males scored higher than females, which fed into the continuing discussion on gender inequalities concerning digital technologies and female preparedness for the digital job market, resulting in apparent effects for both research and practical applications.

The researchers chose this study to determine the digital proficiency and overall preparedness of graduating marketing students for their future careers. Their interest stemmed from a desire to understand whether these students possessed the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the digital tools used in school and the industry. Recognizing the increasing importance of digital tools in marketing, the researchers sought to assess how educational programs adequately equipped students with the requisite digital competencies.

The researchers aimed to provide insights into the current state of digital preparedness among marketing graduates and identify potential areas for improvement in educational practices.

The findings of this study offered valuable insights for both the university and the industry. The institutions could use the results to refine their marketing programs, ensuring they adequately address the digital needs of aspiring marketers. Similarly, employers in the marketing field could benefit from understanding the digital proficiency levels of graduating students, informing their hiring decisions and influencing the design of training programs for new recruits. Thus, the research contributed critically to enhancing the alignment between marketing education and the evolving demands of the digital landscape. The problem that prompted researchers to conduct the study was the increasing demand for digital skills in marketing. This demand is not confined to a single geographic region but is felt worldwide as businesses increasingly rely on digital platforms for marketing.

At a macro level, global trends indicated a shift towards digital marketing strategies, requiring professionals to possess proficient digital skills. Regionally and nationally, this trend was mirrored as industries adapted to changing consumer behaviors and technological advancements. However, to effectively address this demand, it was crucial to understand students' specific digital proficiency levels at the local level.

The learning outcome of the University of the Visayas Toledo City Campus, supported by the study on measuring the level of digital proficiency among graduating marketing students, was likely related to equipping students with relevant and up-to-date skills for the workforce. Specifically, this study could support the university's learning outcome of ensuring that marketing students possess the necessary digital proficiency to thrive in today's digitally driven business environment.As students, the motivation behind this study was based on our observations and experiences within the academic setting. We observed that many students still needed to be digitally proficient, which prompted the researchers to conduct this study. No previous research was conducted locally about the digital proficiency of graduating students, making this study unique.

This study aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which focuses on achieving fair and extensive access to high-quality education and encouraging lasting learning opportunities for everyone. The researchers' focus on assessing the digital proficiency and preparedness of graduating marketing students supported SDG 4.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

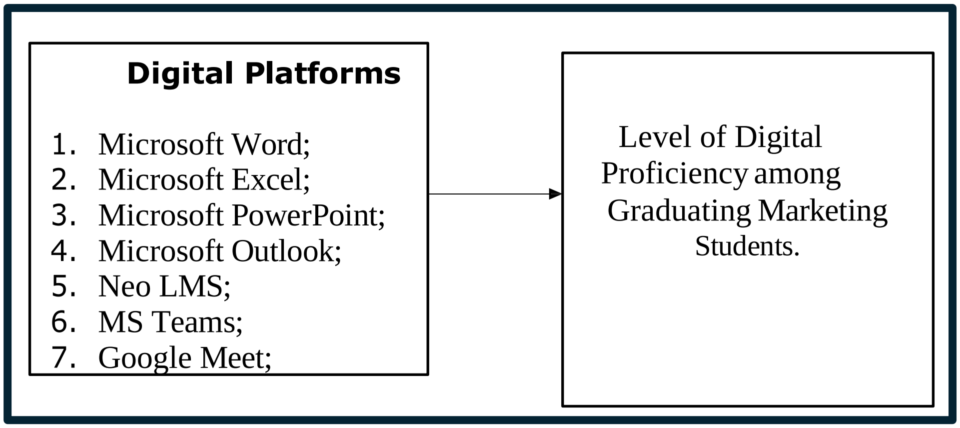

Figure 1.
Schema of the Research Framework

The European Digital Competence Framework (DigComp) by Bartolome et al. (2021, as cited in Barboutidis & Stiakakis, 2023) served as the theoretical foundation for that study. This framework was chosen because [explanation of its relevance to the study]. Furthermore, they emphasized that this feature was not only relevant to businesses but also to people's everyday lives. The study examined pupils' capacity to navigate and use digital platforms for successful information management (Stiakakis, 2023). The results showed that, while students were familiar with digital platforms, their ability to organize, analyze, and present material on digital platforms differed. This indicated a possible gap in developing higher-order digital abilities such as knowledge synthesis and presentation,which are critical for academic achievement and professional efficacy. The key features of the DigComp included digital literacy, digital competency, and digital skills.

Digital literacy refers to the ability to comprehend, evaluate, and gather information in different digital formats (Glister, 1997, as cited in Barboutidis & Stiakakis, 2023). Digital competence was used to describe a set of skills required in the digital environment and focused on describing various elements of literacy (Bawden, 2008, as cited by Barboutidis & Stiakakis, 2023). Digital skills referred to very specific skills that confirmed the competence (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016, as cited by Barboutidis & Stiakakis, 2023).

The study aimed to widen the scope of the research, as the scope of Stiakakis (2023) aimed to examine the factors that affected the different areas of digital competence levels among students at Vocational Training Institutes. Therefore, this study added the digital tools that were commonly used both educationally and institutionally, such as Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft PowerPoint, Microsoft Outlook, NEO LMS, MS Teams, Google Meet, Zoom, Google Mail, and Canva.

This framework was applicable in the researchers' current study, which attempted to measure the level of digital proficiency of marketing graduating students at the University of the Visayas - Toledo City Campus and investigate the specific difficulties they encountered when using various digital tools commonly used by students and the institution.

Figure I illustrate the comprehensive conceptual framework of our study, which encompasses the students' knowledge of a wide range of digital platforms such as Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft PowerPoint, Microsoft Outlook, NEO LMS, MS Teams, Google Meet, Zoom, Google Mail, and Canva. The statement of the problem is clearlyindicated in this study. Our study aims to measure the level of digital proficiency among graduating marketing students at the University of the Visayas Toledo City Campus, with the independent variable being "Measuring the Level of Digital Proficiency Among the Graduating Marketing Students of the University of the Visayas Toledo City Campus." The dependent variables encompass the students' proficiency in specific digital tools and technologies, including Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, NEO LMS, MS Teams, Google Meet, Zoom, Google Mail, and Canva. Additionally, our study thoroughly examines the challenges and barriers faced by students in acquiring digital proficiency, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Theoretical implications of our study included its contribution to the Digital Competence (DigComp) framework. Initially proposed by Bartolome et al. (2021, as cited in Barboutidis & Stiakakis, 2023), DigComp offered a structured approach for evaluating digital competency across different contexts. Our study enhanced this framework by focusing on graduating marketing students at the University of the Visayas Toledo City Campus. We specifically investigated their proficiency with digital tools commonly used in educational and institutional settings.

DigComp outlined key components such as digital literacy, digital competence, and digital skills. Digital literacy refers to understanding, evaluating, and gathering information in various digital formats (Glister, 1997, as cited in Barboutidis & Stiakakis, 2023). Digital competence encompasses the skills necessary to navigate the digital environment, including literacy components (Bawden, 2008, as cited by Barboutidis & Stiakakis, 2023). Digital skills were specific competencies that confirmed overall competence (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016, as cited by Barboutidis & Stiakakis, 2023).

Our study expanded on these concepts by assessing graduating marketing students' proficiency with specific digital tools like Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, NEO LMS, MS Teams, Google Meet, Zoom, Google Mail, and Canva. Through this examination, we aimed to provide insights into students' digital skill levels and identify any challenges they faced in acquiring digital proficiency. Furthermore, our study's findings have practical implications, contributing to the theoretical framework by providing a deeper understanding of the factors influencing students' digital skills. By identifying proficiency levels and exploring challenges, our research informs educational policies and practices focused on enhancing digital skills development among graduating marketing students. This practical application of our research adds to the existing body of knowledge in digital literacy and education, helping to shape future strategies for preparing students for the demands of the digital age.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aims to determine the readiness factors of the customers to accept self- service digital kiosks at fast food restaurant in Toledo City. Specifically, this study aimed to address the following: (1) Determined the current digital proficiency levels of graduating marketing students, including their familiarity with various digital tools and technologies such as MS Word, MS Excel, MS Powerpoint, MS Outlook, NEO LMS, MS Teams, Google Meet, Zoom, Google Mail and Canva. (2) Explore the challenges and barriers that graduating marketing students faced in acquiring digital proficiency.

II. METHODOLOGY

Design

This study used both Qualitative-Thematic Analysis and Quantitative Descriptive Statistics research design, with structured observation as the main instrument for gathering the required data. The researchers conducted a thematic analysis to apply a wide range of qualitative data relating to opinions, thoughts, feelings, and other descriptive information. Researchers explored the respondents' challenges and barriers that graduating marketing students faced in acquiring digital proficiency. The study assessed the digital competency of graduating marketing students at the University of the Visayas Toledo City Campus. The respondents were chosen based on the male population and a random sample of female students enrolled in the BSBA course. According to Koh and Owen (2000), the most common descriptive research method was the survey, which included questionnaires, personal interviews, phone surveys, and normative surveys. The primary objective of any survey was to gather information from a subset of participants that pertained to the research questions at hand. While this might appear straightforward, it often proved to be a challenging endeavor. Careful planning was essential in conducting survey research to ensure its successful implementation.

Research Setting

The study was conducted at the University of the Visayas Toledo City Campus, located explicitly at Magsaysay Hills, Poblacion, in the municipality of Toledo City. It consisted of 150 BSBA students enrolled in the S.Y. 2023-2024.

Research Instrument

The researcher used a researcher-made questionnaire checklist, which served as a rubric for data gathering at the University of the Visayas Toledo Campus. Part one was the table of every variable applied in the study, such as Microsoft Word (Computer Skills: Levels of Proficiency, 2011); Microsoft Excel (Computer Skills: Levels of Proficiency, 2011); Microsoft PowerPoint (Computer Skills: Levels of Proficiency, 2011); Microsoft Outlook (Microsoft Office Skills Assessment | It is Your Yale, n.d.-b); Neo LMS (Guide: Getting Started Guide for Learners » CYPHER for Business, n.d.); Microsoft Teams (Peterson et al., 2024); Google Meet (educators 2022); Zoom (Release notes for macOS. Zoom. (n.d.); Google Mail (Patel, 2024); and Canva (How to use CANVA: A beginner's guide. (n.d.-a).

The questionnaire used a five- point Likert scale: One (1): The student had limited understanding and experience with digital tools and struggled with basic tasks. Two (2): The student had basic proficiency in digital tools and could complete simple tasks without assistance. Three (3): The student had a solid understanding of digital tools and could complete more complex tasks with some guidance. Four (4): The student was highly proficient in digital tools and could complete complex tasks independently. Five (5): The student had mastery-level proficiency in digital tools and could use its advanced features to solve complex problems and create professional-level documents. Part two covered the challenges and barriers that graduating marketing students faced in acquiring digital proficiency, such as access to resources, training opportunities, or individual factors.

The research instrument underwent a thorough examination of both validity and reliability. Its validity was assessed and scored 3.7, marked as accepted, indicating its ability to measure the intended constructs accurately. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha for digital tools evaluated the instrument's reliability. Each dimension resulted in above 0.70 Cronbach, demonstrating the consistency in measuring these constructs across multiple items or dimensions in the proficiency of using digital tools of graduating marketing students

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers went through numerous stages to collect the data needed for analysis and interpretation. This study used a method of collection through structured observation.

Firstly, the researchers created the research equipment. One of the advisers' experts checked the tool. The researchers underwent the design hearing process and ethics review with the research adviser and the panel committees. Afterward, the researchers revised research chapters one, two, and three and the research instrument or questionnaire to be used. The research adviser and three professional validators checked the questionnaire, and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) finally reviewed and approved it design hearing process and ethics review with the research adviser and the panel committees.

Afterward, the researchers revised research chapters one, two, and three and the research instrument or questionnaire to be used. The research adviser and three professional validators checked the questionnaire, and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) finally reviewed and approved it.

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During the dissemination of instruments, the researchers assisted students in filling out the assessment form relevant to the level of digital proficiency among graduating marketing students and the challenges and barriers that graduating marketing students faced in acquiring digital proficiency. The researchers eventually gathered and encoded the assessment results supplied to the respondents. Data retrieval involved [specific data retrieval process], turning information into numerical values used to generate responses. This assisted in analyzing the collected data and summarizing the major conclusions. Lastly, the researchers ensured that all data gathered were protected, secured, and kept confidential after the tabulation and analysis of the data.

Data Analysis

After collecting it, the researchers recognized and analyzed the data and arranged it according to the identified areas where the students were specifically highly proficient and not proficient in digital skills. The level of digital proficiency was treated with weighted mean, standard deviation, and variance analysis for statistical analysis. Rating scales were analyzed using the Likert scale of Duong, T. M., & Nguyen, H. T. T. (2021). Implementing Task-Based Language Teaching in Vietnamese Secondary Schools: What Hinders EFL Teachers? TESL-EJ, 25(2), n2.

Table 1. ***Descriptive Ratings for Data Interpretation***

RANGE	DESCRIPTORS	DESCRIPTION
4.21-5.00	Highly Proficient	Signifies an exceptional level of proficiency where the individual demonstrates mastery and expertise in the measured area.
3.41-4.20	Proficient	Signifies an exceptional level of proficiency where the individual demonstrates mastery and expertise in the measured area.
2.61-3.40	Moderately Proficient	This range indicates a moderate level of proficiency where the individual is competent but may still require some guidance or support.
1.81-2.60	Somewhat Proficient	This range suggest some level of proficiency but with room for improvement.
1.00-1.80	Not Proficient	This range indicate a lack of proficiency or skill in the measured area.

The researchers also analyzed the challenges and barriers that graduating marketing students faced in acquiring digital proficiency through thematic analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting the study, it was submitted to the university institutional review board of the research ethics committee for technical and ethical review. Moreover, it was approved and given the notice to proceed certificate with a reference number of **2024-052.**

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter showed the analysis, findings, and interpretation of data. Appropriate tables were used for all findings for a more straightforward presentation, and the data gathered from the survey conducted were presented and analyzed based on the specific questions.

Descriptive Statistics of Digital Proficiency Levels of Graduating Marketing Students

Table 2. ***Self-assessment in using all Digital Tools***

STATEMENT	MEAN	STANDARD DEV.	INTERPRETATION
1. Proficiency Level in using Microsoft Word	3.63	0.06	Proficient
2. Proficiency Level in using Microsoft Excel	3.41	0.06	Proficient
3. Proficiency Level in using Microsoft PowerPoint	3.76	0.05	Proficient
4. Proficiency Level in using Microsoft Outlook	3.17	0.09	Moderately Proficient
5. Proficiency Level in using Neo LMS	4.12	0.03	Proficient
6. Proficiency Level in using Microsoft Teams	4.06	0.07	Proficient
7. Proficiency Level in using Google Meet	3.4	0.05	Moderately Proficient
8. Proficiency Level in using Zoom	3.72	0.08	Proficient
9. Proficiency Level in using Google Mail	3.9	0.09	Proficient
10. Proficiency Level in using Canva	3.58	0.07	Proficient
Total Weighted Mean & Standard Deviation	**3.68**	**0.019**	**Proficient**

Table 2 presents the students' proficiency levels across different digital tools. Most of the levels in using digital tools were proficient based on the self-assessment among graduating marketing students. The use of Microsoft Word had a mean of 3.63 with a standard deviation of 0.06, indicating an exceptional proficiency level where graduating marketing students demonstrated mastery and expertise as well as the other digital tools marked as proficient, including the use of Microsoft Excel with a mean of 3.41 with a standard deviation of 0.06; in using the Microsoft PowerPoint, with a mean of 3.76 and its standard deviation of 0.05; in using the Neo LMS, with a mean of 4.12 and its standard deviation of 0.03; and in using Microsoft Teams, with a mean of 4.06 and its standard deviation of 0.07. Additionally, using Zoom was also marked as proficient with a mean of 3.72 and a standard deviation of 0.08, as well as using Google Mail with a mean of 3.9 and a standard deviation of 0.09, and using Canva with a mean of 3.58 and its standard deviation of 0.07. This indicated an exceptional level of proficiency where the graduating marketing students demonstrated mastery and expertise in the measured area of their self-assessment.

However, based on the table presented, two digital tools are marked as moderately proficient. These tools included Microsoft Outlook, which had a mean of 3.17 with a standard deviation of 0.09, and Google Meet, which had a mean of 3.4 with a standard deviation of 0.05, indicated that graduating marketing students were competent but might still require some guidance or support according to their self-assessment.

According to the study of Morgan, Sibson, and Jackson (2022), which aimed to establish a comprehensive conceptual framework of digital literacy and assess proficiency levels among higher education students, the findings indicated varying levels of proficiency across different aspects of digital literacy. As mentioned, students reported the lowest proficiency in evaluating digital information for bias and quality, while demonstrating higher competency in social literacy skills such as appropriate online communication. These results underscore the importance of enhancing digital literacy adaptability and integrating industry relevant experiences into higher education programs to better prepare students for the demand of the modern workforce. Our study on the proficiency levels of graduating marketing students with different digital tools, as assessed by the students themselves, aligns closely with these findings, further emphasizing the need for a more comprehensive digital literacy education in higher education.

Our findings on the proficiency levels of graduating marketing students with different digital tools, as assessed by the students themselves, closely align with the results of the study by Morgan, Sibson, and Jackson (2022). Our study showed proficiency in the majority of these digital tools, indicating mastery in these areas, while two digital tools were marked as moderately proficient, suggesting areas for improvement.

This underscores the importance of integrating industry-relevant experiences and enhancing digital literacy adaptability in higher education to better prepare students for the modern workforce. These findings have significant implications for the future career prospects of these students, as they highlight the need for a more comprehensive digital literacy education in higher education.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS THAT GRADUATING MARKETING STUDENTS FACE IN ACQUIRING DIGITAL PROFICIENCY.

Table 3. ***Summary of Themes***

Table 3 showed the summary of themes of challenges and barriers that graduating marketing students faced in acquiring digital tools. For Theme 1, which was Technical Issues, this generally indicated technical glitches, compatibility issues, slow internet, and software issues. Ten respondents usually responded with statements like:

Themes	Core Themes
Theme 1	**Technical Issues** ➢ Technical Glitches ➢ Compatibility Issues ➢ Slow Internet ➢ Software Issues
Theme 2	**Learning and Familiarity** ➢ Initial Struggles ➢ Learning Curve ➢ Unfamiliar Interfaces ➢ Need For Training
Theme 3	**Time Management and Distractions** ➢ Time Management Issues Distractions while using Technology

"Yes, some common challenges include technical glitches, compatibility issues, and distraction."

"Yes, tech glitches can be frustrating; sometimes slow internet or software issues can be tough."

"Yes, especially when there is no stable internet."
"Yes, due to low signal."
"Yes, I have faced challenges with software compatibility and learning how to use new tools efficiently."

"Yes, slow internet connection, unable to find what I want to do."

"Yes, I have faced challenges when using digital tools for studies. One common is troubleshooting technical issues arise while using software online platforms. However, with practice and persistence, I have been able to overcome these obstacles and continue to my digital skills."

"Yes, I've been encountered challenges such as technical glitches with software."
"Yes, Internet Interruptions"

"Yes, slow internet connection"

For Theme 2, which was Learning and Familiarity, this generally indicated initial struggles, learning curve, unfamiliar interfaces, and need for training. Forty-five respondents usually responded with statements like:

"Yes, when I just started learning the tools I struggled to use it."
"Yes, because some of it is not familiar to me but I want to learn it."
"Yes, especially in navigating Microsoft Excel and some unfamiliar digital tools."
"Yes, there is challenges using the digital tools but I'm willing to learn everything"
"Yes, for I know that I am not still an expert yet and don't have such experiencing using the technology."

"Yes, a lot especially that I am not that well in using digital tools"
"Yes, because some digital tools are very complex."
"Yes, when it comes entering the room."
"Yes, some are difficult to navigate"
"When I use a certain app or a digital tool that are new to me it will be challenging to me"

"Yes, because sometimes I forget where I find certain tools in the application I used."

"Yes, it's because I'm not totally literate in using all of those digital tools have been mentioned."

"Yes, some tools are not familiar to me like Canva"

"Yes, especially when using a computer since I'm lack of typing skills."
"Yes, the first time I used it."
"Yes, for example, in MS Excel I didn't know much about the formulas."

"Yes, since I'm not that digitally proficient, I have to asked for help to someone who are digitally proficient to use the specific tools."

"Yes, I do, during making PowerPoint, Excel, Microsoft Words while using phone."
"Yes, sometimes when making tables and formulas."
"Yes, having a hard time with MS Excel and Canva."

"Yes, using Excel."

"Yes, learning in Microsoft Excel."

"Yes, I have faced obstacles in learning how to use certain digital tools and technologies, I initially found it challenging to use marketing automatic software but to its complex featured and facilities."

"Yes, users may face challenges such as technical issues, learning curves, or unfamiliar interfaces when interacting with new technologies."

"At first yes, but as I explore the tools, I am learning it."

