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Research Article

Success Stories of Established Bakeshops in Zamboanga Del Sur: A Narrative Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the success stories of established bakeshops in Zamboanga del Sur. It identifies the factors that have fueled its expansion and sustainability in a competitive industry. By investigating bakery owners' experiences and strategies, the study identifies critical factors contributing to their success, providing valuable lessons for aspiring entrepreneurs and stakeholders in the bakery sector. Perseverance, dedication, and innovation play central roles in these narratives. The study further examines these bakeries' challenges, such as perishable surplus, employee behaviors, and lack of resources. Participants emphasized the value of creativity and resilience in overcoming these challenges. The owners' good character, resiliency, and leadership were critical to overcoming obstacles and achieving success. Customer satisfaction leads these bakeshops to long-term growth. These bakeries built a loyal customer base by cultivating relationships with their communities, contributing to their long-term success. This study compiles inspiring success stories and might serve as a blueprint for best practices. It emphasizes the importance of innovation, adaptability, and strong business practices in establishing and maintaining thriving bakeshops in a local setting, making it an invaluable resource for future entrepreneurs.

Keywords: *Bakeshop success, Entrepreneurship, Narrative, Customer satisfaction, Zamboanga del Sur, Resilience*

Introduction

The Food Industry Business is an industry that is common to Filipinos because they are known for having a big appetite and being good cooks, providing a delicious variety of baked goods and has a special place in their hearts

and tummies, from the enticing aroma of freshly made bread to the sweet enticement of pastries and cakes (Cada, 2024). For many people, bakery goods are a daily necessity. Every bakery establishment faces a commercial challenge when trying to stand out in a highly

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competitive environment, as it indicates that the yearly global baking market exceeds 300 billion US dollars (Hsu et al., 2022).

Baked goods encompass multiple food products made from flour (typically wheat flour). Among them, bread has stood as a foundation in different cultures by providing energy, mostly from its starch fraction, while being low in fats and sugars (Gomez et al., 2019). These days, most people's everyday diets include bread, pastries, and other bakery goods because they constitute the foundation of the food pyramid and have a high nutritional content. Bakery products play a crucial role in human nutrition. Bread comes in many sizes, tastes, and forms and is often created from accessible and affordable ingredients, which are significant since they help address nutritional gaps in the diet and aid in feeling full and content (Holiencinova et al., 2014).

Bakeries in an unorganized segment are worst affected by the pandemic. Due to the lockdown, many bakeshop industries have shut operations due to a shortage of laborers. Another factor that has impacted the bakeshop industry is the lack of raw material availability due to movement restrictions, which results in production limits (Anam et al., 2021). Emphasizing the importance of learning from successes and failures in implementing business strategies. For established bakeshops, the ability to adapt and innovate based on past experiences can be a significant determinant of ongoing success.

In today's ever-changing business environment, prioritizing sustainable and ethical practices has become crucial. Companies emphasizing these principles show their dedication to moral integrity, human rights protection, and ensuring long-term economic sustainability (Sari, 2024). To effectively manage risks and ensure long-term viability, businesses must integrate sustainability into their operations. Neglecting these practices could lead to significant and possibly permanent losses for companies, especially in a market that increasingly values sustainable solutions (Chang & Slaubaugh, 2016). Market adaptability and consumer engagement are pivotal to the sustained success of food enterprises, reinforcing that a

strong connection with customers enhances brand loyalty (Khan & Acquaye, 2019).

Numerous businesses have successfully implemented innovative strategies and sustainable practices, leading to significant growth and resilience in an evolving market. One of the company's critical success factors is the ability of fast-food chains to adapt their offerings and operations to meet consumer demand for healthier, environmentally friendly options (Koutsou et al., 2014). Sustainable practices, such as environmental initiatives and human resource management, can positively impact business performance. Sustainability is critical for any business in today's competitive environment (Azam et al., 2019). However, many companies still need help implementing sustainable practices. (Bokolo et al., 2019). Organizations that embrace sustainable practices ultimately benefit by gaining a competitive advantage in the marketplace, appealing to a broader range of customers, and adapting more effectively to evolving market conditions (Adula & Natasha, 2024).

Salahuddin Bakery, a family-run traditional food business in Jalan Dhoby, Johor Bahru, has demonstrated that keeping conventional aspects of a family heritage business still draws clients in, particularly those who visit often. The results of the observational studies discovered the numerous parameters that impact the sustainability of this bread shop. The elements contributing to its sustainability were the premises, goods, machinery, raw materials, customers, and knowledge transfer (Ab Karim et al., 2021).