"Yes, a little bit."
"By editing and looking for some key areas how to perfectly show the presentation in using those technology"

"Yes, sometimes it is hard to understand."
"Yes, making reports consisting of tables."
"Yes, at first but, I've learning from all those lacking knowledge about digital marketing or proficiency."

"Yes, sometimes.

"In some ways, I have difficulty using the technology especially in editing"
"Yes, illiterate in using some applications."
"Yes, most of the time."

"Yes, like when it's my first-time using technology."
"Yes, not having a proper training and supervision."
"When I'm using a laptop, I'm not comfortable using the keyboard because it's small"

"When I'm using a laptop, I'm not comfortable using the cursor pad in laptop I'm comfortable using mouse."

"I have difficulties in learning how to use technology. Because I didn't have much exposure to it and found it challenging to understand at first."

"Yes, learning in Microsoft Excel."

"Yes, I have faced obstacles and difficulties in learning how to use technology are major challenge I encountered languages and programming concepts."

"Yes, especially when the stuff is new for me and I'm aware on using it"

"Yes, the first time I used it."

"Yes, when I just started learning the tools I struggled to use it."
"Yes, it's hard specially when we haven't explored the tools."
For Theme 3, which was Time Management and Distractions, this generally indicated time management issues and distractions while using technology. Two respondents responded:

"Yes, I have faced several challenges when using digital tools or technologies for my studies, one of the biggest challenges is managing my time effectively."

"Yes, some common challenges include technical glitches, compatibility issues, and distraction."

In conclusion, the challenges and barriers faced by graduating marketing students in obtaining digital proficiency showed several key themes. Graduating marketing students generally reported experiencing technical issues, such as glitches, compatibility issues, and slow internet connectivity.

On the other hand, learning and familiarity with digital tools arose as another distinguished theme, with many students expressing initial struggles and the need for training. Additionally, time management issues and distractions while using technology were identified as challenges by some students. These findings emphasized the comprehensive nature of the challenges students encountered in improving digital proficiency and highlighted the importance of addressing these barriers through targeted

marketing programs and educational institutions to enhance digital proficiency among graduating students.

In 2019, Samuel Temitayo Faloye conducted a study to understand the challenges faced by first-year students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) regarding the digital divide. His findings indicated that students with little or no prior exposure to technology encountered several difficulties, including using application programs (such as MS Word and spreadsheets), downloading informative materials, conducting online tasks, and navigating the Internet. Additionally, Faloye discovered that factors like the timing of access to technology (whether before or after joining the university), technology skills, and computer anxiety significantly affected students' computer self-efficacy.

These findings mirror the results of a 2019 study by Samuel Temitayo Faloye at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which identified similar difficulties among first-year students with limited prior exposure to technology. Both studies underscored the need for structured training programs, adequate resources, and continuous support to help students overcome these barriers and enhance their digital proficiency. Addressing these challenges through targeted educational initiatives is crucial for equipping students with digital skills for their future careers.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the insights gathered from this research underscored the proficiency levels of graduating marketing students. The study concluded that the graduating marketing students at the University of the Visayas Toledo City Campus were generally proficient in using selected digital tools and technologies. Graduating marketing students demonstrated a commendable level of proficiency in various digital tools, particularly in Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft PowerPoint, Neo LMS, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Mail, and Canva. In contrast, only two digital tools, Microsoft Outlook and Google Meet, were moderately proficient. On the other hand, the majority of graduating marketing students faced challenges and barriers primarily related to learning and familiarity with digital tools, such as understanding complex features and adapting to frequent updates. A smaller number of respondents faced technical issues, time management, and distractions. These findings underscored the importance of a multifaceted approach, including improved technical support, resource provision, and comprehensive training programs, to equip students with the advanced digital skills necessary for their future careers. This indicated that the students were capable and competent in performing necessary functions with these tools independently and with minimal guidance.

To further enhance this proficiency, the researchers proposed the development of a targeted program to improve students' digital skills. The research highlights the proficiency levels of graduating marketing students at the University of the Visayas Toledo City Campus using various digital tools and technologies.

These students are generally proficient in multiple digital tools or platforms. However, it also pointed out the need for focused efforts to improve their skills in advanced features, addressing technical issues, resource limitations, and learning challenges, which is essential to help students reach higher levels of digital proficiency. The findings emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach, including better technical support, resource provision, and extensive training programs, to prepare graduate marketing students with the advanced digital skills needed for their careers. The study is grounded in the European Digital Competence Framework (DigComp) by Bartolome et al. (2021, as cited in Barboutidis & Stiakakis, 2023), which offers a consistent method for evaluating digital competence globally and highlights the importance of digital skills in both business and daily life. The results revealed that although graduating marketing students are familiar with digital platforms, their ability to organize, analyze, and present material varies, suggesting a need to develop higher-order digital skills like knowledge synthesis and presentation. The DigComp framework outlines digital literacy, digital competence, and digital skills: digital literacy involves understanding, evaluating, and gathering information in digital formats; digital competence encompasses the skills needed in a digital environment; and digital skills refer to specific abilities that demonstrate competence. These distinctions highlight different levels of digital proficiency and areas where graduating marketing students can enhance their skills to meet academic and professional expectations.

Limitation

One limitation of this study was its geographic focus on the University of the Visayas Toledo City Campus. This localized sample might only partially represent marketing students' proficiency levels and challenges in other cities or institutions. Additionally, the study's reliance on self-reported data could introduce bias, as students might have overestimated or underestimated their proficiency levels.

The findings of this study had significant practical implications for marketing programs and educational institutions. By understanding students' current proficiency levels and challenges, schools and universities could tailor their academic programs and support services to better prepare students for digital workplace demands. Implementing tailored training programs, increasing access to resources, and integrating digital literacy modules could directly enhance the employability of graduates.

Future Implications

Future researchers could expand the scope of the study to include multiple schools or universities across different cities to provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital proficiency among marketing students. Moreover, future researchers could have included hands-on assessments to measure digital proficiency more accurately. Additionally, they could have suggested that the scope and limitations of the study be expanded.

Future studies could have included all year levels in the marketing management program, not just graduating students. Furthermore, future research could have added other competencies measuring digital proficiency, such as typing skills, problem-solving abilities in digital environments, and advanced software features.

Future researchers could employ more advanced or sophisticated methodologies based on the evidence-based practice hierarchy. This could include experimental designs, longitudinal studies, or mixed method approaches to yield more robust and generalizable findings. Researchers could investigate areas uncovered by the present study, including factors such as socioeconomic status, prior exposure to technology, and learning styles that could significantly influence students' digital proficiency.

Future studies could improve upon the current methodology by addressing its weaknesses. This involved refining survey instruments, increasing sample sizes, and incorporating qualitative methods to gather deeper insights into students' experiences.

Future researchers could also study third-year students to capture valuable insights into the progression of digital proficiency throughout the academic program and help identify critical intervention points.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future researchers could expand the scope of the study to include multiple schools or universities across different cities to provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital proficiency among marketing students. Moreover, future researchers could have included hands-on assessments to measure digital proficiency more accurately. Additionally, they could have suggested that the scope and limitations of the study be expanded. Future studies could have included all year levels in the marketing management program, not just graduating students. Furthermore, future research could have added other competencies measuring digital proficiency, such as typing skills, problem-solving abilities in digital environments, and advanced software features.

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Future researchers could also study third-year students to capture valuable insights into the progression of digital proficiency throughout the academic program and help identify critical intervention points.

Researchers could also study other factors significantly contributing to students' proficiency, including teaching-learning activities on the part of the college and faculty, as these could play a crucial role in enhancing digital skills, such as the integration of Digital tools in the Curriculum where students regularly use of digital tools and platforms in coursework can help students become more comfortable and proficient in their use.

Mentorship programs pairing students with mentors with advanced digital skills can provide personalized guidance and support, helping students improve their proficiency through one-on-one interactions.

By addressing these research findings and providing the necessary support, graduating marketing students developed resilient digital skills and competencies that enhanced their academic performance and significantly benefited their future careers. These recommendations ensured that graduating marketing students were well-prepared to meet the demands of the modern workplace, making them more effective and competitive professionals.

Our respondents often reported encountering technical issues, problems with learning and familiarity, difficulties with time management, and distractions in acquiring digital tools. Therefore, researchers provided the following recommendations based on the findings:

Technical Glitches: Regular system maintenance and updates reduce technical glitches, creating a smoother learning environment. This reliability helped graduating marketing students build confidence in their technical skills, making them more attractive to employers who valued proficiency and troubleshooting abilities.

Compatibility Issues: Ensuring software and devices worked well together taught graduating marketing students to adapt to various technological setups. This adaptability is a crucial skill in today's diverse and multi-platform workplaces.

Slow Internet: By providing offline access to materials, graduating marketing students stayed productive even with slow internet. This mirrored real-world scenarios and helped them become more adaptable and resourceful professionals.

Software Issues: Regularly updating and troubleshooting software and offering technical support helped graduating marketing students develop problem-solving skills. These skills were directly beneficial in professional settings where maintaining productivity was vital. **Initial Struggles:** Providing introductory workshops and step-by-step guides helped graduating marketing students overcome initial challenges that will build a strong foundation for their future careers.

Learning Curve: Offering continuous support and refresher courses helped graduating marketing students improve their proficiency, making them more confident with various tools, a highly desirable trait in the workforce.

Unfamiliar Interfaces: Designing user-friendly interfaces and providing comprehensive tutorials made students more comfortable and efficient with new tools to enhance their versatility as employees.

Need for Training: Implementing mandatory digital literacy training and specific software application sessions will significantly boost study.

Time Management Issues: Providing training on time management skills and creating structured schedules helped students balance their academic responsibilities. This was a critical skill for handling multiple tasks and deadlines in their careers.

Distractions while using Technology: Encouraging productivity tools and apps that block distractions helped graduating marketing students stay focused. Developing intense concentration and minimizing distractions were valuable skills that enhanced productivity in any professional environment.

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THE DILEMMA OF USING FACEBOOK TO INCREASE AWARENESS OF ACO MULTICAB TRADING BUSINESS AT POBLACION, TOLEDO CITY

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the dilemma of using Facebook as a medium to increase awareness in ACO Multicab Trading Business. The study serves as a roadmap for leveraging Facebook effectively, offering actionable recommendations to navigate and thrive in the evolving digital marketplace. The research method is qualitative research. Case study research design perfectly fits this study, for it best describes, compares, evaluates, and understands different aspects of our research problem. The respondents of this research are the owners of ACO Multicab Trading, the Managers, and their agents. This study used thematic analysis to find out the data in using social media as a marketplace; a questionnaire consists of an open-ended question that gives respondents the freedom to answer in their own words through recording in written form. The findings include that using Facebook to increase awareness has a positive and negative impact on brand awareness. The findings revealed four themes: Challenges Encountered, Dealing with the Difficulties, Disadvantages, Advantages, and Impacts of using Facebook. Relying solely on Facebook for promotion is risky due to its dynamic nature and potential for reputation damage. However, Facebook provides easy customer access, responsiveness, and valuable feedback. Building trust through customer reviews can enhance online presence and sales, requiring a proactive approach and commitment to product quality. The study provides insights for similar businesses, social media professionals, and digital marketing agencies to improve their strategies. It suggests ways for other multi cab businesses to learn from successes and challenges, helps social media professionals with better campaign tactics, assists digital marketing agencies in optimizing services, and guides future research on handling customer feedback and long-term business impact.

Keywords: *Dilemma of using Facebook, Multicab Trading, Awareness, social media, Challenges.*

I.INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms have become a popular and cost-effective way for businesses to promote their products and services, engage with customers, and increase their reach. However, using social media as a marketplace for companies has its challenges and dilemmas. This research investigates the dilemma of using Facebook to increase awareness of the ACO Multicab Trading business in Poblacion, Toledo City.

ACO Multicab Trading is a small business that sells Multicab, a popular mode of transportation in the Philippines. Their business goal is to generate more revenue and boost brand engagement. Its primary target market is business owners such as piggery owners, hardware owners, and family businesses because they can use it as an asset of their business. Additionally, even if they are not a business owner, they can afford the products offered at ACO Multicab Trading since they offer installments like financing installments, in-house installments, and trade-ins of units.The business has been using social media platforms like Facebook to advertise its products and engage with potential customers. However, the industry has faced challenges in using Facebook to increase awareness. The goal is to increase recognition and reach new people likely to be interested in their business. They created their Facebook page in 2022. Their Facebook page has 469 likes, 607 followers, and one review. As of now, their page still needs to be rated.

ACO Multicab Trading creates awareness through Facebook. Social media helps capture potential customers and is the medium through which they know they exist. ACO Multicab Trading sends prospects more information about their products and units throughFacebook. When the customer wants to purchase the products, ACO Multicab Trading is responsible for delivering the products to reduce the risks and efforts of the customers. The company offered discounts to repeat customers to encourage larger purchases. Loyalty discounts give incentives on price/extra benefits or discounted rates for customers loyal to ACO Multicab Trading Business. Repeat customers will express their support for the business through Facebook posts and reviews by mentioning the business's name.

The dilemma of using Facebook to increase awareness for ACO Multicab Trading business in Poblacion Toledo City raises essential questions about the effectiveness and sustainability of the Facebook page as a marketing tool for small businesses. This research will explore these questions by analyzing the challenges faced by ACO Multicab Trading business, examining the impact of Facebook on their business operations, and identifying strategies for addressing the challenges and dilemmas of using the Facebook page as a medium to increase awareness.

Social media networks have become essential to customer relationships (Tedeschi, 2006). Based on the current state of business affairs, it is evident that firms and individuals seek significant professional benefits from social media.Social networking sites (SNS) (Gillian et al., 2017) offer brands the ability to spread positive electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) to build awareness and acquire new customers.

However, the credibility of eWOM has been threatened lately as marketers increasingly try to manipulate eWOM practices on SNS. A greater understanding of eWOM credibility is necessary for marketers to leverage authentic consumer engagement better by generating credible peer-to-peer communications. However, there has yet to be aframework synthesizing which factors constitute eWOM credibility in the online environment.

In recent years, social media has become a popular platform for businesses to market their products and services and to make people aware that they exist. However, the effectiveness of using social media as a business marketplace is often a subject of debate. On one hand, social media platforms offer a low-cost option to reach out to a large audience (Holly Paquette, 2013).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are also known as the global Goals. The SDGs are a new, universal set of goals, targets, and indicators that UN Member States will be expected to use to frame country agendas and policies over the next 15 years. Among the 17 SDGs, this study was aligned with NO.8, Decent Work and Economic Growth, because it aims to attain complete and productive employment and respectable work. Decent work includes equal opportunities for all people, just like in ACO Multicab Trading, without gender, social, and opportunity discrimination. Decent Work and Economic Growth are interconnected concepts that strongly influence each other. When Decent Work is prioritized, it contributes to sustainable economic growth through several channels. According to the International Labour Organization (2015), decent work encompasses opportunities for productive work that pays a fair wage, workplace security and social protection for families; improved prospects for personal development and social integration; freedom for people to express their concerns and organize and participate in decisions that affect their lives. It has a remarkable similarity with ACO Multicab Trading; they organized a monthly meeting to find out about the employees' concerns and make solutions to their specific problems to have personal improvement in the workplace.

A Theoretical Stance

The researcher decided to avoid referring to any theoretical framework, in the whole phase of this study. This research aims to answer the difficulties they encountered while using online selling as their tools to seek a lot of clients of ACO multicab trading. This also helps the generation of products to become more efficient and faster.

Philosophical Stance

A philosophical stance to consider regarding the dilemma of using Facebook to increase awareness for ACO multicab trading business in Toledo City is the ethical implications of using social media platforms for commerce. Social media platforms are designed primarily for social interactions, and their use for commercial purposes raises ethical concerns about privacy, fairness, and authenticity. For instance, using social media for commerce may expose individuals to privacy risks, as personal information may be collected and used for marketing purposes without their consent.

Additionally, using social media like Facebook for ACO multicab trading business may raise questions about fairness, as small businesses may have different resources than larger companies to market their products on social media platforms effectively, which may lead to an uneven playing field where larger enterprises have a competitive advantage over smaller ones.

Moreover, using social media for commerce may also raise concerns around authenticity, as it can be challenging to verify the legitimacy of businesses and products advertised on these platforms, which may lead to fraudulent activities, such as the sale of counterfeit or stolen goods, which can harm consumers and legitimate businesses.

From a philosophical perspective, the dilemma of using Facebook to increase awareness for the ACO multi-cab trading business in Toledo City raises critical ethical questions about the use of technology for commercial purposes. It highlights the need to balance the potential benefits of using social media as a medium for awareness with the ethical concerns that arise from its use. That requires careful consideration of the impact of social media commerce on individuals, businesses, and society, as well as the development of ethical guidelines to ensure that commerce on social media platforms is fair, transparent, and respectful of individual rights and privacy.

DOMAINS OF INQUIRY

This qualitative research aims to examine the dilemma of using Facebook to increase awareness of ACO Multicab Trading business.
Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges encountered by the ACO multicab trading in using social media platforms like Facebook as a medium for awareness?

2. How did the company deal with the difficulties of using Facebook as a medium for awareness?

3. What are the positive and negative impacts in using Facebook as their medium of awareness?

4. Based on the findings, what proposal can be forwarded?

I. METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the thorough research methodology used, covering important topics like the study's design, respondent selection, sample methods, research setting instrumentation, data analysis strategies, data collection processes, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

The researcher used a case study research design to determine the dilemma of using Facebook as their tool to increase awareness of ACO Multicab Trading. Case study research design perfectly fits our study, for it best describes, compares, evaluates, and understands different aspects of our research problem. Thus, the case study, the Dilemma of Using Facebook as their Tool to Increase Awareness of ACO Multicab Trading Business at Poblacion, Toledo City, explores the opportunities and challenges regarding its use of social media like Facebook as a medium to increase awareness. As the business seeks to leverage the power of social media platforms to improve its customer awareness and boost sales, it encounters various dilemmas that demand careful consideration.

Research Setting

The researcher used a case study research design to determine the dilemma of using Facebook to increase awareness of ACO Multicab Trading. Case study research design perfectly fits our study because it is best for describing, comparing, evaluating, and understanding different aspects of our research problem. Thus, the case study, the Dilemma of Using Facebook as their Tool to Increase Awareness of ACO Multicab Trading Business at Poblacion, Toledo City, explores the opportunities and challenges regarding its use of social media like Facebook as a medium to increase awareness. As the business seeks to leverage the power of social media platforms to improve its customer awareness and boost sales, it encounters various dilemmas that demand careful consideration.

Respondents of the Study and Sample

The respondents of this research are the Owners of ACO Multicab Trading and their Agents. The owner is currently in charge of the company's Facebook page.

The inclusion criteria of this study are the following: the research respondents (a) have experienced difficulties using Facebook to increase awareness, (b) the respondents are male

(Owner, agents and employees) that are above 30 and 60 years old, (c) requires participants to be willing to participate, (d) the respondents must be present during the preliminary survey and actual survey, (e) Respondents should know what they are doing and why they are in the study.

The exclusion criteria in this study are as follows: the researcher respondent (a) who does not experience difficulties of using social media may be excluded from this survey,

(b) not willing to participate should disqualify from participating in the study, (c) are not present during the conduct of the researcher's preliminary survey and actual survey, (d) and those who don't use Facebook as their tool to build business awareness.

Research Instrument

The researchers used a simple open-ended questionnaire that gave respondents the freedom to answer the following questions in their Data Gathering Procedure's own words and asked them to provide answers in their own words designed to elicit more information about the difficulties of using social media as their Marketplace.

The researchers prepared transmittal letters to ask permission from the Dean to conduct the study outside the school campus. When permitted, the researchers explained the objectives to the respondents and asked them to participate in the survey to fulfill the goals.

Once consented, the researchers gave instructions on how to answer the questionnaire. After answering the questionnaire, respondents returned them to the researcher for tally analysis of data. Purposive sampling was used to identify the study respondents.

A semi-structured interview is a qualitative method of inquiry that combines a predetermined set of open-ended questions. Researchers using semi-structured interviews take a written guide in particular advance.

Data Gathering

Before beginning the study, the researcher submitted a concept paper for approval to the College of Business Administration. The researcher invited the members of the thesis panel for a design hearing after getting approval. The researcher took the panelists' advice to heart. Following completion, the researcher sent the study for ethical review to the University of the Visayas Research Ethics Committee. Following the Ethics Committee's examination, the researcher was granted a Notice to Proceed Certificate, allowing them to start collecting data right away. The data collection method was conducted online and by referrals to obtain the greatest number of respondents. Following collection, the data was compiled, statistical analysis was performed, assessed, and shown in a table.

Data Analysis

This study uses thematic analysis to find data using social media as their marketplace to address the research or say something about an issue. By using this analysis, it enables

the researchers to generate new insights and concepts derived from data.To conduct this research, we used the Colaizzi method to ensure our data would be reliable and unbiased.

Further, the researchers used this analysis method since our study is for qualitative research. In line with that, we can collect the data from the company through interviews with the owners or customers and agents of the ACO Multicab trading company to gather qualitative data. To ensure our sample is diverse and reflects a range of viewpoints and life experiences

Ethical Consideration

Before conducting the study, it was submitted to the university institutional review board of the research ethics committee for technical and ethical review. Moreover, it was approved and given the notice to proceed certificate with a reference number of **2024-098**.

III.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the study's results on the dilemma of using Facebook to increase awareness of ACO Multicab Trading Business at Poblacion, Toledo City.

Table 1: Summary of Themes & Subthemes

Theme	Core Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1	Challenges Encountered	Fake Accounts and Spam
		Targeting Limitations
		Inability to Pitch for Sales
Theme 2	Dealing with the Difficulties	Sustain Engaging Posts
		Overview of Product Specification
		Customer Satisfaction
		Staying Motivated
		Team Coordination
Theme 3	Disadvantages	Addressing Digital Frauds
		Slow internet connection
		Actual Physical Check
		Advertisement Cost
		Exploiting Insecurities
		High Competition Density
		Algorithm Changes
Theme 4	Advantages	Boost Sales
		Engagement Opportunities

		Brand Visibility
		Positive
Theme 5	Impacts on using Facebook	Increase Product Exposure
		Customer Preferences
		Wide Audience Access
		Negative
		High Competition for Attention
		Negative Feedback
		Managing Unreliable Individuals

Theme1. Challenges Encountered

According to Ionnis Antoniadis, Symeon Paltsoglou & Vasilis Patoulisdis (2019), "Challenges in using Facebook for brand awareness include understanding post characteristics that drive engagement, managing negative reactions, and optimizing content for increased popularity and consumer interaction." However, utilizing this social media platform as a lever for awareness is challenging.

Subtheme 1: Fake Accounts and Spam. Fake accounts are established on social networking platforms or websites using fabricated information, frequently aimed at deceiving or misleading individuals. According to Aditi Gupta &Rishabh Kaushal (2017), fake accounts on Facebook can harm brand awareness by spreading spam. Detecting them through user activity analysis and machine learning can help protect brand reputation.

According to Informant 1: *"Basically, it's hacker. I had my previous Facebook which was used to post my flagships and advertised my company, but it was hacked, and uhm… I was not able to open it until now, that is why I've made new one. Also, uhm… it's the risk of knowing that many people known me, and my safety and my family is also in danger. Another, is uhm… when I joined their or other business group to boost my company, they blocked me and removed my post in their pages."*

Informant 2 also shared similar experience: *"Facebook users tend not to believe of what we post because they think it's a scam."*

Subtheme 2: Targeting Limitations. Targeting limitations are constraints that restrict advertisers' ability to specify the audience for their digital platform advertisements. According to Wimmala Pongpaew, Mark Speece, Leela Tiangsoongnern (2017), limitations in using Facebook for brand awareness targeting include the need for active engagement beyond viewing, as engagement is defined by actions like likes, comments, sharing, and purchases.

According to informant 6: *"Getting target customer to interact with my post such as*

uhm… (like, comment, share) can be challenging."

Informant 9 also shared that: *"In my experience, uhm… I tried posting units in Facebook but as I observed, hmmm… they don't take it seriously."*

In addition, informant 10 stated that: *"Others took it as a not serious post that's why our post might not always uhm… reach our intended audience."*

Subtheme 3: Inability to pitch for sales. Inability to handle inquiries pertains to a scenario where an organization struggles to effectively oversee and address customer questions, demands, or issues. This challenge may stem from insufficient resources, like customer service personnel or technology, or from inadequate training and procedures in place for handling customer queries promptly and satisfactorily. According to Bija Monica & Raluca Balaş (2014), to increase brand awareness on Facebook, it's crucial to promptly handle inquiries.

Neglecting this aspect can hinder the effectiveness of social media marketing strategies.

According to informant 4: *"Some challenges l encountered by using Facebook in posting for the available units are not being uhm… able to answers all the questions for me not also familiarize the price, facing and chatting some uhm… frustrated customer."*

Informant 7 and 8 also shared the same experience: *"Dealing with "HM" clients" they added that "seryoso kaayo mi ning tubag sa ilang mga pangutana about sa ACO ug sa product nga amoa ginabaligya specially the price pero at the end of the day dili man diay sila kuan… interested ba."*

[Translation: Dealing with the "HM" clients they added that we're very serious answering their inquiries about the business and the product that we are selling specially the price but at the end of the day, they are not uhm…interested to it.]

Subtheme 4: Ghost buyer. An undercover or anonymous individual engaged by a corporation to assess the standard of service, customer journey, or adherence to regulations and protocols. According to Nadia Meirani, Retno Komalasari (2022). "Challenges like fraud, uncertainty in goods, and prices are faced by buyers in online trading groups on Facebook, including the risk of ghost buyers in multicab trading.

Informant 3 mentioned that: *"The challenges I encountered are those ghoster customer that they pretend to purchase the product, and it also those uhm… customers having fun* *the in the Facebook marketplace clicking the "interested" message and asking uhm… some specs and prices."*

Informant 7 also shared: *"The challenges would be the Barat Clients, kabalo sila nga kuan… namaligya mi then ang uban customer kusog kaayo mo hangyo regarding sa price through online then at the end of the day kay nagduha-duha pa diay sila".*

*(*Translation: The challenges would be the Barat Clients, they already know that uhm…

we're selling, then other customers tend to ask for discounts regarding the price through online then at the end of the day, they are in doubt or undecided.]

Theme2. Dealing with the difficulties

Facebook offers immense potential for reaching and engaging diverse audiences. However, navigating its dynamic landscape comes with obstacles that demand careful consideration and proactive solutions. According to Endwell Onyinye Nyekwere, et. al. (2013). "Facebook enhances awareness in advertising by facilitating personal connections. Overcoming challenges through leveraging recommendations from trusted sources can boost awareness and consumer engagement on social media platforms."

Subtheme 1: Sustain engaging posts. Sustaining compelling posts necessitates developing and disseminating material that consistently intrigues and holds the attention of one's audience for an extended period. According to Quesberry, et. al. (2019).

"To sustain engagement on Facebook, focus on creating posts that increase shares, likes, and comments, as these factors influence organic viral reach."

According to informant 6: *"Keep on posting", the informant added "normal raman jhud ang kuan… nga naay challenges maagian so, maong sagaran sa akoang buhaton is kanang… padayon rako sa pag post about sa mga gina-offer sa ACO kay kuan… kabalo ko nga naa gyuy tawo ang interesado sa amoa ug para pud kanang… mas ma aware gani sila nga mao na amoa gina-offer."*

[Translation: Keep on posting, the informant added that it's just normal in a business that uhm… encounter challenges that's why what I mostly did is uhm… keep on posting about the product that company offers because uhm… I know that there's someone who's interested on us and for uhm… they must be more aware of the product that we are offering.]

Subtheme 2: Overview of product specification. An examination of product specifications offers a concise account of the fundamental particulars and characteristics of a product. Normally, it encompasses details like the product's size, weight, utilized materials, available color choices, and any distinctive or prominent attributes. According to (Liacat, 2015). Focusing on information and service quality dimensions can significantly impact consumer engagement and brand advocacy on Facebook. Product specifications aid overcoming challenges through leveraging recommendations from trusted sources can boost awareness and consumer engagement on social media platforms.”

Subtheme 2: Overview of product specification. An examination of product specifications offers a concise account of the fundamental particulars and characteristics of a product. Normally, it encompasses details like the product's size, weight, utilized materials, available color choices, and any distinctive or prominent attributes. According to (Liacat, 2015). Focusing on information and service quality dimensions can significantly impact

consumer engagement and brand advocacy on Facebook. Product specifications aid consumers in comprehending the anticipated qualities of the product and have the potential to impact their buying choices.

Informant 7 mentioned that: *“We deal with them by organizing first our unit detailed specification so that uhm… we can diminish some questions regarding to a certain unit asked.”*

Informant 8 also shared: *“Provide more information or specifications of the unit to uhm… lessen questions to a certain unit.”*

Subtheme 3: Customer's Satisfaction. Customer satisfaction pertains to the degree to which customers express contentment with a company's offerings. It serves as an indicator of a business's ability to meet or surpass customer expectations. The satisfaction of customers is impacted by a variety of elements, such as product or service quality, the standard of customer service rendered, pricing, convenience, and the overall experience provided to customers. According to (Christopher Sibona, 2012).

Customer satisfaction on Facebook is influenced by perceived ease-of-use and usefulness. Users with more friends and interactions tend to have higher satisfaction levels, impacting overall Facebook usage positively.

Informant 5 stated that: *“We ensure that our customers can reach their specific needs and quality needs which can uhm… lead to customers satisfaction.”*

***Subtheme 4: Staying Motivated*. **Maintaining motivation entails upholding a positive and determined demeanor towards the attainment of objectives or the fulfillment of duties. This encompasses the ability to remain concentrated, establish well-defined targets, and discover methods to preserve a sense of inspiration and eagerness.

According to (Cynthia Weijs, 2014). “Awareness of consequences, managing risks, and raising reputation management awareness are key to staying motivated in posting on Facebook to increase awareness.”

Informant 1 shared an experience: *“Stay positive despite the challenges. Struggle and*

increase, boost confidence or self-encouragement. Take everything as part of business *despite losses uhm… learn to improve skills to attain goal."* He added that, *"Business Minded people spurn negatives".*

Informant 2 also shared similar experience: *"Stay positive despite the challenges.*

Improve what needs to be improved."

Informant 8 stated that *"Business minded people spurn negatives."*

Informant 9 expressed that: *"Keep on posting, kay dili raman diha mo-stop ang kanang… akoang tumong nganong mogamit kog Facebook. Padayon ra jhud kos pag post about sa mga multicabs nga naa sa ACO para mas kuan… ma aware ang uban nga naa diay mi ingon ana diri".*

[Translation: Keep on posting because it doesn't only stop here uhm… my point why I use Facebook. I keep on posting about the availability of units in ACO for more uhm… awareness to others that there is this kind of product or unit here.]

Furthermore, informant 10 said that: *"We didn't stop. We continued posting our products on Facebook so that others will be aware on what we are selling."*

Subtheme 5: Team coordination. This process encompasses the essential elements of communication, collaboration, and delegation of tasks among team members to guarantee a unified and effective approach. According to Bija Monica, Raluca Balas (2014). "Team coordination is crucial in utilizing Facebook for brand awareness. Setting clear posting goals, prompt customer interaction, and creating engaging content are key strategies for effective social media marketing."

Informant 3 shared that*: "Through organized each of the team members to know their uhm… responsibility in the company when they are selling online.*

Theme 3. Disadvantages

While Facebook offers significant advantages for increasing awareness, it also presents several notable disadvantages. According to Chyng-Yang Jang (2015), Common disadvantages of using Facebook for business awareness include low adoption rates, dormant fan pages, lack of continuous use, and limited user engagement among small businesses. The engagement on Facebook, often characterized by likes and shares, may not always translate into meaningful action or impact in the real world. While Facebook remains a powerful tool for awareness, navigating these disadvantages is crucial to ensuring the success and impact of awareness initiatives on the platform.

Subtheme 1. Addressing digital frauds. Addressing digital fraud necessitates the implementation of strategies aimed at identifying, preventing, and alleviating deceptive practices carried out via digital mediums such as the internet, mobile applications, and electronic transactions. According to Manoj Apte, Girish Keshav Palshikar Sriram Bashkaran (2019). “Frauds in Online Social Networks, like Facebook, involve identity manipulation and misinformation diffusion, posing challenges in detection and prevention due to the complex structure and anonymity.”

According to informant 3: *“Facebook has struggled with fake accounts and spam contents which can make it uhm… harder for business to uhm… reach genuine users with their*

uhm… marketing messages.

Subtheme 2. Slow internet connection.This circumstance can lead to latencies in webpage loading, and lackluster performance of online applications. According to Muhammad Amir Mehmood (2012). “The impact of network effects on application quality, as studied in the paper, can lead to slow Facebook usage due to adverse network conditions affecting user experience.”

According to informant 8: *" The disadvantage is the “Signal" "Lag", the informant added “lisod kaayo kay basin mawad-an ug salig ang customer namo kay dili dayon mi ka-reply sa ilahang kanang… pangutana tungod sa kahinay sa internet”.*

[Translation: The disadvantage is the signal or the internet connection, the informant added that it’s very hard because the customers may not trust us anymore because we cannot cater their uhm… inquiries right away due to slow internet connection.]

Subtheme 3. Actual physical check. Potential customers may scrutinize the accuracy and reliability of the information they share about multicab trading, including vehicle specifications, pricing, and availability. Some customers prefer to see the products in person rather than relying solely on social media. According to Bija Monica Raluca Balas (2014).“Personal scrutiny on Facebook for brand awareness is crucial due to its vast reach. Companies must engage with customers promptly and provide engaging content to increase brand visibility effectively.”

According to informant 5, “*Sometimes here at ACO kay dili kaayo active sa kanang… social media kay mas prefer man sa ubang customers nga makita nila ang unsa jhud kanindot ang multicabs”.*

[Translation: Sometimes here at ACO, we’re not too active in uhm… social media because there are customers which are more preferring to see how attractive the multicabs are.]

Informant 7 added “Customers were scared to be scammed, and I think they uhm… prefer to see the product or the multicabs in person, uhm… not in the picture only since they were uhm… aware already that our business exists, thanks to Facebook”.

Lastly, the Informant 9 added the same thought *“People nowadays scared or afraid to be scammed and they uhm… preferred to see it in person rather than pictures to uhm… see if it is worth it or not”.*

Subtheme 4. Advertisement cost. The expenses related to advertising, known as advertisement cost, are the financial outlays made by a business entity or an individual to endorse a specific product, service, or brand across Facebook. These expenditures can exhibit significant variations based on factors such as the nature of the advertisement, the specific platform utilized, the intended target demographic, and the duration of the promotional campaign. According to Eva Lahuerta Otero, Rebeca Cordero Gutierrez (2015). "Using Facebook for advertising is cost-effective for increasing brand awareness, as shown in the study. It proves beneficial for public and private entities to promote them businesses online."

According to informants 2: "Needed to pay on boosting Facebook to uhm… reach more Facebook users."

Subtheme5. Exploiting Insecurities. Utilizing vulnerabilities entails the strategic utilization or exploitation of an individual's uncertainties, susceptibilities, or deficiencies for personal benefit. According to Virpi Kristiina Tuunainen, Olli Pitkänen, Marjaana Hovi (2009), increasing awareness of privacy risks on Facebook due to users' unawareness of information visibility and lack of understanding of privacy policies may lead to exploiting insecurities in using the platform.

According to informant 1: "post negative comments, jeopardize personal lives and my family, Cater uhm… more people with bad thoughts".

According to informants 2: "Needed to pay on boosting Facebook to uhm… reach more Facebook users."

Subtheme 6. High competition density. High competition density pertains to a market or industry characterized by many competitors competing for the same customer base or market share. According to A. K. M Ahasanul Haque, Abdul Moment, Seyama Sultana, Farzana Yasmin, Kuala Lumpur (2013). "The study highlights Facebook as the most effective strategy for online brand awareness among Malaysian users, indicating high competition density in utilizing Facebook for this purpose."

According to Informant 10: *"In Facebook, it's more on competition. Businesses nowadays are uhm… vying for user's attention on Facebook. So, meaning, standing out and uhm… getting noticed can be uhm… challenging for us.''*

Subtheme 7. Algorithm changes. Within the sphere of social media platforms such as Facebook, algorithm adjustments frequently involve changes made to the algorithms that dictate the content displayed to users on their feeds. These modifications have the potential to impact the way posts are prioritized, exhibited, and circulated to users, considering various factors like significance, interaction, and timelines. According to Ahmet Faruk Cecen (2019), Facebook's algorithm and ads can enhance brand awareness by tailoring audiences but may also facilitate negative campaigns due to their advantages over positive ones.

According to Informant 6: *"Relying on Facebook for marketing can be risky, as changes to the algorithms could significantly uhm… impact the reach of audience and sales.*

Theme 4. Advantages

Facebook serves as a dynamic platform for increasing awareness due to its array of advantages. Facebook fosters engagement through likes, comments, and shares, promoting interactive dialogue and community involvement. According to Lasha Tchelidze (2023), "Using Facebook for brand activities enhances brand awareness by reaching consumers effectively, improving brand positioning in their minds, and enabling "unaided" brand awareness through frequent advertisements while avoiding overexposure."

Subtheme 1. Boost sales. According to Sriteja Volam (2014), "Utilize Facebook's platform to market products smartly, increasing brand awareness and potentially boosting sales by creating engaging pages, sharing content, and interacting with users effectively."

This is what Informant 1 had to say: *" Boost company name".*

Informant 3 stated that: *" The advantage of using Facebook as our tool to aware and boost our sales is to uhm… make easier to gain other customers online and easy to access in responding our customer who inquired online".*

In addition, Informant 5 stated. *" Our advantage in using Facebook is that we advertise so that uhm… customers can be satisfied and buy our product, which is the multicab".*

Subtheme 2. Engagement opportunities. A multitude of channels or initiatives established by corporations or individuals to engage and establish connections with their target audience or clientele. According to Bija Monica & Raluca Balas (2014), "Facebook offers engagement opportunities to increase brand awareness by providing a platform for shareable content, organic interactions, and direct customer communication, enhancing brand visibility and reach."

One of the Informants which is informant 1 shared that: *"More people patronized ACO".*

Informant 2 added that *" It helps reach more customers".*

Informant 6 shared experience that: *"Using Facebook as marketing tool can help though uhm… receiving instant feedback from customer through comment's, messages, and reviews that helps to uhm… understand customer preferences and improve product and services".*

As expressed by the informant 7, he said *"Can reach more customers by uhm… sharing different marketplaces or Facebook pages or can uhm… reach more customers to different places."*

Informant 8 mentioned that.*" Facebook is one of the platforms that has billion active users that uhm… provides access to the potential customers".*

Lastly, Informant 9 also shared: *" The advantages in using Facebook you can gain more uhm… customers and boosting the page of the company".*

Subtheme 3. Brand visibility. The degree to which a brand is acknowledged and observed by consumers within the market. It includes the existence and exposure of a brand through a variety of platforms including advertising, social media, search engines, physical locations, and referrals by word-of-mouth. According to Sriteja Volam (2014), "Facebook is utilized for smart brand marketing, increasing brand visibility by creating special pages based on likes and shares, making it a valuable platform for companies."

According to Informant 10: *"Facebook helps ACO MTB by providing a platform for customers to leave reviews, comments, and feedback, which uhm… can help build trust and credibility for our brand, and ultimately boost sales".*

Theme 5. Impacts on using Facebook.

Using Facebook to boost awareness can have significant impacts. It offers a wide reach and targeted advertising, enabling direct engagement with potential customers. However, businesses must navigate competition, algorithm changes, and privacy concerns effectively to maximize its benefits (Lasquite, 2015).

Positive Impacts

Utilizing Facebook for multicab trading awareness allows businesses to reach a global audience through targeted advertising and interactive engagement. According to Muhammed S. Alnsour & Zafaf Abu Tayeh (2019), "Using Facebook positively impacts brand awareness, recognition, recall, top-of-mind, and dominance for Jordanian banks. It enhances customer interaction, knowledge, content updates, and client engagement." The platform's visual content sharing capabilities effectively showcase products, while cost-effective marketing solutions and analytics tools enhance campaign effectiveness.

Overall, leveraging Facebook enables businesses to increase brand visibility, engage with customers, and drive growth in the multicab trading market.

Subtheme 1. Increase Product Exposure. According to Deborah Roberts, Marina Candi, & Mathew Hughes (2017), "Positive affirmations like 'likes' on Facebook can enhance product exposure, generate interest in new product launch activities, and boost early product acceptance through word-of-mouth communication on social network sites."

Informant 2 also shared that: *"Facebook users were more aware that our company/business exist."*

Informant 4 added: *"Positive impacts is to let the people uhm… choose and let them think of why they need to uhm… purchase or what to purchase."*

Informant 7 mentioned that: *"You can post and list your posted sales in different places and by that uhm… we can reach more people and boost our sales."*

In addition, informant 8 said that: *"Can post or share to different Facebook pages on marketplaces to uhm… reach more clients."*

Lastly, informant 10 shared that: *"By sharing what we posted, it will allow users or Facebook users to uhm… interact with our sales content and spread it to their networks since uhm..*

Facebook offers various engagement features such as likes, comments, shares, and reaction."

Subtheme 2. Customers' preferences. Customer preferences denote the selections, preferences, and hierarchies of consumers in relation to products, services, or encounters. According to Gita Aprinta (2016), "Customers prefer using Facebook for brand awareness due to its vast user base, facilitating direct access to consumers, optimizing promotion, and enabling sharing information, enhancing brand recall and loyalty."

Subtheme 3. Wide audience access. According to Eva Lahuerta Otero & Rebeca Cordero Gutiérrez (2015), "Using Facebook for advertising increases awareness by reaching a broad audience, as shown in the study. It effectively promotes public and private entities beyond the initial target group."