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to identify the success stories of established bakeshops in Zamboanga del Sur to determine how they sustain their business until they succeed. The researchers used semi-structured interviews to understand the stories of the bakeshop owners. The study was conducted during the school year 2024-2025. Notably, this study seeks to answer the central question: *"How do bakeshop owners describe their success stories in sustaining their bakeshop?"* It aimed to answer the following queries:

1. What motivated the owners of established bakeshops to start their bakeshops?
2. What are the challenges established bakeshop owners face in operating their bakeshops?
3. How do the established bakeshop owners overcome these challenges?
4. What innovations have the established bakeshop owners made to achieve success?
5. What practices do the established bakeshop owners implement to sustain their bakeshops today?

Methods

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative narrative inquiry approach to explore the success stories of established bakeshops in Zamboanga del Sur. Narrative inquiry is grounded in the idea that humans are storytelling organisms who make sense of their experiences through stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). The Polkinghorne model was used to frame the study, emphasizing narratives as a primary means of constructing meaning (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Research Environment and Participants

This study was conducted in Zamboanga del Sur, Southern Philippines, a province with a strong bakery culture. The location was chosen due to its relevance to the study, as it has an active market for baked goods. The presence of well-established bakeries highlights the industry's growth and offers valuable insights into the motivations, challenges, and successes of bakery owners. The participants were selected bakeshops in Zamboanga del Sur that met specific criteria: (1) operational for at least ten years and (2) owned by either the original proprietor or a close family member. These criteria ensured that the collected narratives provided in-depth insights into the long-term success of bakery businesses.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument in this study was the researchers themselves, supported by semi-structured interviews, narrative texts, and field notes. Interviews were guided by structured questions designed to explore the participants' experiences, motivations,

challenges, and coping strategies (Creswell, 2013). Audio and video recordings ensured accurate data collection, while field notes captured observational insights.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers followed institutional guidelines and obtained the necessary approvals before conducting interviews. A formal letter requesting their participation was sent to bakery owners. The interview guide was developed with input from academic advisors to ensure clarity and relevance. In-depth interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed following Polkinghorne's guidelines for narrative data collection (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Data Analysis

The collected data were systematically analyzed using narrative analysis. Interview recordings were transcribed and categorized into themes. A paradigmatic analysis approach was applied to identify common themes and relationships within the narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995). Thematic maps were created to group similar responses, allowing the researchers to extract meaningful insights into the experiences of bakery owners. The key analytical steps included transcribing interviews for accurate documentation, identifying recurring themes using thematic analysis, categorizing responses to establish patterns in business strategies, challenges, and innovations, and collaborating with participants to ensure accurate representation of their stories.

Result and Discussion

This study explored the experience of the established bakeshop owners as they tell their success stories in sustaining their business. It aimed to document a thorough narrative of their journey covering a range of topics from their motivation in establishing the bakeshop up until to their practices in sustaining the bakeshop, three (3) different stories were told. The research participants in this study are three (3) bakeshop owners in Zamboanga del Sur who were interviewed individually. The participants are Charry, Marie, and James (not their real names). These participants shared their journeys, which presented the generated

themes based on the gathered data: a. motivation behind starting their businesses: *family business succession, low competitive intensity, and additional income*; b. challenges encountered in managing the business: *perishable surplus and defects, employee misconduct, and lack of resources*; c. overcoming the challenges: *recipe innovation, employee management, and peer assistance*; d. Innovation: *limited marketing strategy, skilled labor reliance, and variety of products*; e. Practices of Established Bakery Owners Sustaining the Bakeshop: *Steadfast endurance, empowerment, and recognition*.

A. Motivation Behind Starting Their Business

Family Business Succession

Charry, Marie, and James come from families with a strong interest in business, which significantly influenced their decision to continue the business. Charry shares that her passion for business started early, which is why she chose to continue running the bakeshop. She mentions that, *"...It feels like this business really suits me. Because it feels like it is a family business for us, my siblings and I."*

Marie, on the other hand, was never initially interested in business, but due to her sister-in-law's involvement in entrepreneurship, she became more involved. Marie states that, *"....We just got into this because there was no one else to manage the business. Actually, we didn't use to have a business since it was my sister-in-law who was into business. So, it really stayed within the family as we ran it."*

James, raised in a Chinese family with a strong business tradition, naturally developed an interest in business. Having inherited his parents' restaurant, James eventually decided to expand into a new business which is the industry of bakery.