According to informant 3: *"The positive impact of using Facebook is to uhm… gain other customers from different places especially outside in Cebu City."*

Informant 5 also shared that: *"Using Facebook has had a significant impact on our company because uhm… it has allowed us to connect directly with our target audience."*

Informant 9 also mentioned that: *"The positive impact in using Facebook is to uhm…reach more customers online."*

Negative Impacts

Facebook also presents several drawbacks that multicab traders must navigate. These negative impacts include heightened competition for user attention, the risk of receiving negative feedback, and the presence of unreliable individuals who may undermine trust and credibility.

According to Aamir Amin, Sohail Safdar (2023), negative impact of using Facebook for brand awareness includes potential harm from negative comments, fake news, and controversial posts, affecting brand image and purchase intention in digital marketing.

Subtheme 1. High competition for attention. Intense competition for attention denotes the fierce rivalry among diverse entities, such as corporations, individuals, and institutions, in the quest to attract and retain the focus of their desired audience. According to Ganesh Iyer, Zsolt Katona (2015). “Yes, high competition for attention exists on social media platforms

like Facebook due to increased connectivity, status utility, and social differentiation,

leading to participation inequality among users.”

Informant 1 shared this: *"People or competitors damaged the image of company to boost, some people uhm… posted negative comments about my unit, but I certainly uhm… cater them positively.”*

Subtheme 2. Negative feedback. According to Ana Raluca Chiosa, Bogdan Anastasiei (2017), negative feedback on Facebook can change brand perception, generate negative word-of-mouth, impact future purchase intentions, and trigger brand rejection, as shown in the research.

According to Informant 2 said that "*Negative comment/ review that can harm the uhm… company's reputation"*.

Informant 6 shared her thought that: " *Negative comments or reviews on Facebook can uhm… harm the company's reputation, as they are visible to other people and may discourage uhm… potential customers"*.

Informant 8 stated that *“Negative comments can uhm… damage the reputation of our company or business”.*

Informant 9 expresses that: *“Get negative comments about the product"*.

Furthermore, Informant 10 added that: *"The amplification of negative feedback. Negative comments, reviews, or feedback on Facebook can uhm… quickly spread and damage our brand/ company's reputation, especially if not addressed uhm… promptly and effectively"*.

Subtheme 3. Managing unreliable individuals. Managing unreliable individuals involves strategies to address their behavior and enhance their dependability. According to Alkesh Patel, Ajit Balakrishnan (2012).

“User reputation systems can identify troublesome users on social networks like Facebook, allowing for temporary or permanent bans to manage unreliable individuals effectively.”

Informant 3 mentioned that: *"The negative impact of using Facebook is dealing with understand person, and those uhm… scammer's online"*.

Informant 7 expressed furthermore that: *"Disregarding/Facebook users tend to disregard the post because it might be a scam.”*

The challenges of utilizing Facebook for business are varied, ranging from security concerns such as account hacking to managing fraudulent activities and responding to algorithm changes affecting content visibility. Despite these obstacles, maintaining an active presence on the platform remains crucial for enhancing brand visibility, engaging with a diverse audience, and promptly addressing customer inquiries. However, businesses must be

cautious about relying on something other than Facebook for promotion due to the platform's dynamic nature and the risk of adverse effects on reputation from negative feedback.

Informant 9 expresses that: *"Get negative comments about the product"*

Furthermore, Informant 10 added that: *"The amplification of negative feedback. Negative comments, reviews, or feedback on Facebook can uhm… quickly spread and damage our brand/ company's reputation, especially if not addressed uhm… promptly and effectively"*.

On a more positive note, they are leveraging Facebook as a marketing tool that offers numerous benefits, including convenient access to potential customers, prompt responsiveness, and the ability to gather immediate feedback for product improvement. Facebook can significantly enhance sales and broaden a company's digital footprint by fostering trust and credibility through customer reviews and constructive engagements. While challenges persist, adopting a proactive approach and maintaining product quality can turn these obstacles into opportunities for growth and improvement in online sales performance.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the insights gathered from this research underscore the dilemma of using Facebook as a platform to increase awareness of ACO Multicab Trading Business. The study illuminates significant challenges such as account security issues, fluctuating algorithms, and the struggle to convert online interactions into tangible transactions. Despite these hurdles, Facebook presents compelling opportunities for expanding market reach, fostering customer engagement, and bolstering brand credibility. The findings suggest strategic approaches to overcome obstacles and capitalize on the platform's potential, benefiting ACO Multicab and similar businesses, social media professionals, and digital marketing agencies seeking to optimize their strategies in the competitive digital landscape.

This research serves as a roadmap for leveraging Facebook effectively in the context of multicab businesses, offering actionable insights and recommendations to navigate and thrive in the evolving digital marketplace.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers recommend the following for the dilemma of using Facebook to increase awareness of ACO Multicab Trading found out in the study:

I. *Ensure Account Security*:

a. Protect Your Password. Avoid using your Facebook password on other sites and never
b. share it with others. Create a strong password that does not include your name or common words.

c. Guard Your Login Information. Be vigilant about phishing scams. Scammers often create fake websites that mimic Facebook and ask for your login details.

d. Always verify the website URL before entering your credentials. If in doubt, type www.facebook.com directly into your browser.

e. Never forward emails from Meta to others, as these may contain sensitive account information. Scammers often create fake websites that mimic Facebook and ask for your login details.

f. Always verify the website URL before entering your credentials. If in doubt, type www.facebook.com directly into your browser. Never forward emails from Meta to others, as these may contain sensitive account information.

g. Monitor for Malicious Software. Malicious software can damage your computer or network. Learn to recognize signs of infection and how to remove malicious software. Keep your web browser updated and remove suspicious applications or browser add-ons. Avoid clicking on suspicious links, even if they appear to come from trusted sources. Remember, Meta will never request your password via email. Report any suspicious links you encounter on Facebook.

II. *Prevent fraud.* according to CRI Group (2019).

a. Take a proactive approach to fraud prevention. Establish a code of ethics for management and employees to set cultural and ethical standards. Regularly conduct fraud risk assessments and implement robust internal controls to minimize fraud risk. Ensure your organization’s compliance program aligns with global business ethics, anti-bribery, and anti-corruption standards.
b. Conduct due diligence. Major business transactions such as mergers and acquisitions carry significant fraud risks. Conduct thorough due diligence to uncover apparent and hidden risks during these transactions.

c. Be mindful of cultural differences. Be aware of cultural differences when expanding internationally. Understanding these differences is crucial for effective and ethical business operations in new markets.

d. Conduct background checks. Your organization's hiring process should include thorough background investigations. Check educational, credit and employment history (as permitted by law) and references.

e. Make training a priority. Ensure staff members know the warning signs of fraud and basic prevention techniques.

f. Provide a fraud hotline. Statistics show that tips are the most common reporting method for fraud. Encourage employees, customers, and contractors by providing an anonymous reporting system (a telephone hotline or online portal). It is a positive sign that ethics hotlines are growing in popularity. CRI Group™ encourages everyone to report any wrongdoing. Everyone must seek to maintain transparency to comply with

the code of conduct and compliance regulations.

g. Don't tolerate fraud. Regular communication is vital. Ensure your staff knows fraud and corruption aren't tolerated and will be punished. When fraud is uncovered, follow through with consequences for the perpetrator.

III. *Respond to algorithm changes. Working with the Facebook algorithm, according to Cooper (2021).*

a. Understand audience preferences. Create meaningful, relevant, and informative content based on audience engagement patterns.
b. Create accurate and authentic content. Use clear headlines and truthful content.
c. Avoid misleading titles, community safety risks, low-quality claims, unoriginal content, false claims, and inappropriate language.
d. Avoid manipulating the algorithm. Focus on understanding and leveraging the algorithm to create valuable content rather than attempting to exploit it.
e. Engage with your audience. Actively respond to comments and interactions to build relationships and encourage ongoing engagement.
f. Encourage audience interaction. Promote sharing and discussions among your audience to enhance engagement and visibility.
g. Post at optimal times. Schedule posts when your audience is most active to maximize engagement.
h. Utilize basic status posts. Don't overlook simple status updates, as they can drive significant engagement.
i. Leverage advocates and influencers. Empower employees and collaborate with influencers to expand your content's reach.
j. Monitor analytics and insights. Regularly track performance metrics to refine your strategy and improve content resonance with your audience

3.*Respond to algorithm changes. Working with the Facebook algorithm, according to Cooper (2021).*

a. Understand audience preferences. Create meaningful, relevant, and informative content based on audience engagement patterns.

b. Create accurate and authentic content. Use clear headlines and truthful content.

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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE ON CONSUMERS PREFERENCE TOWARDS THE DIFFERENT COFFEE SHOPS IN TOLEDO CITY

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ABSTRACT

The study delves into the role of social influence on consumers' preference towards the different coffee shops in Toledo City. It involved two dependent variables, the Family and Reference Group, with four sub-variables each: the mother, father, brother, and sister, and for reference, the friends, artists, online influencers, and models/endorsers. The research explored the relationship between social influence and consumer preference and investigated which social impact is the most significant to the consumer's preference. The study, which had a sample of 357 respondents selected through a Raosoft formula, was conducted with meticulous attention to detail. The researchers employed a custom-designed questionnaire to gather essential data for the investigation. The research paper underwent rigorous validity and reliability tests, and the results were found to be acceptable. The statistical treatment used in the study, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Mean, provided a solid foundation for data interpretation. The results stated in the data analysis the significant finding is that the families' factors influence consumers' preference; there is a coefficient value of .222, which has a p- value of .663, and the decision stated is, therefore, not significant. Reference Group has a coefficient value of .316, with a p-value of .00001, and the decision stated is, therefore, significant. This study found a substantial relationship between reference group influence and consumer preference. This recommendation includes specific advice for coffee shop owners and marketers operating within a similar place. This finding holds significant meaning for the reference group that exerts the most influence on consumer preferences.

Keywords: *Social Influence, Consumer Preference, Coffee Shops*

I.INTRODUCTION

The role of social influence on consumer preferences for various coffee shops was a complex and multidimensional topic. Word of mouth, online audits, social standards and patterns, and other shapes of social impact all had a considerable effect on client choices. Word-of-mouth communication, counting proposals from companions, family, and colleagues, played a significant part in forming customer inclinations for coffee shops—positive shared experiences created favorable brand perceptions. Furthermore, social influence significantly impacted coffee shop choices. Consumers often sought to align with contemporary trends and the behaviors of their social circles. This desire to conform led individuals to select coffee shops based on their perceived popularity and trendiness within their social networks. The detailed relationship between social effects and individual preferences held significant value for coffee shop owners and marketers in developing personalized customer attraction and retention strategies. This area of inquiry was inherently dynamic, as consumer preferences might have shifted alongside evolving social forces, highlighting its importance as a field of ongoing research and analysis.

Social influences, derived from interactions with family, friends, peers, or other impactful individuals, played a significant role in consumer choices, including coffee purchases. Social influence operates through the integration of social identities within a group. These dynamics fostered shared beliefs, perspectives, and behaviors, shaping what was acceptable or desirable. Research in buyer behavior highlighted using others' product evaluations as informational sources. Our study, "The Role of Social Influence on Consumers' Preferences Toward Different Coffee Shops in Toledo City," supported this, demonstrating that social influence significantly impacted individuals' coffee purchasing decisions. Sinha and Swearingen [28] found that consumers were far more likely to believe recommendations from people they knew and trusted, i.e., friends and family members than from automated recommendation systems on e-commerce websites. The idea that social factors guided individual decision-making was a cornerstone of early social influence research. In Asch's (1952) classic thinking, an individual's "actions and the beliefs guiding them were either an endorsement of his (her) group, and therefore a bond of social unity, or an expression of conflict with it.

(Wang, 2014) combined social influence and purchase intention, in which he measured social influence towards purchase intention by using the subjective norms and visibility dimensions. Subjective norms had two indicators. The first indicator was a behavioral belief, which was the perception of consumer belief that buying was a positive and profitable action.

The second indicator was a normative belief, which was the perception of consumer belief that buying a product or service was a necessity. Environmental and consumer behavioral factors measured the visibility dimensions. Customer preferences for coffee shops were formed by many components, counting social impacts inferred from intelligent inside social systems (e.g., family, companions, and peers). Social impact, a key concept in social brain research, envelops the capacity of people or bunches to adjust the considerations, sentiments, and behaviors of others. As coffee culture expanded, elucidating the social dynamics that influenced consumer choices became increasingly important; this research investigated how social interactions and influences drove consumer decision-making regarding coffee shop selection. Its objective was to provide insights into the complex mechanisms underlying consumer behavior and preferences within a social context.

The exploration of the role of social influence on consumer preferences regarding coffee shops in Toledo City was significant. While existing studies had touched upon consumer behavior and preferences, a notable absence existed in the specific context of coffee shop choices within Toledo City.

The study, "Informational and Normative Social Science in Buyer Behavior," stated that evidence was presented to suggest that people used other people's product assessments as a source of information about the product." When individuals saw others rating a thing exceedingly, they tended to see it more favorably themselves than something else would have. Agreeing with our inquiry, which was titled "The Part of Social Impact on Consumers' Inclinations Toward Distinctive Coffee Shops in Toledo City," social impact critically impacted consumers' obtaining choices. Social impact can be an effective constraint in forming customer inclinations since it taps into human brain research, feelings, and social association and approval requirements. Marketers and businesses often leverage these dynamics to promote products and brands.

Social influence played a significant role in consumer choices, including coffee purchasing decisions. This phenomenon stemmed from group dynamics, social identity formation, and the resulting validation of shared beliefs and behaviors. This study aimed to examine the influence of these social factors within a specific urban context – Toledo City. By focusing on the localized coffee shop scene, we sought to uncover how social dynamics shaped consumer preferences. This approach distinguished our work from broader consumer behavior analyses, allowing us to delve into the detailed complexities that drove decision-making processes within a distinct community.

The research study titled "The Role of Social Influence on Consumers Preference Towards the Different Coffee Shops in Toledo City" was in line with Maintainable Cities and Communities, the 11th Economic Improvement Objective of the UN. This objective emphasized creating comprehensive, secure, versatile, and maintainable urban situations. This study advanced our knowledge of local community dynamics and economic activity by investigating how social dynamics impacted consumer decisions within the coffee shop setting. The results could influence plans to encourage local company growth, sustain urban development, and improve Toledo City residents' general quality of life.

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RESEARCH FRAMEWOR

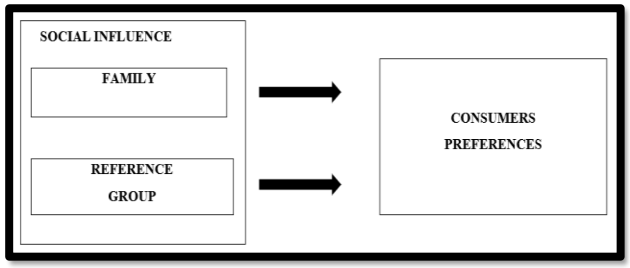

Figure 1.*Schema of the Research Framework*

Social proof theory, a central concept in social psychology, offered profound insights into how individuals' preferences, including those of consumers, were shaped by the actions and opinions of others. This theory suggested that people tended to imitate the behaviors of those around them, driven by the assumption that such actions were correct or desirable (Naeem, 2021). In the context of consumer behavior, social proof served as a potent force driving individuals' preferences.

II. METHODOLOGY

This chapter explained various methodologies used to gather data and analysis relevant to the research. The methods included areas such as the location of the study, research design, sampling, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative correlational design to investigate the role of social influence on consumers' coffee shop preferences in Toledo City. This method was ideal for examining associations between variables, allowing researchers to quantify the strength and direction of the relationship between social influence and consumer choice. Using surveys, questionnaires, or structured observations yielded objective, numerical data, minimizing researcher bias and ensuring the findings were reliable and replicable.

A quantitative correlational approach promoted generalizability by utilizing a larger sample of Toledo City consumers. This robust data set, selected through a rigorous process to ensure representativeness, provided a comprehensive view of the population's preferences and social influences. Furthermore, this design prioritized efficiency and cost-effectiveness without sacrificing data quality. The results had practical applications for coffee shop owners, marketers, and policymakers, potentially informing marketing tactics, customer engagement strategies, and broader decisions aimed at enhancing the Toledo City coffee shop experience.

Research Setting

The area from Luray to Poblacion in Toledo City presented several methodological and pragmatic advantages for the environment in which the research occurred. It hosted a wide range of socio-economic and demographic features within the larger city, ensuring the findings' representativeness and generalizability.

Additionally, the area was suitable for studying social interactions and community dynamics due to the prevalence of coffee shops. Coffee shops serve as social hubs where people gather, interact, socialize, and exchange ideas, attracting a diverse crowd with different viewpoints and experiences for the researcher to formulate theories. The coffee shop setting also facilitated a relaxed atmosphere, encouraging participants to express their thoughts openly and honestly. Local coffee shop owners and baristas were knowledgeable about the community and provided valuable information to the researcher, including necessary contacts. The proximity of other amenities in the area further facilitated participants' access to the coffee shops. From Luray to Poblacion in Toledo City, several popular coffee shops such as Kaps Kape, Cafetolio, Coffee Stop, Don Machiatos, Uncle Brew, and Librew Cafe were already established. Their presence provided ample grounds for investigating how social interactions influence consumer preferences.

Sampling Design

The study employed a purposive sampling design to focus specifically on the Luray to Poblacion area of Toledo City. This method allowed us to intentionally select participants who resided in or frequented coffee shops within this locality. This ensured that the data aligned with our objective of exploring consumer preferences and social influence in this context. This ensured that the data aligned closely with the study's aim of exploring consumer preferences and social influence in this context. Purposive sampling facilitated gathering in-depth, locally relevant insights, which were valuable given the unique social dynamics within this microcosm of Toledo City.

Moreover, the limited geographic scope of the study made purposive sampling a practical and resource-efficient choice. Despite acknowledging potential biases inherent in purposive sampling, the benefits of obtaining contextually rich insights outweighed these limitations. The findings provided actionable insights tailored for coffee shops and consumers in the Luray to Poblacion area.

Research Instrument

The research instrument employed in this study is a custom- designed questionnaire crafted by the researchers to collect vital data for the investigation. The questionnaire consisted of questions designed to elicit responses from participants on the various aspects of their demographic profile and their preferences and influences related to coffee shop products. The instrument included both closed-ended and open- ended questions.

The questionnaire commenced with section II, 'Level of Influence and Preference,' which showcased a table. This table allowed the respondents to articulate their perceptions of the level of influence and preference associated with various variables on coffee shop products. The scale used ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating the lowest influence or preference and 5 representing the highest. The factors included in the table covered familial influences (Mother, Father, Brother, Sister), and reference group (Friends, Online Influencers, Models/Endorsers).

Our instrument went through a validity test with three experts with scores of 4 and 3, and for reliability, we used Cronbach's alpha with a score of 0.81 for the level of preference and 0.84 for the level of influence.

Data Gathering Procedures

A design hearing was conducted prior to submitting our research for ethics approval. The study's objectives, methodologies, and ethical concerns were presented and reviewed during this hearing with critical stakeholders. The paper was submitted to the ethics review board for the approval of our research plan. This step is vital to ensure that our data collection procedures are conducted in an equitable and ethical manner.

During the data collection phase, researchers provided ample clarification to participants, fostering an environment conducive to honest and insightful responses. Participants were encouraged to express their thoughts openly, enabling researchers to gain valuable insights into the factors driving consumer preferences in the different coffee shops in Toledo City.

Each participant received a printed questionnaire tailored to the study's objectives. By presenting participants with a survey instrument, researchers ensured that respondents clearly understood the questions and could provide thoughtful responses.

Upon completing the data-gathering phase, researchers analyzed the collected information. However, before delving into the analysis, we took utmost care to ensure the privacy and security of the respondents' information, demonstrating our unwavering commitment to ethical research practices.

Printed questionnaires with responses were securely stored in a safe flash drive for safekeeping. Any unnecessary physical documents were disposed of securely to prevent unauthorized access. Researchers remained committed to securing participants' privacy at every step of the research process, demonstrating respect and responsibility in handling their information.

Analysis of Data

The study employed Pearson's correlation coefficient to assess the strength and direction of the linear relationship between social influence factors and consumer preferences toward coffee shops. This statistical measure was calculated for each influence factor (e.g., mother, friends, online influencers) against the corresponding preference score, revealing the extent to which changes in influence were associated with changes in preference. The Pearson correlation coefficient was chosen due to its ability to quantify linear relationships between two continuous variables, aligning with the nature of the influence and preference ratings in this study. The magnitude and sign of the correlation coefficients provided valuable insights into the strength and direction of the relationships between each social influence factor and consumer preference, aiding in identifying key drivers of coffee shop choice.

Ethical Consideration

Before conducting the study, it was submitted to the university institutional review board of the research ethics committee for technical and ethical review. Moreover, it was approved and given the notice to proceed certificate with a reference number of **2024-053.**

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter comprises the results and their analysis as well as interpretation of the information from individual respondents. It also provides an in-depth examination of methods employed to present data and interpret findings that will have significance in a meaningful and informative way. The data were presented in tabular form, and this agrees with the statement of the problem. Through interpreting the data, researchers can make valid conclusions that serve as grounds for recommendation.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE VARIABLE OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Table 1

Family

Variables	Average Influence (Mean)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Average Preference (Mean)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Mother	3.50	1.70	2.80	1.00
Father	3.50	1.00	3.70	1.00
Brother	3.80	1.00	3.70	1.00
Sister	4.00	0.70	4.00	0.75
Total Mean &SD	**3.75**	**1.10**	**3.55**	**0.94**

Table 1 displays the mean scores and standard deviations for each of the four factors of the first social influence. As a result, Sister emerged as the most influential factor, with respondents attributing a mean score of 4, This high level of influence might reflect gender differences in the strength of sibling bonds or socialization patterns. Studies suggest that sisters often share close relationships, potentially leading to stronger conformity in consumer preferences (Ufer et al., 2019). The moderate preference score of 2.8 for mothers suggests that while mothers' recommendations might influence coffee shop choices, it doesn't necessarily translate into a strong preference for the shop itself. Following closely behind is the influence of Brother, with a mean score of 3.8, Dynamics within sibling relationships could contribute to this shared taste, as siblings often socialize and try new experiences together. Research on sibling influence suggests that both conformity and differentiation play a role, meaning siblings can both align and diverge in their choices (Lee, 2019). The data suggests a strong preference for coffee shops recommended by brothers, with an average preference score of 3.7. This aligns with the influence data, highlighting the potential for shared experiences and tastes within sibling relationships.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE VARIABLE OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Table 2

Reference Group

Variables	Average Influence (Mean)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Average Preference (Mean)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Friends	4.45	0.63	4.47	0.64
Artist	3.70	1.00	3.00	0.90
Online Influencers	4.00	0.60	4.00	0.70
Models/Endorsers	3.70	0.90	3.70	0.95
Total Mean & SD	**3.96**	**0.78**	**3.80**	**0.79**

Table 2 displays the mean scores and standard deviations for each of the four factors of the Reference Group. As a result, Friends emerged as the most influential factor, with respondents attributing a mean score of 4,.45 This indicates that peer recommendations and social outings significantly shape preferences.

This finding is supported by social influence research, highlighting social circles' power in driving consumer behavior. Studies show that people are likelier to try and enjoy products or experiences their friends endorse (Muhammad & Lee, 2019). The average preference score of 4.47 shows that respondents listen to friends' recommendations and actively enjoy the coffee shops they suggest. Following closely behind is the influence of Online Influencers, with a mean score of 4, this trend aligns with the broader rise of influencer marketing.

Coffee shops can strategically leverage online influencers to reach a wider audience and showcase their products. The average preference score of 4 indicates that recommendations from online influencers translate well into positive attitudes towards coffee shops. This suggests that consumers find these figures relatable and their opinions credible when it comes to trying new places. Research supports this, emphasizing the role of parasocial relationships in influencer marketing, where consumers feel a sense of connection to the influencer (Aulia et al., 2023).

Table 3

Summary of Data using Pearson's Correlations

Construct	N	Pearson Correlation	P-value (Sig2- tailed)	Decision
FAMILY				
Mother	387	0.130	0.89637	Not Significant
Father	387	0.170	0.00075	Significant
Brother	387	0.053	0.29601	Not Significant
Sister	387	0.465	<.00001	Significant
REFERENCE GROUPS				
Friends	387	0.302	<.00001	Significant
Artists	387	0.217	<.00001	Significant
Online Influencers	387	0.373	<.00001	Significant
Models/Endorsers	387	0.101	0.046343	Significant

Based on the data presented on table 3. Persons' Correlation of influences on consumers preferences. In the families' factors that influence consumers' preferences, there is a coefficient value of .222, which has a p-value of .663, and the decision stated is insignificant. This means that consumer preferences are independent regarding family factors of influence. Therefore, according to its revealed outcome the null hypothesis number 1 is accepted. On the other hand, the Reference Group, shown on the table that there is a coefficient value of .316, which has p-value of, .00001 and the decision stated significant. This significant relationship between the Reference Group and consumer preferences leads to the rejection of null hypothesis number 2.

The reference Group emerges as the most influential factor in shaping consumer preferences. This group's impact, as highlighted in the results above, is significant. The study underscores the role of social networks in enhancing the appeal of coffee shops and shaping consumer preferences in a competitive market environment. According to (Khan et al, 2019), there are many different elements that impact consumer choices in the coffee market, including taste, price, convenience, and brand image. Yet, customer opinions and preferences for coffee shops can be greatly impacted by social influence.

According to (Kim et al, 2019), there is evidence to show that consumers may have a stronger preference for coffee shops that are well-liked by their peers or that have the endorsement of famous people. Siprajim (2019) found that peer groups strongly influence coffee shop preferences, especially among younger individuals. Being seen frequenting the same spots as friends reinforces group identity and a sense of belonging. Aulia et al., (2023) stated that work colleagues form a major reference group, with proximity and convenience often determining the coffee shop choices of office workers on breaks or when grabbing a drink before shifts. Ratasuk and Gajesanand (2020) found that aspirational reference groups exist, where individuals who admire a particular lifestyle or aesthetic may seek out coffee shops they associate with that image.

Table 4

Overall Results of Data using Pearson's Correlations

Construct	N	Pearson Correlation	P-value (Sig2-tailed)	Decision
Families	387	.222	.663	Not Significant
Reference Group	387	.316	<.00001	Significant

$^{**}p<0.01$, $^{*}p<0.05$

Table 4 presents the variables under study. In this case, there are two constructs: "Families" and "Reference Group." These could represent different groups of participants or categories within a dataset. Furthermore, the "N" denotes the sample size for each group or construct. For both "Families" and "Reference Group," there are 387 respondents. The Pearson correlation statistic measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables. For "Families," the correlation coefficient is 0.222 with a weak and insignificant Correlation; for the "Reference Group," it is 0. 316 with a positive and significant Correlation. The results indicate the probability of obtaining the observed correlation coefficient (or a more extreme value) if the accurate Correlation in the population is zero. For "Families," the p-value is 0.663, and for the "Reference Group," it is less than 0.00001 (essentially zero). This section interprets the results in terms of statistical significance. If the p-value is less than a predetermined significance level (often denoted by α, commonly set at 0.05), the Correlation is considered statistically significant. Otherwise, it is deemed not significant. In this case, the Correlation for the "Families" construct is not significant ($p = 0.663$), while the Correlation for the "Reference Group" is significant ($p < 0.00001$).

CONCLUSION

This chapter provides the conclusion from the analysis of the research outcomes and recommendations from the researchers accruing from the findings. The results came out of the problem statement.

The results of the data revealed that there is no significant relationship between family influence and customer preference. The level of significance showed no significance. Thus, null hypothesis no. 1 is accepted. Consumers' preferences are, therefore, independent regarding families' factors of influence. Also, consumers could have other factors influencing their preferences for the coffee shop in Toledo City.

Furthermore, there is no relevant relationship between family influence and consumers' preferences. A significant finding revealed that family factors influence consumer preference with a coefficient value of .222 and a p-value of .663, which is not significant. This study found no meaningful correlation between consumer preference and family influence, which can be very interesting. This research implied that other factors may significantly influence customer decisions more than the presumed influence of family dynamics. Hence, consumer behavior may be more significantly influenced by personal preferences, experiences, or even cultural trends. It also consists of the factors influencing customer choices and the best ways for marketers to target their target market.

This study found a significant relationship between reference group influence and customer preference. A reference group is a group of people that an individual uses as a standard for self-evaluation or as a model for behavior. According to its significance level, it showed up and resulted in an important decision. Thus, the second null hypothesis is rejected. Consumers' preferences have greatly influenced the reference group, and this factor has been meaningful for them in their buying or purchasing decisions. Based on the result mentioned above from the data presentation, Reference Group, the significant finding shows in the table that there is a coefficient value of .316, which has a p-value of .00001, and the decision stated is, therefore, significant. The discovery of a strong correlation between customer choice and reference group influence highlights social dynamics' role in influencing consumer behavior. Peers, coworkers, and aspirational figures are reference groups that can significantly influence people's decisions through cues, suggestions, or social validation. By understanding this influence, marketers may strategically use peer endorsements and social networks in their campaigns. It also emphasizes the role of social proof and the power of word-of-mouth in influencing consumer decisions.

The implications of this study extend to both practical and theoretical realms within the field. At a practical level, our findings provide valuable insights for coffee shop owners and marketers in Toledo City, emphasizing the importance of leveraging reference group influences to attract and retain consumers. Moreover, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of consumer behavior by explaining the application of social proof theory in the context of coffee shop preferences, highlighting the significant role of social influence in shaping consumer decisions.

However, our study has limitations. For instance, the sample was limited to respondents from Luray-Población, Toledo City, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings to broader populations.

Future research directions could explore the direct mechanisms of social proof theory in consumer decision-making across diverse geographical locations and demographic groups and investigate ethical considerations surrounding businesses' strategic use of social influence.

Moreover, in the context of the reference group, foreseeing this study with the help of the Social Theory, based on the result revealed that significantly affects the influence towards the consumer's preferences. This concluded that consumers' preferences for their counterparts in the reference group and assumed that these selections represent positive experiences or favored characteristics. People may be influenced by this process of observational learning to choose the same coffee shop based on the positive feedback they perceive from their social network and to emulate the actions of others. Furthermore, consumers can obtain information about which coffee shops are well-liked or socially supported by observing how the reference group members behave. People can understand the choices made by their reference group as a sign of the coffee shops that fit in with their shared values and interests or that are socially desirable.

Therefore, consumers' preferences for various coffee shops and the reference group have a significant link, which shows that social proof processes are at work in Toledo City to shape consumer behavior. Social proof theory is a psychological phenomenon where people assume the actions of others to reflect correct behavior for a given situation. Your research advances our knowledge of how peer relationships and interpersonal dynamics impact consumer decisions in the coffee shop industry by examining the impact of social influence. Finally, the application of social proof theory clarified the ways in which Toledo City consumers' preferences for coffee shops are influenced by the reference group. People negotiate the confusing world of coffee shop selections by using social validation and following in the footsteps of their peers. This collective behavior eventually shapes market dynamics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research results titled: "The Role of Social Influence on Consumers' Preference Towards the Different Coffee Shops in Toledo City," this study has developed recommendations for specific advice for coffee shop owners and marketers operating within a similar place. The findings revealed that the reference group is very influential on consumer preference. This is meaningful for the reference group that influences the consumer's preference most. Hence, these variables listed hereunder should be designed and recommended as a marketing strategy to leverage this social influence.

Friends

The researchers recommend a program where the referrer and the new customer (a friend) receive a free drink or discount on their next visit, which could be highly effective as a BARKADA PROMO.

Online Influencers

Coffee shops may open virtually for all people to give comments, suggestions, and commendable consumer feedback. People nowadays are spending more time on different mediums of social networking sites. This allows coffee shops to keep on improving their products. Having other points of view is a step in making the business long.

Model

Coffee shops could introduce promotions that capitalize on being influential and keep promoting both in actual and online ways. Look for the most influential person or a model to be the promoter in any season, offering promos or discounts and introducing brilliant new flavors.

Future researchers are recommended to conduct a study that could contribute to revitalizing the understanding of the role of social influence in shaping consumer behavior in the coffee shop market and provide actionable insights for stakeholders in Toledo City and beyond.

a. Track changes in consumer preferences and social influence dynamics over time.

   What is the impact of social influence factors?

b. How do online platforms, such as social media and review websites, influence consumers' perceptions and choices, and how do these digital interactions intersect with offline social networks?

c. Highly tested questionnaires will reflect the indicators and examine other related theories, such as purchase intention.

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READINESS FACTORS OF THE CUSTOMERS TO ACCEPT THE SELF-SERVICE DIGITAL KIOSKS AT FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS IN TOLEDO

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ABSTRACT

The study delves into the readiness factors influencing customer acceptance of self-service digital kiosks in fast-food restaurants in Toledo City. It involves profiling respondents based on age, education, and income and analyzing factors like perceived ease of use, usefulness, enjoyment, self-efficacy, value, and behavioral intention. The research explores the relationship between respondent profiles and readiness factors, investigates challenges in kiosk implementation, and offers recommendations to enhance the customer experience. The study tailors' insights to Toledo's context, focusing on factors of perceived usefulness and ease of use, providing practical suggestions for businesses to optimize self-service technology utilization. The analysis aims to bridge the gap between technology adoption and customer expectations, aiming for a seamless dining experience in fast food establishments. The study has respondents of 251 and were selected through stratified sampling techniques. Researchers utilized adopted and modified questionnaires by Rastegar, N., Flaherty, J., Liang, L.L., and Choi, H. C. (2018). The paper underwent validity and reliability tests, and the result was acceptable. The study utilized Pearson Correlation and ANOVA. Results stated that in the respondents' demographics, the majority were Gen Z individuals aged 18 to 27, primarily college students with an income of 0-3,000. Perceived Usefulness and Ease of Use are the top factors influencing digital kiosks' customer acceptability. These are the key factors for customer acceptability, as the TAM Model emphasized—negative correlation between Readiness Factors and Age, indicating decreasing readiness factors with age. Positive correlations between Readiness Factors and Household Income were observed. No significant differences in readiness factors across educational attainment groups or age generations were found. Businesses should include digital displays, marketing materials, and signs, and clients should be informed about the advantages of utilizing kiosks concisely and clearly

Keywords: *Pearson's Correlation, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Readiness Factors, Self Service Kiosks, One way ANOVA*

I.INTRODUCTION

In this dynamic environment, innovations are emerging. Customers are drawn to digital kiosks because they are stylish and welcoming, offering a world of ease and personalization. With these self-service digital kiosks, dining is seen as tantalizing as it moves beyond the counter service concept. This study explores the expectations and reasons that led to a revolution in the fast-food sector and the preparedness elements that push consumers to adopt these innovative technologies.

With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, civilizations transitioned from an agrarian to an industrial economy, where machines were used to supplement human labor in producing goods. The fifth industrial revolution is underway, in which machines are combined with Artificial Intelligence (AI) to create intelligent machines that carry out all the labor. Robots have traditionally carried out mechanical activities, but in the future, smart robots will carry out ever-more sophisticated jobs that, until recently, seemed to be the sole preserve of human intelligence, such as driving, flying, and other duties requiring human intelligence.

In the past few years, self-ordering kiosks have become a staple of fast food and fast-casual chains worldwide. According to Jungson (2013), male and female respondents were more inclined to use QSR kiosks when they understood their roles in using SST. However, neither group's chance of using kiosks was significantly influenced by perceived skill or degrees of intrinsic drive. Overall, the link between experience, preparation, and likelihood of using kiosks at QSR did not considerably depend on gender. Even though 36% of consumers are more likely to adopt tech options in the restaurant industry than two years earlier, almost half (49%) prefer interacting with employees rather than with an SSK (National Restaurant Association, 2016) in their work on future industry trends, Webster and Ivanov (2020) characterize technology-averse consumers as a relatively small group, confined to the high end of the market. Most future consumers, they speculate, will enjoy an automated experience.

Baba (2020) found out that the technology-based self-service kiosk allows customers to facilitate the ordering process without or with minimal help from service providers. Edward (2013) concluded that the traditional ordering process requiring the servers to write down the orders in the kitchen, serve the dishes, and prepare the bills is now more convenient and practical with Self Service Technology (SST). The development of intelligent machines would have a significant and unanticipated impact on civilization.

Before the Industrial Revolution, there was a trend toward replacing humans with machines for some activities, but this allowed humans to move on to other tasks and increase their productivity. Intelligent machines will replace humans, but they won't have anywhere to go.

SDG Number 9 seeks to build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation. Economies with a diversified industrial sector and vital infrastructure sustained less damage and are experiencing faster recovery. In 2021, global manufacturing rebounded from the pandemic; however, the recovery remains incomplete and uneven. It is relevant to the study by which self-ordering kiosks are an example of innovation in many business establishments. The researchers chose to assess customers' readiness factors for accepting self- service digital kiosks at fast-food restaurants in Toledo for several reasons.

Firstly, the increasing trend towards automation and digitalization in the service industry has sparked curiosity among researchers and businesses to understand consumer behavior towards self- service technologies. By exploring the readiness factors of customers in Toledo, researchers aim to uncover insights that can enhance the adoption of digital kiosks in fast- food establishments. Additionally, the practical significance of this topic lies in its potential to improve operational efficiency, customer satisfaction, and overall service quality in the fast-food sector. Understanding the factors that influence customers' acceptance of self- service kiosks can help restaurant owners tailor their strategies to meet the evolving preferences of modern consumers. Ultimately, by delving into this topic, researchers seek to bridge the gap between technology implementation and customer expectations, paving the way for a seamless and engaging dining experience in Toledo's fast-food restaurants.

Digital kiosks for self-service have been introduced due to the fast-food industry's increased need for convenience and technology usage. Customers can use these kiosks to place orders and pay without speaking to a cashier. The study's challenging issue may have something to do with the difficulties or obstacles fast food chains have had putting self-service digital kiosks into place. Customer reluctance, privacy and security concerns, usability problems, and cultural variables that influence the adoption of new technology are a few examples of these hurdles. Through a thorough investigation at various stages, scholars can pinpoint the precise elements that either facilitate or impede consumers' adoption of self-service digital kiosks. Fast food establishments and other companies in the sector can use this information to create and execute plans that increase consumer preparedness and enhance the entire customer experience.

The gap in the study is the need for more in-depth studies focusing specifically on the readiness factors influencing customer acceptance of digital kiosks in fast-food establishments. The study on the readiness factors of customers to accept self-service digital kiosks in fast-food restaurants will address the research gap by providing a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the specific factors influencing customer acceptance of digital

kiosks in this context.

Firstly, the study conducted in-depth interviews, surveys, and observational research to gather rich qualitative and quantitative data on customer attitudes, preferences, and behaviors towards self-service digital kiosks in fast food restaurants in Toledo.

The researchers explored the underlying motivations and barriers that shape customer acceptance by focusing specifically on readiness factors, such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, trust in technology, and social influence. Secondly, the study explored Toledo's socio-cultural and economic dynamics that may influence customer readiness to adopt self- service digital kiosks. By considering factors such as consumer demographics, technological literacy, dining preferences, and the competitive landscape of the fast-food industry in Toledo, the research will provide insights that are tailored to the local context. Thirdly, the study analyzed the implications of the findings for fast-food restaurant owners and managers in Toledo. By identifying key readiness factors that drive or inhibit customer acceptance of digital kiosks, the research offered practical recommendations for businesses to enhance the implementation and utilization of self-service technologies. These recommendations may include strategies to improve user experience, provide targeted training and support, and develop marketing campaigns that promote the benefits of self- service kiosks to customers.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

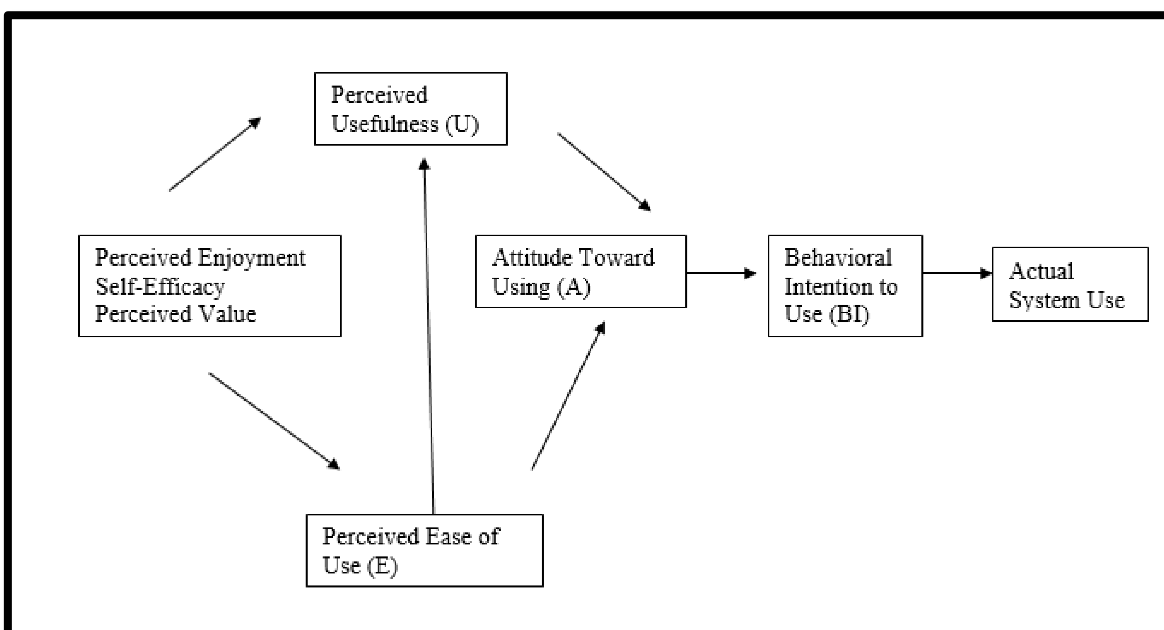

Figure 1. Schema of the Research Framework

Technology Acceptance Model

According to the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), or TAM, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are the two elements that affect whether potential users will embrace a computer system. This model characterizes how the potential user thinks. Key trait, precisely, even though the inventor of a technology product might/believe it is practical and user-friendly, the product won't be accepted by potential customers until those consumers hold the same opinions/ views. TAM's primary goal is to unveil the truth of the mechanisms underlying technology to acknowledge forecast conduct and offer an analytical justification for effective technology deployment. The goal of TAM is to inform practitioners about possible measures that may be taken before implementing systems. Usefulness is the individual's perception of the extent to which the use of a given technology improves performance, defined as perceived usefulness. Ease of use is defined as no effort required when using some system by someone. This construct is developed from the idea of self-efficacy, which signifies an opinion of how well a person can handle activities for a potential task. Self-efficacy was said to be a predictor in choosing how to use technology. It was defined as the degree to which individuals find innovation challenging to understand and use. Also, perceived ease of use shared a similarity with the complexity factor theorized in the innovation diffusion literature as a barrier to innovation adoption.*Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, and User Acceptance of Information Technology. MIS Quarterly*

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aims to determine the readiness factors of the customers to accept self-service digital kiosks at fast food restaurants in Toledo City. Specifically, this study aimed to address the following: (1) Describe the profile of the respondents as to age, highest educational attainment, and household income. (2) Determine the readiness factors influencing the acceptability of customers on the digital kiosks in the fast-food restaurants in Toledo City, as to the Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Enjoyment, Self-Efficacy, Perceived Value, and Behavioural Intention. (3) Examine significant relationship between profile of the respondents and readiness factors. (4) Based on the results of the study, discuss the recommendations.

II. METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the thorough research methodology used, covering important topics like the study's design, respondent selection, sample methods, research settings, instrumentation, data analysis strategies, data collection processes, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative correlational type of research using a descriptive survey design to determine the customers' readiness factors for accepting the self-service digital kiosks at fast food restaurants in Toledo City. The researchers focused only on understanding customers' readiness for the digital kiosk. This study consists of many variables. Non-experimental empirical research with erotic thinking is a type of non-experiment that involves numerical measurement concerning the variables and the investigation into the possibility that such variables are connected, and if so, the positive or negative connection is identified.

Research Setting

The research setting of the study was the three restaurants in Toledo City; digital kiosks have emerged as powerful tools in today's technology-driven world, revolutionizing the way businesses engage with customers and enhance user experiences with their sleek designs and user-friendly interfaces; digital kiosks provide a seamless and efficient means of interaction, making them a valuable asset for various industries, including retail, hospitality, healthcare, transportation, and beyond. In this guide, the researchers delved into digital kiosks, exploring their features, benefits, and applications and examining how they reshape customer engagement and transform business operations.

Sampling Design

The respondents were selected by using a stratified sampling technique. The respondents answered the questionnaire on the readiness factors of the customers about self-service digital kiosks through Google Forms. Only 251 customers in different generational ranges voluntarily responded to the survey.

Research Instrument

The researchers adopted and modified questionnaires by Rastegar, N., Flaherty, J., Liang, L.L., and Choi, H. C. (2018) in their study entitled "The adoption of self-service kiosks in quick service restaurants." The questionnaire consists of two parts: the demographic profile to identify the respondents' age, education, and income. The second part is the list of factors of the customer's readiness to use digital kiosks, such as Ease of Use, Usefulness, Perceived Enjoyment, Self-Efficacy, Perceived Value, Satisfaction, and Behavioral Intention, to identify what factors customers encounter.

The paper underwent a validity test with three research experts as validators, which yielded an acceptable result. Further, the paper also went through a reliability test using Cronbach's alpha result of 0.9826

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Data Gathering Procedures

A letter of request to the College of Business Administration to conduct the study was approved. The questionnaires were administered using Google Forms. The researchers explained to respondents how valuable their response was to the study. The researchers also clarified how the respondents answered appropriately according to their knowledge of the subject of the study.

After the respondents answered the questionnaire, the researcher collected and tallied the data for interpretation.

Analysis of Data

The data gathered were analyzed using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient. Pearson's correlation coefficient is meant to measure a linear relationship's strength as well as the direction between 2 variables. It ranges from -1 to 1- one implying a complete negative correlation while another implying a positive. ANOVA is a statistical technique employed to examine variations in mean values across multiple groups within a sample. This method evaluates whether all group means are equivalent, as posited by the null hypothesis, or if evidence suggests at least one group mean differs from the rest, as the alternative hypothesis proposes. ANOVA finds frequent application in experimental studies, facilitating comparisons of means among three or more groups. Gather data from different groups or treatments that you want to compare. Ensure that your data meets the assumptions of ANOVA, including normality and homogeneity of variables.

The following scale was used to interpret the weighted mean.

Table 1: Descriptive Ratings for Data Interpretation

Statistical Level	Description
1.00-1.80	Highly Unacceptable
1.81-2.60	Slightly Unacceptable
2.61-3.40	Undecided
3.41-4.20	Slightly Acceptable
4.21-5.00	Acceptable

Table 2: Interpretation of Pearson’s correlation coefficient values

Interval Coefficient	Description
0.80-1.00	Very Strong
0.60-0.79	Strong
0.40-0.59	Moderate
0.20-0.39	Weak
0.00-0.19	Very Weak

Ethical Consideration

Before conducting the study, it was submitted to the university institutional review board of the research ethics committee for technical and ethical review. Moreover, it was approved and given the notice to proceed certificate with a reference number of **2024-100.**

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the study's results on the readiness factors of the Customers to accept the Self-Service Digital Kiosks at Fast Food Restaurants in Toledo.

Table 3

Demographic Profile of the Respondents (n=251)

PROFILE	Frequency	Percent
Age		
18-27 (Gen Z: Born 1997-2012)	130	51.79
28-43 (Millennials: Born 1981-1996)	80	31.87
44-59 (Gen X: Born 1965-1980)	33	13.15
60-69 (Boomers: Born 1955-1964)	8	3.19
Highest Educational Attainment		
Elementary	16	6.38
High School	68	27.09
College	167	66.53
Monthly Household Income		
0-3,000	57	22.71
3,000-5,000	27	10.76
5,000-10,000	43	17.13
10,000-15,000	43	17.13
15,000-20,000	42	16.73
20,000 Up	39	15.54

As shown in Table 3, in the age section, the majority, 130(51.79%) of the respondents were between the ages of 18 to 27(Gen Z: Born 1997 to 2012), while the minority, 8(3.19%) of the respondents were between older people of 60 to 69 (Boomers: Born 1955 to 1964). This shows that most respondents are Gen Z, according to the generational gaps. According to Bracken (2022), research by the tech company Vita Mojo found that more than 60% of millennials and nearly 80% of Gen Zers had easier navigating a kiosk-based menu than a menu board. They also picked items they wanted with greater ease.

Moreover, most respondents were college students, with 167 (66.53%). In a study by Lee (2008), College students were considered suitable candidates for the initial survey as they regularly utilize TBSS kiosks across different retail outlets. They were taking part in the survey before the main study was optional. Only suitable individuals/students who had a self-checkout or information about a kiosk at least once were included in the survey. The majority attained some college degree or higher education. 57(22.71%) respondents had a household income of ₱0-₱3,000. Arun (2015) states that street vending has become increasingly significant in contemporary society.

Research indicates that street vendors show less inclination towards adopting Self-Service Technologies (SSTs) compared to formal wage workers, while consumers' preferences are influenced primarily by age, gender, and income.

Table 4

The readiness factors influencing the acceptability of customers on the digital kiosks in the fast-food restaurants in Toledo City

Factors	(x)	SD	Interpretation
Ease of Use	3.93	0.34	Slightly Acceptable
Perceived Usefulness	4.06	0.32	Slightly Acceptable
Perceived Enjoyment	3.86	0.32	Slightly Acceptable
Self-Efficacy	3.79	0.44	Slightly Acceptable
Perceived Value	3.78	0.34	Slightly Acceptable
Behavioural Intention	3.83	0.4	Slightly Acceptable
Average Weighted Mean	**3.88**	**0.28**	**Slightly Acceptable**

Note. (x)- Weighted mean, (SD) - Standard Deviation

In Table 4 presents that Perceived usefulness is the most readiness factor with a weighted mean of 4.06 (SD=0.32) that can influence the acceptability of customers on the digital kiosks in fast food restaurants in Toledo City, followed by Ease of Use with a weighted mean of 3.93 (SD=0.34), Perceived Enjoyment with a mean of 3.86 (SD=0.32), Behavioural Intention mean of 3.83 (SD=0.4), Self-Efficacy mean of 3.79 (SD=0.44) and last in the list is Perceived Value with a weighted mean of 3.78 (SD=0.34). The results contradict the study of Raztegar (2018), which states that innate drive (perceived enjoyment) significantly impacted customer satisfaction. In contrast, external incentives (perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use) had no bearing on customer satisfaction. Self-efficacy exerted a more significant influence on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations compared to trust. In the study of (Peng, 2019) after examining data obtained from an online survey conducted by AMOS, the findings revealed that the perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (two components within the Technology Acceptance Model) exerted a notable impact on the adoption of MMK (Mobile Marketing). (Michael Yao-Ping Peng, 2022) The findings strongly support all hypotheses. Technology readiness positively influences both perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness.

Based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) Model, it adopts two perceptions: Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use. The model explains why people would go with these options. They do this because of theorized usefulness as well as ease of access.

Further, the results align with the study as Perceived Usefulness and Ease of Use are the top factors influencing customers' acceptability of the digital kiosks in the fast-food restaurants in Toledo City

Table 5

Correlation Analysis between Readiness Factors and Age

Profile	Ease of Use	Perceived Usefulness	Perceived Enjoyment	Self-Efficacy	Perceived Value	Behavioral Intention
Age	-0.99	0.97	0.94	0.80	0.84	0.97

Ho: There is no significant relationship on the Age and Readiness Factors (Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Enjoyment, Self-Efficacy, Perceived Value & Behavioral Intention) to accept self-service digital kiosks.
Ha: There is significant relationship on the Age and Readiness Factors (Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Enjoyment, Self-Efficacy, Perceived Value & Behavioral Intention) to accept self-service digital kiosks.

Table 5 displays the results of a correlation analysis between Readiness factors and age. The numbers in the table represent correlation coefficients, which indicate the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. Ease of Use and Age: There is a very strong negative correlation of -0.99. This suggests that as age increases, there is a significant decrease in readiness factors related to ease of use, or vice versa. Perceived Usefulness and Age: There is a strong positive correlation of 0.97. This indicates that as age increases, perceived usefulness also tends to increase, or vice versa. Perceived Enjoyment and Age: There is a strong positive correlation of 0.94. This suggests that as age increases, perceived enjoyment of the subject matter also tends to increase, or vice versa. Self-Efficacy and Age: There is a strong positive correlation of 0.80. This implies that as age increases, self-efficacy, or belief in one's ability to perform a specific task, also tends to increase, or vice versa. Perceived Value and Age: There is a strong positive correlation of 0.84. This indicates that as age increases, perceived value of the readiness factors also tends to increase, or vice versa. Behavioral Intention and Age: There is a strong positive correlation of 0.97. This suggests that as age increases, behavioral intention, or the willingness to engage in certain behaviors related to readiness factors, also tends to increase, or vice versa.

Table 6

Correlation Analysis between Readiness Factors and Household Income

Profile	Ease of Use	Perceived Usefulness	Perceived Enjoyment	Self-Efficacy	Perceived Value	Behavioral Intention
Household Income	0.74	0.67	0.80	0.79	0.71	0.80

Ho: There is no significant relationship on the Household Income and Readiness Factors (Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Enjoyment, Self-Efficacy, Perceived Value & Behavioral Intention) to accept self-service digital kiosks.
Ha: There is significant relationship on the Household Income and Readiness Factors (Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Enjoyment, Self-Efficacy, Perceived Value & Behavioral Intention) to accept self-service digital kiosks.

Table 6 shows the correlation analysis between Readiness factors and Household Income. Ease of Use and Household Income (0.74): A strong positive correlation of 0.74 indicates that there is a significant increase in readiness factors, specifically ease of use, as household income increases. This suggests that as income rises, individuals find it easier to engage with the technology or system. Perceived Usefulness and Household Income (0.67): A strong positive correlation of 0.67 suggests that perceived usefulness increases as household income increases. This means that individuals with higher income levels perceive the technology or system as more useful. Perceived Enjoyment and Household Income (0.80): A very strong positive correlation of 0.80 indicates that perceived enjoyment increases as household income rises. Higher-income individuals tend to find more enjoyment in using the technology or system. Self-Efficacy and Household Income (0.79): A strong positive correlation of 0.79 suggests that self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations, increases with higher household income. Individuals with higher income levels tend to have higher self-efficacy in using the technology or system. Perceived Value and Household Income (0.71): A strong positive correlation of 0.71 indicates that perceived value, the perceived benefits or worth of the technology or system, increases with higher household income. Individuals with higher income levels see more value in technology. Behavioral Intention and Household Income (0.80):

A very strong positive correlation of 0.80 suggests that behavioral intention, the willingness to use the technology or system, increases as household income rises. Higher-income individuals are more likely to intend to use the technology.

Table 7

One-way ANOVA between Readiness Factors and Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	N	Mean	SD	F	df	p value
Elementary	16	3.85	0.52			
High School	68	3.69	0.81	0.69	250	0.64
College	167	3.94	0.71			

Table 7 shows that the mean Readiness Factors of Elementary was 3.85 (SD= 0.52), while those High Schools reflected a mean score of 3.69 (SD=0.81). On the other hand, the College reflected a mean score of 3.94 (SD= 0.71). Based on the table, the F-value is reported as 0.69, indicating that the variation between the group means is relatively small compared to the variation between groups. The p-value is stated as 0.64, suggesting that there is insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis of differences in readiness factors between the educational attainments. In other words, the results

indicate that any observed differences in readiness factors among groups could likely be due to chance rather than an actual difference.

Table 8

One-way ANOVA between Readiness Factors and Age

Educational Attainment	N	Mean	SD	F	df	p value
18-27 (Gen Z: Born 1997-2012)	130	3.59	0.22			
28-43 (Millennials: Born 1981-1996)	80	3.46	0.22			
44-59 (Gen X: Born 1965-1980)	33	2.78	0.29			
				1.42	250	0.28
60-69 (Boomers: Born 1955-1964)	8	1.89	0.5			

Table 8 shows that the mean of Readiness Factors of Gen Z was

3.59(SD=0.22), the Mean for Millennials was 3.46 (SD=0.22), the Mean for Gen X was 2.78 (SD=0.29), and Boomers had a mean of 1.89 (SD=0.5). Based on the information in the table, the F- value of 1.42 and the p-value of 0.28 indicate no significant difference in "Readiness Factors" across the different educational attainment groups for the specified generation.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to determine the readiness factors of the customers to accept self- service digital kiosks at fast food restaurants in Toledo City. Based on the study's findings, Perceived Usefulness and Ease of Use are the top factors influencing customers' adaptability to digital kiosks in fast-food restaurants in Toledo City. The results aligned with the TAM Model, which is the model that explains why people would choose to use a particular technology. It adopts two perceptions. This study found that perceiving the digital kiosks might be beneficial to them. The respondents recognized the benefits and advantages given by these digital kiosks. Also, the study revealed that using self-service digital kiosks is significantly influenced based on the profile of the respondents. Overall, these findings suggest that age, highest educational attainment, and household income are factors that may have an impact on readiness levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, the researchers shared recommendations highlighting how the company can emphasize the value of using kiosks on the part of the customer.

Despite their potential, many consumers could ignore or underuse kiosk services because they are unaware of or don’t comprehend their advantages.

Thus, to improve consumer engagement and satisfaction, businesses must implement methods that communicate the value of using kiosks. Businesses should ensure that, via various mediums, including digital displays.

Based on the results, the researchers shared recommendations highlighting how the company can emphasize the value of using kiosks on the part of the customer. Despite their potential, many consumers could ignore or underuse kiosk services because they are unaware of or don’t comprehend their advantages. Thus, to improve consumer engagement and satisfaction, businesses must implement methods that communicate the value of using kiosks.

Businesses should ensure that, via various mediums, including digital displays, marketing materials, and signs, clients are informed about the advantages of utilizing kiosks concisely and clearly. Key benefits like convenience, time-saving, and individualized attention can be emphasized to clients to encourage them to use kiosks.

Researchers should direct marketing efforts toward those who already have higher levels of preparedness for this technology, stress its convenience and benefits, educate them about it through various channels such as social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs, etc., also consider different approaches based on where each individual falls under these categories.

The researchers also recommend these to future researchers to investigate other factors, such as why people engage in the traditional ordering of food at the kitchen counter versus this self-service kiosk.

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PRICING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY SELECTED RETAIL STORES IN POBLACION, TOLEDO CITY

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ABSTRACT

The research titled "Pricing Strategies Employed by Selected Retail Stores in Poblacion, Toledo City" was carried out, with ten retail stores as respondents of this study found in Poblacion, Toledo City as respondents. The study employed the convenience sampling technique, obtaining consent from store owners to participate in the research. After receiving consent, the respondents were given a survey questionnaire. Descriptive quantitative research was used to analyze the pricing strategies of the selected retail stores, determining the frequency and mean score to rank the most utilized strategies. Other retail stores recommended implementing the pricing strategy with the highest mean score. The researchers used a researcher-made questionnaire based on their observations and modified questions from previous studies to gather accurate data from the respondents. Once the data was collected, the researchers tabulated, interpreted, and analyzed the results before presenting them. The findings revealed that Cost-plus pricing was the most prevalent strategy among the 10 retail stores, leading the researchers to recommend its adoption by other retail stores and shopping categories.

Given that other retail stores utilized multiple pricing strategies, the researchers suggested that Cost-plus pricing is the most effective and fundamental strategy, leading to increased profitability, competitive advantages, and higher sales. Additionally, the researchers recommended that future studies include obtaining retail stores' monthly or yearly income and expanding the survey scope within Toledo City. The data obtained from the income of the respondents will serve as additional supporting evidence that the retail store employing a particular strategy is either effective or not in securing profit, sales, and competition.

Keywords: *Pricing Strategies, Retail Stores, Sari-Sari Stores, Cost-plus Pricing, Premium Pricing, Penetration Pricing, Bundle Pricing, Competition-based Pricing, Premium Pricing*

I.INTRODUCTION

The pricing of a commodity is complex and dynamic, particularly for retail stores, both large, medium, and small-scale enterprises, because from time to time, the management needs to come up with different pricing strategies considered appropriate for the exchange of goods and services between the customers as well as for the maximization of profits and sales of the store. Properly implementing pricing strategies is crucial for micro-scale enterprises due to their unstable and unstructured pricing strategies. Unlike well-established macro-scale enterprises with pricing structure and stability, medium and micro-scale stores face uncertainty in stabilizing and finding the appropriate pricing strategies to help small-scale enterprises match and achieve growth and sustainability like large-scale enterprises. In the long run, a company's profitability is determined by the price of its goods, which affects its sales revenue. Price is the foundation for the company's profit-making process, in which the proper price must be set to cover manufacturing costs, achieve profitability, and maintain operations. Price is a critical marketing mix component, representing corporate goals and strategies. To find the best pricing plan that maximizes revenue while considering customers' perceived value, businesses must thoroughly assess their cost structures, market demand, and competition.

Moreover, this chapter reviews "Emerging retailer pricing trends and practices" and states that to begin describing the latest retail environment, retail businesses should focus on the changes in consumer demand, competition, and cost of previous pricing opportunities and challenges retailer stores have encountered and make amendments from those opportunities and challenges. This statement is reflected in the medium- to small-scale enterprises in Poblacion, Toledo City, which faced the same challenges as every micro-retail store in employing different and appropriate pricing strategies. The implication of an inappropriate pricing strategy in achieving the company's revenue and target markets is the improper distribution of the management of entire operations from the production, distribution pricing, and selling of goods to end-users. These implications will lead companies to lose competition, leading to less revenue and fewer loyal or potential customers. The significance of pricing in micro-stores is in obtaining profitability and return on capital to achieve sustainability. This journal titled "Recent Trends and Emerging Practices in Retailer Pricing" mentions that profitability in retail stores has become prime importance in retailing industries. (Bolton, 2010. Et al.).

Pricing strategies are perceived as critical factors in retail management, particularly in grocery stores that operate at a low margin and need help to gain competitive advantages and win consumers. (Fassnacht & El Husseini, 2013). Proper commodity pricing will involve grocery stores in competition in the market. More and more customers are also competing for a valuable product at an acceptable price. This will be essential for medium- and small-scale enterprises when pricing.

Pricing strategies are one of the most essential components that can affect the operation of micro-retail stores and other retail industries. The study's findings will significantly contribute to small-scale stores and other retail businesses facing the same issues and challenges in implementing stable and structured pricing strategies. Its impact on retail stores is that understanding and knowing the factors driving customers away from purchasing will allow store owners or the management to change their pricing strategies. It will provide them with an overview of what pricing tactics and strategies are more efficient and effective to gain a competitive advantage, attracting more consumers, and then maximizing profit. Thus, it will allow the management to test which price strategies can attract consumers, maximize revenue, and be competitive. More importantly, the findings of this study will empower retail stores as it will provide them with outlines and roadmaps on which pricing plan they will include in their operation and the circumstances they will undertake in the future—such as understanding the various pricing techniques, determining the most effective method, determining the strategy that yields the lowest profit, and determining the strategy that yields the highest profit.