Low Competitive Intensity

At first instance, when Marie started operating the bakeshop, she only had two competitors. However, her bakeshop gained popularity due to her first baker, attracting many customers. Marie stated that, *"..When we first started the business, our bakery was doing well because the only other bakeries here were Pems and Ellas."* This success led to a decline in sales for

another bakeshop within the area, which motivated Marie to continue managing her bakeshop.

James saw an opportunity in Pagadian, where no bakeshop was offering hot bread, particularly pandesal, which encouraged him to pursue the venture, he states that, *"....At that time in Pagadian, there weren't many selling hot bread. I prayed to God to bring it here, and I was deeply drawn to the idea. Seeing how successful it was, I knew I had to bring it to Pagadian."*

Additional Income

Most people enter business with the primary goal of gaining additional income. Marie indicates that, *"....the additional income also became necessary because my husband didn't have any other source of income, so we decided to work hard."* Initially hesitant, Marie took over the bakeshop from her sister-in-law, driven by her husband's lack of other income.

While the reasons for starting their bakeshops may differ, all these business owners share a strong passion for baking. Their efforts show that with determination and persistence, success is possible. Because of this, they haven't just survived; they have thrived and reached impressive goals in their business journeys.

B. Challenges Encountered in Managing the Business

Perishable Surplus and Defects

Charry, Marie and James, face challenges related to the limited shelf life of baked goods, which often leads to income losses. Unsold products sometimes become old stock due to unpredictable demand.

Charry shared that, *"....well, there are times when nothing sells, for a few days nothing sells, it gets stale and there are no customers buying."* Marie experienced over baked goods, as her baker would sometimes fall asleep while baking due to lack of sleep before starting their shift, she asserts that, *"..occasionally, he overcooks the bread because he fell asleep after staying up late the previous night. Additionally, there are instances when our baker, perhaps due to being forgetful, makes bread that is excessively salty or lacks sugar."* James also admitted that overbaking by bakers was unavoidable at

times, resulting in unsellable goods and financial losses, he states that, *"We also faced issues with burned products."*

Employees Misconduct

Employees play a significant role in a business as they are directly responsible for production and operations. However, challenges such as financial breaches of trust, behavioral issues, failure to fulfill duties, and employee misconduct have been experienced by all of the participants.

Charry experienced betrayal from some of her former employees, admitting that theft in the bakeshop was something she could not entirely avoid, she claims that, *"...there are many, because it seems to be tempting, in this business because you can see that there is a lot of money every day, when they see it, they are tempted to take some because money is really tempting."* Marie, on the other hand, faced stress with the replacement for her previous baker, who had been a veteran with a genuine passion for baking. Marie emphasizes that, *"these people and their attitude, sometimes they take a long time to start their shift, so it also takes a long time to make the bread. Sometimes our baker comes in drunk, so they take a long time to wake up."*

James did not provide specific details about his employee's actions, but he described it as a very negative experience that ultimately led to the employee's termination. James explained that, *"In business, we encountered challenges with employees, while some were good, others were not, and we even had bad experiences with some employees who didn't act appropriately, so we dismissed those employees."*

Lack of Resources

James, a newcomer to the bakery business, faced significant challenges in the early stages due to insufficient equipment for baking. He shared that, *"...the challenge was starting with no knowledge about the bakery business, no equipment, and no bakers, truly starting from scratch."* Nevertheless, it is inspiring to see how much James's business has flourished over time.

Challenges provide business owners with opportunities to showcase their problem-

solving skills, strengthening their foundation for growth and ensuring competitiveness in a complex market. Charry, Marie, and James demonstrate unwavering resilience, transforming each challenge into an opportunity for growth and ensuring the long-term sustainability of their businesses. Their steadfast perseverance in the face of adversity reflects the strength of their resilience and their deep commitment to the success of their business.

C. Overcoming the Challenges Recipe Innovation

Recipe innovation involves creating new dishes or reinterpreting traditional ones using unique ingredients or techniques. In Charry's case, she practiced recipe innovation as her coping mechanism to prevent product waste. She states that, *"...and if it gets stale, you can make pudding out of it, the pudding is really strong and you just need to adjust how you make it."* As her ingredients for recipe innovation are products that have not sold, she will turn them into other products to utilize them.