The researcher's determination and interest in this study will make the researchers more curious about conducting the research and serve as an inspiration and motivation for the next generation of researchers and scholars. The potential for this study to inspire and motivate future researchers is significant, as it will demonstrate the value and impact of research in retail management and marketing.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Figure 1.
Schema of the Research Framework

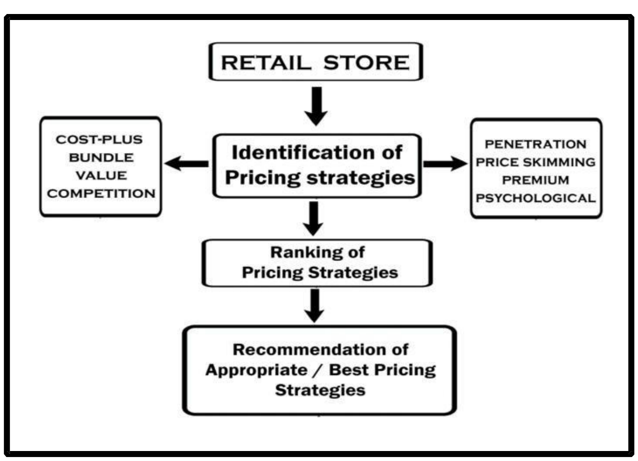

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. The framework illustrates the researcher's concept and framework for this study. In this quantitative study, the researcher's primary goal is to determine how retail stores use pricing strategies to understand and analyze the market's competitive dynamics. The research seeks to identify the mechanisms underlying retail success and competitiveness by emphasizing pricing strategies, product differentiation, and market efficiency.

The retail stores identified are ranked according to their highest and lowest average values. For other retail stores, the pricing strategy with the highest value among the pricing strategies is recommended. One of the results of implementing the appropriate and best pricing strategy in retail stores is to enable these different retail stores to gain a competitive advantage by analyzing and interpreting the price war between competitors, attracting potential customers that could benefit the retail stores in the industry to achieve profit targets. This study is specifically tailored to small retailers who do not have fixed pricing strategies and inadequate monthly or annual revenue or profit records because they are small-scale businesses. Through a quantitative analysis of pricing decisions and marketing efficiency data, the study aims to provide practical insights and practical recommendations for retail stores located in the Poblacion of Toledo. This recommendation concept helps retailers increase profitability, navigate competitive challenges, and achieve sustainable growth.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This research examines the pricing strategies employed among the selected retail stores in Poblacion, Toledo City, which will help researchers determine and recommend the appropriate pricing strategies. This study seeks to examine and achieve the following:

1. Identify the pricing strategies used by the selected retail stores
2. Determine which selected retail stores used the different pricing strategies categorized in terms of the length of operation and the frequency of utilization
3. Determine which pricing strategy has the highest average utilization
4. Recommend the best pricing strategy for the retail stores.

II.METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses and explains the different methodologies and designs employed that are considered relevant in this study. This chapter covers the sampling, population, the data collection process, ethical considerations, and data analysis of the subject.

In addition, this chapter presents the location of the study, research design, data collection process, type of data gathered, and management procedures.

Research Design

The researchers utilized the quantitative descriptive research design to describe the population's characteristics. The descriptive research design of this study is crucial for selecting the respondents. The researchers utilized this to determine and choose the study's respondents. The nature of this research study is aimed and targeted only to precisely assess and address the issues encountered in the pricing strategies of the selected retail stores. The researchers carefully crafted the quantitative descriptive study to ensure the description of each population is accurate and complete. The data collection process should be unbiased, and the interpretation and analysis of data are free or reduced from error.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in Poblacion, Toledo City, where the different populations of this study are clustered and gathered in one area of the location. Moreover, the researchers examined the various pricing strategies employed by these selected retail stores found in Poblacion, Toledo City that have the possibility of obtaining all relevant and necessary information for this study and to help these retail stores maximize profit and gain a competitive advantage to other micro-enterprises that will enhance learning to the retail store management. The respondents were ten (10) retail stores to focus more on the study's data quality, results, and findings. Each of these retail stores had the same categories and product offerings to evaluate the retail store's pricing strategies employed to create a recommendation in which pricing strategies are appropriate to be implemented for a particular product.

Sampling Design

The researchers employed the convenience sampling method to select the participants from a population to collect information relevant to the problems surrounding the ten (10) selected retail stores, the sari-sari stores, since it is the most accessible access for the researchers to gather data from the population. The researchers use convenience sampling because the units selected of the population and the characteristics, such as the pricing strategies of the retail stores, are required for the reliability of results in this study by obtaining the appropriate sample.

Research Instrument

The modified questionnaire was based on the researchers' observations, previous studies, and published and unpublished articles relevant to the study. To get the appropriate data needed for this study. A five-point Likert scale was used to randomly select participants at the Poblacion, Toledo City, intended for the Retail Store Owners. The questionnaire has two parts: Part (I), which is the profile of the respondents by determining the business name and length of business operation, and Part (II), which contains questions surrounding the pricing strategies utilized by the store owners. A twenty-six-item questionnaire was used to identify, evaluate, and rank the pricing strategies that yield the highest value. These were measured on the five-point Likert scale: 5 - Strongly Agree, 4 - Agree, 3 - Neutral, 2 - Disagree, and 1 - Strongly Disagree. Professionals of the University of the Visayas evaluated the research questionnaire. The reliability test results show that the questionnaire passed the validity test with an overall Cronbach Alpha result of .775.

Data Gathering Procedures

A letter of request to the College of Business Administration to conduct the study was approved. The questionnaires were administered to the ten retail stores. The researchers explained to respondents how valuable their responses were to the study. Further, they clarified how the respondents answered appropriately according to their knowledge of the subject of the study.

After the respondents answered the questionnaire, the researcher collected and tallied the data for interpretation.

Analysis of Data

The data gathered by the researchers will be carefully analyzed, interpreted, and evaluated accordingly. The specific data treatment for this study to examine and determine the pricing strategies utilized by selected retail stores is obtained through the following.

Frequency. This is a key tool in this study to figure out the repetitive number of answers from the respondents in terms of which of the different pricing strategies the stores usually employ on their products. The data collected were tallied and presented as a table by counting the respondents' repetitive answers.

Mean. The mean was also used to calculate the average responses of the respondents of this study. The mean allows the researchers to identify the highest and lowest value of the items in terms of how the respondents firmly agree, disagree, and are neutral in answering the questions surrounding the use of different pricing strategies in the respondents' retail stores. The mean is calculated by adding all numbers in the data set and dividing it by the total data set number. The mean range used in this study is 1.00 – 1.79 Strong Disagree, 1.80 – 2.59 Disagree, 2.60 – 3.39 Neutral,3.40 – 4.19 Agree and 4.20 – 5.00 Strongly Agree.

Ethical Consideration

Before conducting the study, it was submitted to the university institutional review board of the research ethics committee for technical and ethical review. Moreover, it was approved, and the notice to proceed certificate with a reference number of **2024-270** was given

IV.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the study's results on the pricing strategies employed by selected retail stores in Poblacion, Toledo City.

Table 1

Pricing strategies used by the selected retail stores

Pricing Strategies	Frequency	Rank
Cost Plus Pricing	10	1
Competition- based pricing	8	2
Premium pricing	7	3
Penetration pricing	6	4
Bundle pricing	4	5
Psychological pricing	3	6

Table 1 shows a comprehensive overview of the pricing strategies implemented by a selection of Sari-Sari Stores in Poblacion Toledo City. It classifies them into six distinct categories: cost-plus Pricing, Competition-based pricing, Premium pricing, Penetration pricing, Bundle pricing, and Psychological pricing. Cost Plus Pricing emerges as the most frequently utilized strategy with ten occurrences. This is followed by Competition-based pricing with 8, Premium pricing with 7, Penetration pricing with 6, Bundle pricing with 4, and Psychological pricing with 3. These frequencies rank the strategies, positioning Cost Plus Pricing at the top as the most employed approach. At the same time, psychological pricing holds the lowest rank based on the result. This data provides valuable insights into the predominant pricing strategies favored by Sari-Sari Stores, specifically in Poblacion, Toledo City. Moreover, most respondents were college students, with 167 (66.53%). In a study by Lee (2008), College students were considered suitable candidates for the initial survey as they regularly utilize TBSS kiosks across different retail outlets. They were taking part in the survey before the main study was optional. Only suitable individuals/students who had a self-checkout or information about a kiosk at least once were included in the survey. The majority attained some college degree or higher education

Table 2

Retail stores and the different pricing strategies applied.

Name of stores	Length of Operation	Pricing Strategies	Frequency	Rank
C-Store, Wink store, D-N store.	7 years above	Cost-Plus Pricing	4	1
		Penetration pricing	3	2
		Competition based/ psychological pricing	2	3
		Premium pricing	1	4
Eliza store, DP store, Dw store, Gy store	5-6 years	Competition based pricing	4	1
		Cost-Plus/ Premium Pricing	2	2
		Penetration pricing	1	3
AL store, Wb store, CL store	3-4 years	Cost-plus/premium pricing	4	1
		Penetration pricing/ Bundle pricing	2	2
		Competition based/ psychological pricing	1	3

The table analyzes pricing strategies selected retail stores employ in Poblacion, Toledo City. These are categorized by their operational longevity and the frequency of strategy implementation. For stores in operation for seven years or more, Cost-Plus Pricing emerges as the predominant strategy. This is followed by penetration pricing. It suggests buying products with an encouraging approach. Penetration pricing may indicate a plan to gain market share through lower prices.

In contrast, stores with 5-6 years of operation favor competition-based pricing as the most utilized strategy. This potentially reflects a continued focus on market expansion by simply analyzing competitor's prices to attract customers. The prevalence of Cost-Plus Pricing in this category may signify sustained emphasis on cost considerations. With the stores operating for 3-4 years, the continued dominance of Cost-Plus Pricing implies consistent reliance on cost-based pricing models. In addition, premium pricing may suggest a shift towards capturing value from customers since it is the same as cost-plus pricing. The data underscores the evolving nature of pricing strategies. This relates to the maturity of retail businesses. It offers valuable insights into

the strategic choices made by stores at different stages of operation.

Table 3

Most utilized pricing strategy.

Pricing Strategies	Weighted mean	Rank
Cost Plus Pricing	4.13	1
Competition-based pricing	4.03	2
Premium pricing	3.95	3
Penetration pricing	3.53	4
Bundle pricing	3.33	5
Psychological pricing	2.97	6

Table 3 presents the highest average utilization by selected sari-sari stores in Poblacion, Toledo City. It goes beyond just counting how many stores use each strategy. Using the "Weighted Mean" term reveals how heavily each strategy is used on average. The table shows that Sari-sari stores overwhelmingly favor Cost-Plus Pricing (4.13 weighted mean). They add a markup to the wholesale price to set their selling price. This strategy ensures they make a profit on each item sold. But competition is fierce. Competition-Based Pricing comes in a close second (4.03 weighted mean). Many sari-sari stores closely watch what their rivals charge for similar items. Making sure their prices stay competitive. This table shows that sari-sari stores juggle two key things: making a profit and keeping their prices attractive to customers.

Table 3.1

Pricing Strategies Utilized by Selected Retail Stores

Pricing Strategies	Retail Store	Mean
	GY Store	5.00
	D-N Store	4.50
Cost-plus Pricing	DW Store	3.75
	Wink Store	4.00
	DJ Sari-Sari Store	5.00
Premium Pricing	Eliza Store	4.07
	Wink Store	4.00
	WB Merchandise	4.67
	CL Store	4.00
	DJ Sari-Sari Store	5.00
	D-N Store	5.00
Competition based pricing	Wink Store	4.00
	C-Store	5.00
Psychological Pricing	AL Store	4.67
Bundle Pricing	DJ Sari-Sari Store	5.00

Table 3.1 presents a comprehensive analysis of the pricing strategies adopted by sari-sari stores in Poblacion, Toledo City. The data reveals a preference for cost-plus pricing among establishments such as GY Sari2x Store (mean score: 5, indicating a high preference), DW Sari2x Store (mean score: 3.75, indicating a moderate preference), and Wink Store (mean score: 4.00, indicating a moderate preference). This strategy involves adding mark-up prices to the products or summing up the costs of products before selling to the customers. Because a price increase can be easily justified to customers by pointing out that rising production costs are the cause of the price increase, cost-plus pricing makes it easier for sellers to set a price that covers their costs while leaving a reasonable margin for profit. It also makes it easier to set contracts with suppliers, who typically prefer to lock in a price that locks in set profits over a less predictable model (Kenton, 2022).

Premium pricing is another notable strategy to maximize profit margins for specific items. It is embraced by stores including Eliza Sari2x Store (mean score: 4.07), WB General Merchandise (mean score: 4.67), CL Store (mean score: 4.00), and DJ Sari2x Store (mean score: 5.00), which involves setting higher prices to cultivate a perception of superior product quality among customers. This approach, known as premium pricing, is employed by businesses to establish a luxurious brand image and position their products above the standard market average. By doing so, they create a link between higher prices and higher value, ultimately strengthening their overall market position through the enhanced perception of quality (Jayachandran, 2024).

Competition-based pricing, which employs pricing tactics designed to have a psychological impact on consumers, is evident in the practices of D-N Sari2x Store (mean score:5.00), Wink Store (mean score: 4.00), and C-18 Store (mean score: 5.00). This strategy suggests a sophisticated understanding of consumer behavior and the influence of price perception on purchasing decisions. Psychological pricing leverages strategic price points to influence customer behavior and perceptions. This strategy hinges on understanding how consumers react emotionally to specific prices, ultimately making products or services appear more appealing (Huthwaite, n.d.). Psychological pricing tactics may encompass time-limited offers or a sense of manufactured scarcity, fostering a sense of urgency that compels quicker purchasing decisions. These methods go beyond simply attracting customers; they subtly influence how customers perceive value, steering them toward a perception of a lower price or a more favorable deal (Priceva, 2023)

AL Store predominantly uses psychological pricing (mean score: 4.67), suggesting a strategic focus on offering competitive prices to attract a more budget-conscious consumer. This customer-centric strategy enables businesses to maximize profitability while ensuring high customer satisfaction. By meticulously considering the perceived value of a brand, its products, features, and related services, companies can differentiate themselves from competitors and foster stronger customer loyalty. Ultimately, this approach contributes to sustainable financial success (Understanding Value-based Pricing: Advantages, Benefits, and Misconceptions, n.d.). Furthermore, the Wink Store demonstrates a unique combination of cost-plus, premium, and competition-based pricing strategies; DJ Store also utilizes three pricing strategies: Premium Pricing, Cost-plus Pricing, and bundle Pricing. D-N Store uses two approaches, competition-based pricing and cost-plus pricing, which indicate a multifaceted approach to pricing that may appeal to various consumer segments.

CONCLUSION

This study, which specifically investigated how micro-scale stores like sari-sari stores price their products to achieve growth and compete effectively, presents findings particularly relevant to micro-scale store owners. The findings show that most stores rely on the cost-plus pricing strategy, which involves adding a markup to the cost price to get the selling price. It's popular because it's simple.

However, the study highlights the limitations of cost-plus pricing. Unlike larger stores with a wider variety of products, sari-sari stores often sell single items or small packs readily available. This limits their ability to use other strategies like bundling or discounts, which are more common in larger stores with a broader product selection. Large stores can also leverage economies of scale to offer competitive prices on a broader range of products. This makes it harder for micro-scale stores to compete solely based on cost-plus pricing.

In conclusion, while the study suggests cost-plus pricing is popular among sari-sari stores due to its simplicity, micro-scale stores might benefit from exploring other pricing strategies alongside it. This could involve considering customer preferences and competitor pricing to optimize their pricing approach for growth and profitability.

Limitations

The study exhibits several limitations. Firstly, the absence of demographic profiles for the respondents, precisely their monthly or yearly income, poses a challenge. The researchers were unable to obtain income data due to confidentiality concerns. Secondly, the study is confined to selected retail stores near Poblacion, Toledo City, focusing exclusively on Sari-Sari Stores. This narrow scope was chosen to compare pricing strategies among similar retail establishments. Lastly, the study's participant pool is limited to ten retail stores, restricting the ability to gather comprehensive insights into pricing strategies employed by other retail outlets.

Future Researchers

The researchers recommend that future studies broaden their scope. Instead of limiting themselves, future researchers should seek permission from store owners to include demographic profiles and precisely estimated monthly and yearly income of the retail store respondents. This information is crucial for understanding and assisting retail stores in achieving their financial objectives, including profit maximization through effective pricing strategies. Additionally, expanding the study's geographical location beyond Poblacion, Toledo City—where participant selection was limited—would allow for more relevant insights into diverse pricing strategies used

by retail stores across different Barangays in Toledo City. Such an expansion would facilitate comparisons among various retail stores and shed light on the impact and outcomes of distinct pricing strategies.

It's important to note that this study primarily focuses on Sari-Sari Stores in Poblacion, Toledo

City. Consequently, the findings may provide limited information on the diverse pricing strategies of other retail stores. Future researchers should consider expanding the respondent profile, increasing the number of participants, exploring different locations, and incorporating open-ended questions related to pricing strategies to enhance the study's value.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed based on the study's analysis, findings, and results. The researchers suggest that sari-sari stores adopt the Cost-plus pricing strategy for their commodities and other offerings. This approach allows them to set prices based solely on product costs, without external influences, by calculating costs and adding a predetermined markup percentage. By implementing cost-plus pricing, sari-

sari stores can make informed decisions about product pricing. According to Meydan Freezone's research in Meydan Road, Nad Al (2024), the cost-plus pricing model is commonly used by companies to ensure they cover expenses and generate profits. These establishments can achieve favorable profitability outcomes by applying cost-plus pricing in sari-sari stores. Consequently, this study recommends cost-plus pricing as an appropriate strategy for similar retail stores or shopping categories.

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CUSTOMER PREFERENCES ON THE PRODUCT PACKAGING OF FROSTY ICE CREAM AND CREAMY WAFFLE IN TOLEDO CITY

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on customer preferences regarding the iced coffee product packaging of Frosty Ice Cream and Creamy Waffle in Toledo City. This study aims to determine which packaging characteristics the customers prefer and how these preferences affect their buying behavior. We collected data from the respondents using a researcher-made questionnaire and analyzed the results using descriptive statistics. The results show that Shape S7 is popular among all the investigated shapes and is the favorite, whereas Shapes S4 and S5 come second and third in the list. Regarding the packaging design, customers prefer typography, visuals, and format. In conclusion, the study recommends redesigning new packaging designs that reflect the customers' choice to increase the marketability of Frosty Ice Cream and Creamy Waffle products.

Keywords: *Customer Preferences, shapes, Packaging, iced coffee and study*

I.INTRODUCTION

Product packaging is strategic in marketing and brand positioning in the competitive market. Quality packaging attracts consumer attention, communicates product benefits, and influences purchase decisions (Kuvykaite et al., 2021). Packaging is a strategic tool for market success because of these consumer and business advantages. This has become increasingly important as more products are released onto the market. The research demonstrates how important it is to connect packaging to marketing strategy. Utilizing packaging design for distinctiveness is a critical component of marketing (Rundh, 2016). Its packaging significantly influences customers' right-away impressions of a product. Packaging creates a lasting first impression that can positively or negatively influence purchasing decisions as one of the first touch points people experience with a brand. Buyers' emotional and analytical brain processes are stimulated using colors, images, fonts, and materials to evaluate products. Customers are emotionally drawn to a product and want to learn more when the design is appealing. Well-designed packaging logically communicates the value, benefits, and high quality of the contents, creating a rational case for selecting one product over another Ahmed, (2014). In the commercial food sector, packaging is essential for product differentiation, shelf appeal, convenience, portion control, and protection of contents (Salgado et al., 2021).

On the other hand, poor packaging lacks originality, compromises food safety, and affects a brand's reputation. Recent studies indicate that the majority of consumers decide whether to purchase food products within seconds by looking at front-of-pack labels and visual appeal (Gidlöf et. al., 2017). Hence, packaging significantly impacts consumer perceptions, decisions, and choices.

The business owner of Creamy Waffle and Frosty Ice Cream claims to have just introduced an additional product, which is an iced coffee. At the moment, it is packed in simple plastic containers. There are several problems with the existing product packaging that require attention. First, spills and leaks may occur because the cup lid is not well secured. Customers will also find it inconvenient to carry around the big container.

Moreover, it is not environmentally friendly. Lastly, the packaging is unsightly, detracting from the buyer's happiness. When taken as a whole, these problems degrade the consumer experience and must be resolved quickly to increase the product's marketability.

The study aims to evaluate the degree of client acceptance of the present packaging. This study aims to collect data on customer preferences and confirm the owner's assumptions. We can create innovative packaging that meets client requirements with the aid of the outcomes.

Understanding and following customer preference is a crucial aspect to consider in many businesses. It is clear how important product packaging is in conveying vital product information. Buyers make significant purchases based on their views of the underlying goods, which are principally impacted by several packaging elements. The package's physical design influences consumer emotions toward a product, which may even encourage purchase. According to research, packaging aspects like font, color, size, completeness, form, metaphor use, packaging flaws, etc., impact consumers' impressions and preferences. Customers tend to generate ideas about various goods, including food, based on how well they comprehend the numerous styles and visuals on the package that catch their attention. These views significantly influence consumer purchasing behavior at the point of purchase. Additionally, packaging aids businesses in choosing their positioning since consumers connect elements like color and logo placement with power and prestige (Lo & Huang, 2017).

Customers today, more than ever, want a product that looks good. Aside from the food product, one of the primary attractions is the packaging design. Packaging is heavily influenced by design. Customers can be drawn in, and the product can stand out from the competition with a premium packaging design.

The visual presence should convey the product's quality and a distinct personality, whether quirky, endearing, or honest. The Frosty Ice Cream & Creamy Waffle is a nascent snack bar enterprise recently introduced to the consumer market, marking its entry into the business industry. Packaging must be done correctly for the benefit of both customers and companies. It protects the product from the point of manufacturing till it reaches the customer's hands, maintaining its quality. Packaging is a means of presenting a brand to consumers and highlighting salient features. Innovative packaging improves user experience and, over time, raises brand recognition and fosters brand loyalty by providing adequate mobility and storage.

Pereira et al. (2022) found that product-specific factors such as flavor, ingredients, nutrition data, and packaging influence customers' decisions to purchase ice cream. Attractive and educational packaging makes innovative products like waffles and ice cream sandwiches lucrative and stand out. Recent studies have examined consumer preferences on ice-cream packaging attributes like shape, imagery, color, material, labeling, convenience, and eco-friendliness (Aday et al., Ugur. (2015); Eistys et al., 2021).

However, more studies need to be done on what makes packaging appealing, specifically for unique ice cream products like sandwiches and waffles. Indeed, there is a need to fill in this gap.

The present study on customer packaging preference will massively contribute to The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The SDGs, sometimes called the Global Goals, were enacted by the United Nations in 2015 as a global call to action to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, and guarantee that by 2030, everyone will experience peace and prosperity. The 17 SDGs understand that development must balance social, economic, and environmental sustainability and that actions in one area will impact results in others (United et al.,2023).

This study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 12 for responsible consumption and production. Analysis of consumer sentiments may serve as a driving force behind the creation of sustainably designed packaging that minimizes food waste, increases recyclability, and enhances transparency via labeling.

This aligns with SDG 12's emphasis on sustainable management and the economical use of natural resources. Packaging functionality may be balanced with sustainability concerns thanks to consumer data and perceptions.

Similarly, a paper by Fiore et al. (2023) also provided significant data, indicating that one of the most obvious ways to increase the sustainability of food packaging is to adhere to the 3Rs principle: reduce, reuse, and recycle. This entails developing packaging materials to be as light and as small as possible, making sure they can be reused again or easily refilled, and making sure they can be recycled or composted at the end of their useful lives. In this way, food packaging can contribute to waste reduction, resource conservation, reduced emissions, and prospects for the circular economy. This strategy can achieve some SDGs, including SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), designing packaging that satisfies customer preferences for convenience while being reusable, recyclable, or compostable at the end of life.

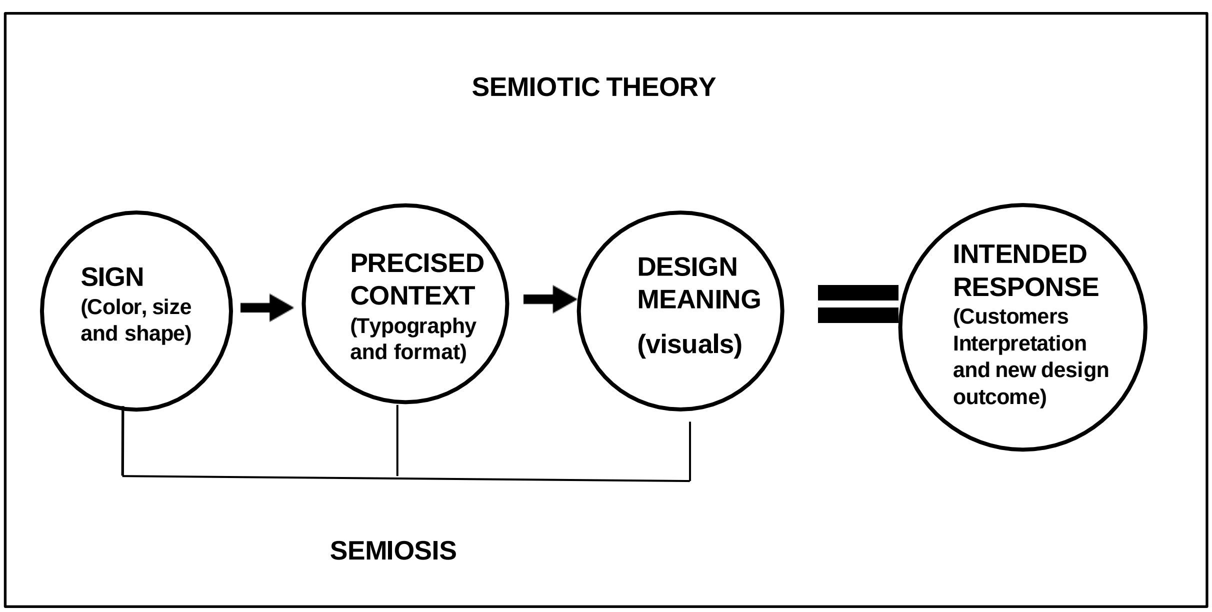
Most recent research on packaging has been on conventional ice cream tubs, cups, and bars; novel product forms have yet to be covered. For example, Badrinath et al. (2019) looked at the best way to package ice cream tubs and assessed factors that affect the design of ice cream sleeves.

Research on product packaging and customer preferences was done by Ampuero and Vila (2006), Polyakova (2013), Dolic et al. (2022), Mohebbi (2014), and Lal et al. (2015). Ampuero and Vila (2006) concentrated on how packaging designs affect consumers' buying decisions. Polyakova investigated the involvement of packaging design in the communication and marketing process in the same year, 2013, and how it influences the tendency to buy the product. In a study, Dolic et al. (2022) examines how color and form influence consumers' perception of the quality of packaged products. The application of color to the packaging for promotion and identification was analyzed by Mohebbi (2014). Last, Lal et al. (2015) comprehensively discussed and quantified consumer preference for different packaging patterns regarding several attributes such as age, residence type, etc. As much as this paper focused on the several parts of the packaging, everybody points out how design in HC packaging shifts consumers' perceptions, their preferences, and their choices (Ampuero & Vila, 2006; Dolic et al., 2022; Lal et al., 2015; Mohebbi, 2014; Polyakova, 2013). The Frosty Ice Cream & Creamy Waffle is a nascent snack bar enterprise recently introduced to the consumer market, marking its entry into the business industry. This is still a growing business. Our study aims to evaluate the current packaging of Frosty Ice Cream and Creamy Waffle Iced Coffee products and determine customer preferences through surveys to redesign the packaging.

Compared to the previous literature, which is more general regarding the undertaken goals and primarily uses secondary data, the present work is more specific concerning the object of investigation. It is based on the primary data obtained from a survey of students and regular customers to accurately point to the changes that should be made to the packaging of the product brand. We want to close the gaps by giving updated, context-specific information on preferred package components, including color, shape, sustainability, and overall product design, and by directly tying consumer survey responses to packaging enhancements for these enterprises.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Figure 1.
Schema of the Research Framework



The researchers utilized the Semiotic Theory by Ferdinand de Saussure in 1916, a theory that focuses on studying signs and symbols, also known as semiotics. This theory is instrumental in understanding the language or system components, how signs and symbols are interpreted and understood, and their impact on cultural and social aspects.

According to Yana Erlyana from the Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research Volume 512, Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Folklore, Language, Education and Exhibition (ICOFLEX 2019) in the study Semiotic Analysis of Packaging Designs in Promina Puffs Weaning Food, " The use of visual characters in packaging can help to strengthen the products or items' image and can be one- of -a -kind personality of the business or of the product itself."

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The main goal of this study is to evaluate the product's packaging design and create a more attractive packaging suggestion for the business. Another goal of this study is to design product packaging that will bring convenience and attraction to customers, which will help the brand strive, and keep up against other competitors, especially the prominent snack bar business. Specifically, this paper sought to address the following objectives.

1. Identify the profile of the respondents in terms of gender and educational level
2. Identify the customers’ level of acceptance with the current product packaging
3. Determine the preferences of people when it comes to packaging design of Iced Coffee as to color, size, shape, topography, format and visuals.
4. Based on the findings, we recommend to propose a new product packaging design.

II.METHODOLOGY

This chapter contains a discussion of the methodology used in the conduct of this study. It describes and expounds on the research method, research environment, research subjects and respondents, research instruments used, data gathering procedure, and sampling procedure. The method used in this study is the "semiotic approach," which has three essential elements: the sign, object, and interpretant. A sign brings something, the object is what it stands to, and the interpretant is determined or created by it in the exact correspondence with something.

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive approach systematically collects and analyzes numerical data to describe characteristics and patterns. Its purpose was to provide a comprehensive data summary to identify patterns, averages, make predictions, test causal relationships, and generalize results to wider populations.

Research Setting

The locale of this study is Toledo City, specifically Poloyapoy Street, Poblacion Toledo. It is on the side of the road across the University of the Visayas Toledo City Campus and is within walking distance of the PEGAFI School. It is an excellent location for a business because it is accessible and convenient for students. Also, the area of the said business is just along the road. It is easy and convenient for passers like riders, passengers, drivers, and tourists to locate where the company is.

Sampling Design

The research respondents were the business's specific customers, totaling 208. Utilizing the Raosoft calculator to determine the required sample size for each group separately at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, it determines that 208 responses are the needed sample size out of the 450 estimated number of customers.

Inclusion- Exclusion Criteria include students and regular customers (e.g., passengers, riders, bystanders, passers, and residents) (male or female), ideally ages eighteen (18) years old and above, to participate in the study. However, respondents below 18 years old were excluded from the study to ensure accurate and reliable data and from data treatment.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was developed by the researcher and validated by research experts. A reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's alpha, which resulted in 0.949, which suggests that the items in the scale are interrelated and certain. The researcher employed a survey questionnaire that was distributed electronically via Google Forms. Still, the researchers also provided a hard copy as an alternative for respondents who needed help accessing the online form. The survey questionnaire comprised at least 15 closed-ended questions answerable using a 5-point Likert scale: 5 strongly agree, 4- Agree, 3- Neutral, 2- disagree, and 1- Strongly Disagree, multiple choice. The first part is the demographic. The second part is the Existing Packaging Evaluation, which includes questions on the appeal, visibility, and ease of use of current packaging. Part III is the Customer Preferences on packaging design. This part also evaluated the attractive color themes (red, orange, green, yellow, pink, blue).

Data Gathering Procedures

The researchers conducted the study in four main steps: First, they prepared the researchers-made questionnaire and presented it to the adviser and research committees. Second, the researcher forwarded a transmittal letter for approval and permission from the Dean's office and asked the owner to sign it. Third, the researcher presented the informed consent to the respondents before surveying Poblacion, Toledo City, and finally, collecting, analyzing, and evaluating the data. During the data collection, the researchers discussed the informed consent before proceeding with the survey. After the data collection, the researchers tabulated and analyzed to give meaningful insights to the data.

Analysis of Data

The gathered data were examined using descriptive statistics like frequencies, percentages, and means, which were used to summarize participant demographics and their responses to rating scale queries. Conversely, weighted means were calculated for rating scale questions that measure preferences on ordinal scales (e.g., the attractiveness of color themes) to establish the average rating determined for each choice. Using weighted means is acceptable in these factors as the ratings are on an ordinal rather than an interval scale.

Ethical Consideration

Before conducting the study, it was submitted to the university institutional review board of the research ethics committee for technical and ethical review. Moreover, it was approved, and the notice to proceed certificate with a reference number of **2024-156** was given**.**

III.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the study's results on the customer preferences for the product packaging of Frosty Ice Cream and Creamy Waffle in Toledo City.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
GENDER		

Female	122	58.7
Male	86	41.3
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL		
College level	187	89.1
High school level	21	10.1

Table 1 presents the demographic trends: females comprised the majority at 58.7%, while men comprised 41.3%. It implies that participants were mainly females. The concentration of educational levels among respondents depicts a remarkable presence in the tertiary education system bracket, as 187 respondents (89.1%) claimed to be college students. However, 10.1% have high school-level education.

Table 2. Customer level of acceptance of the existing product packaging

Variable	*SD*	*Mean*	*Interpretation*
Packaging is environmentally friendly.	1.1	3.2	Neutral
Packaging is aesthetic and trendy.	1.2	3.1	Neutral
Packaging color is attractive and eye catching.	1.2	3.1	Neutral
Packaging material is suitable for the product.	1.2	2.9	Neutral
Packaging material is sanitary/ clean and neat.	1.2	2.8	Neutral
Packaging size is ideal for an iced coffee.	1.2	2.8	Neutral
Packaging material is sturdy and doesn't easily break.	1.2	2.8	Neutral
Packaging size is appropriate for its price.	1.2	2.7	Neutral
Packaging is handy/easy to carry.	1.2	2.7	Neutral
Packaging is easy to open and doesn't have a complicated seal.	1.1	2.7	Neutral

Legend: 1.0-1.80 Strongly Disagree, 1.81-2.60 Disagree, 2.61-3.40 Neutral, 3.41-4.20 Agree and 4.21-5.00 Strongly Agree

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for Frosty Ice Cream and Creamy Waffle's iced coffee product packaging patterns, ranking them from highest to lowest: 5 Strongly

agree, and 1 means strongly disagree. Respondents rated the "Packaging is environmentally friendly" received the highest mean score of 3.2, with a standard deviation of 1.1, which means that respondents generally view this aspect neutrally. However, there is some variability in their opinions.

Following closely, the 'Packaging is aesthetic and trendy' aspect received a mean score of 3.1 and a standard deviation of 1.1, indicating a neutral perception and the need for improvement. The attractiveness of the packaging color was noted with a mean of 3.07 and a standard deviation of 1.2, suggesting that it is not particularly appealing. "Packaging material is suitable for the product" scored a mean of 2.9 and a standard deviation of 1.2, indicating slight disagreement. "Packaging material is sanitary/clean and neat" has a mean of 2.8, indicating low satisfaction among respondents, with a standard deviation of 1.2. The" ideal size for iced coffee" and "the sturdiness of the packaging" both received a mean score of 2.8, with standard deviations of 1.2 and 1.1, showing that these aspects are perceived as unsatisfactory. The appropriateness of "the packaging size "for its price has a mean score of 2.7 and a standard deviation of 1.1, which shows disagreement with the size not appropriate for the price.

Less favorable perceptions were noted for the "ease of carrying the packaging," with a mean score of 2.7 and a standard deviation of 1.2, and the ease of opening the packaging, which received the lowest mean score of 2.7 but with the lowest standard deviation of 1.1. This means that satisfaction with the current product packaging design highlights areas where improvements could be made to enhance the packaging design.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution for Color Category

Color	N	Percentage	Result
Chocolate	66	31.7	1st
coffee	30	14.4	2nd
beige	26	12.5	3rd
Ash brown	11	5.3	4th
Burnt umber	11	5.3	5th
Espresso	11	5.3	6th
brown	9	4.3	7th
khaki	8	3.8	8th
tan	8	3.8	9th
Mocha	7	3.4	10th
syrup	7	3.4	11th
copper	6	2.9	12th
bronze	3	1.4	13th
camel	2	1	14th
auburn	1	0.5	15th
buff	1	0.5	16th
Burnt sienna	1	0.5	17th
chestnut	1	0.5	18th
Desert sand	1	0.5	19th
russet	1	0.5	20th
sepia	1	0.5	21st
sienna	1	0.5	22nd
taupe	1	0.5	23rd

The table displays the statistical data on color choices made by participants. The most popular selections occupy the highest positions in this table. It has been made clear by the statistics obtained from various sources that 31.7% chose brown as their shade, which they termed as

“Chocolate,” while 14.4% named it black coffee flavor and 12.5% called it Biege, like all others, did best with it. We can observe that most respondents chose these three types while the others comprised a minimal percentage of other varieties. Remaining insightful to the current study or project is doing a more profound analysis regarding this as more focus on some areas may bring about improved decisions in their transformation phase.

Table 3.2

Frequency Distribution for Size Categories

Size	*Frequency*	*Percentage*	Ranking
Tall	55	26.4	1st
Grande	43	20.7	2nd
Venti	43	20.7	3rd
Short	30	14.4	4th
Trenta	27	13	5th
Demi	10	4.8	6th

Table 3.2 presents the respondents' preferences in terms of cup size. Size "Tall" is the most frequently selected category, representing 26.4% of the responses. "Grande" and "Venti" are equal, making up 20.7% of the responses. 14.4% of individuals use the "Short" size, reflected in nearly a fifth of all the answers. The following common is' Trenta' with 13.0% response levels. Very few customers opt for the "Demi" size, i.e., only 4.8% indicating decreased likeness than other measurements; hence, "Tall" is preferred by customers.

Table 3.3.

Frequency Distribution for shapes category

Shapes	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Ranking**
S7	60	28.8	1st
S4	34	16.3	2nd
S5	32	15.4	3rd
S3	25	12	4th
S1	24	11.5	5th
S2	21	10.1	6th

S6	12	5.8	7th

Table 3.3 presents the respondents' preferences in shape. S7 (Shape7) is the most preferred size, representing 28.8% of the responses. It accounts for more than one-fourth of all selections well as with S4 (Shape 4) having a frequency of 34 (16.3%) and S5 (Shape 5) having a frequency of 32 (15.4%).12.0% of the participants prefer S3 (Shape 3). It has a moderate liking for this shape.

Almost the same number of votes are given to S1 (Shape 1) at 11.5% and S2 (Shape 2) at 10.1%. S6 (Shape 6) gets the lowest selection frequency, with 5.8% of responses showing a lower preference than other categories. This means "Shape 7" has attracted the most significant number of respondents based on the findings.

Table 3.4.

Frequency Distribution for typography and format.

Typography	Frequency	Percent
Yes	180	86.5
No	28	13.5

Table 3.4 shows statistical data from which a frequency distribution analysis was carried out regarding typography and format. The findings indicate that 86.5% or 180 respondents believed that design ought to incorporate typography and format, while 13.5%, representing 28, disagreed on whether they would use these two elements in their designs. This demonstrates a strong preference or need for typography and format, as most respondents agreed. The percentage confirms that all observations are included. The respondents agreed to use typography and format when designing the cup.

Table 3.5

Frequency Distribution for visuals

Visuals	Frequency	Percent
Yes	177	85.1
No	31	14.9

Based on the statistics in Table 3.5, this section presents an analysis of the frequency distributions for Visuals used. Only about 14.9% of people disagree with visuals in their design of iced coffee product packages, while 85.1% agree to have visuals. This means that respondents agreed to have visuals when designing the cup.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study's findings, the researchers concluded that the business should focus on female college students, who represent a significant portion of the respondents, as their primary demographic target. The current packaging needs improvement to be easily carried, right sized, and made from eco-friendly materials. Most of the respondents prefer to have an appealing/attractive typography and visual formats. Therefore, enhancing graphic designs and customizing favored colors, sizes, and shapes will boost customer engagement and satisfaction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this study: Meanwhile, the following suggestions are put forward to enhance customers' satisfaction. The researchers will recommend a new packaging design for the Iced-coffee product of Frosty Ice Cream and Creamy Waffle store. This design should change its color, cup size, shape, typography, format, and visual elements to enhance overall appeal and customer satisfaction. Based on the findings, the researchers recommend three (3) different packaging designs that match the top colors: chocolate, coffee, and beige. The cup size should be tall. In terms of the cup shape, it should be sleek, reusable, and handy. Additionally, typography should be trendy and neat, ensuring readability, aesthetic appeal, and eye-catching.

Furthermore, the format must be clear and simple but elegant. Finally, to feel coziness and warmth, the visuals or pictures of the packaging should be creative and natural to reflect the color scheme. By giving what the customers want, these suggestions aim to improve customer engagement and brand perceptions and provide what their preferences are:

Figure 2.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The cup design is based on findings, featuring a tall size and Shape 7 from the questionnaire. It incorporates typography, format, and visual elements. Among the top three colors—chocolate, coffee, and beige—this illustration uses chocolate for a rich, appealing look.

Figure 3.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The cup design is based on findings, featuring a tall size and Shape 7 from the questionnaire. It incorporates typography, format, and visual elements. Among the top three colors—chocolate, coffee, and beige—this illustration uses coffee for a warm, inviting look.

Figure 4.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The cup design is based on findings, featuring a tall size and Shape 7 from the questionnaire. It incorporates typography, format, and visual elements. This illustration uses beige for a soft, elegant look among the top three colors—chocolate, coffee, and beige.

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