Employee Management

Charry experienced serious theft from customers, but Charry indicates that, *"talk to them, like if they continue and stay, they will move away from the cash register but if not, they just leave."* Meanwhile, James, having an unexpected loss due to defective products, overcame these challenges by handling their employees with proper communication, *"...we always emphasized to our bakers that burnt bread should not happen again because it results in losses since those cannot be sold. We have an internal understanding between the employee responsible for the burnt bread and management, an agreement to try to recover the cost of the ingredients to minimize the loss."*

Salary Increase

After a bad experience with her staff, Marie chose to address the challenge by raising their salaries. A salary increase serves as an incentive for excellence and enhances job satisfaction, motivation, and retention. As Marie stated, *"initially, I raised their salary, but still, nothing changed."* She increased her employees' salaries to improve their performance in their work

because Marie noticed that they were not working well and yet they took Marie's kindness for granted as they are family-related.

Peer assistance

Reaching out to a peer who has successfully navigated similar challenges is a powerful strategy for the business. In James's situation, luckily, he is from a family of businessmen. He points out that, *"our support comes from our friends, yes, friends who have a bakeshop ahead of us."* It was his way of overcoming challenges his business has faced to seek help from people with prior business experience in this field.

The experiences of Charry, Marie, and James highlight the importance of strong communication between employers and employees in addressing these issues. Improved communication boosts theft awareness, promotes reporting, identifies training gaps, and fosters employee pride, leading to higher quality and fewer defects.

D. Innovation

Charry shared in her interview that, despite claims of not adopting innovations, her business has thrived by maintaining traditional practices. In contrast, Marie embraced innovation by leveraging a skilled baker to expand their bread variety. Meanwhile, James set his bakeshop apart by being the only one to offer freshly baked hot bread.

Limited Marketing Strategy

Charry states, *"No, we only have display items. I tried doing deliveries before, but I didn't like it because it adds more work for your staff, and there are a lot of leftovers, which is why I don't do deliveries."* Charry did not apply any innovation to her business for her personal preference although she already did some innovative practices before but chose to stop it as it is very costly.

Skilled Labor Reliance

This has given Marie's edge over other bakeries because before their baker was so veteran and very skillful when it comes to baking, so they can produce different kinds of bread and compete in the market. *"...our previous baker was someone we hired because he was an*

excellent baker. He was really skilled at molding bread and creating unique designs, always coming up with different styles. It was impressive because you wouldn't see the same designs every day."

Variety of Products

James's innovative practice leads him to be on the top as they are the only bakery among all of the bakeries in Pagadian before who produce hot bread and are always sold out. James states that, *"...at Sam's Bakeshop, where you can always find hot bread, especially Pandesal, fresh from the morning. The cake offerings were also introduced here at this location."*

The experiences of Marie and James illustrate the significant competitive advantages that can be gained through innovation and product differentiation. However, it was being demonstrated that traditional business models can also be effective, particularly when focusing on operational efficiency and customer loyalty. This suggests that while innovation can drive growth, businesses like Charry's can still achieve success by optimizing existing practices and strategically positioning themselves in the market.

E. Practices of Established Bakery Owners Sustaining the Bakeshop

Steadfast Endurance

Steadfast endurance helps sustain a business by enabling business owners to remain focused and committed during challenges, ensuring that short-term difficulties do not distract long-term goals. Charry states that, *"just be persistent, because the baker won't move unless the boss prompts them. When the workers see the boss taking the lead, they will follow too. Just work hard and persevere."* Charry's journey as a bakery owner was a story of dedication and perseverance. When her bakers were less proactive, she didn't wait for things to improve on their own, instead, she took the lead.

Empowerment and Recognition Practices

Marie kept things simple when it came to celebrations at the bakery. Every Christmas, she organized a small gathering where everyone could come together, share a meal,

and enjoy each other's company. *"For Christmas parties, we now just keep it simple—eating together and having a small celebration, like a family gathering."* For Marie, these moments were less about formality and more about fostering a sense of family among her team, creating a warm and supportive atmosphere. While James had always seen the bakery's Christmas celebration as a chance to bring the team together after the busy holiday season. James states that, *"...we celebrate a Christmas party on the 25th, starting at 2 o'clock in the afternoon and going on until the evening. There's free dinner, awards, and tokens of appreciation for the employees."*

Charry's resilience turns challenges into opportunities, keeping her focused on her goals. By promoting a healthy work environment Marie and James through bonding events and recognizing employees' contributions, it creates a positive work environment that strengthens commitment and collaboration. These practices have been proven to truly help the participants' businesses. Their enduring businesses stand as a testament to the power of empowerment and recognition.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The researchers explored and highlighted how bakeshop owners have achieved success through perseverance, dedication, and innovation in the face of numerous challenges. Charry, Marie, and James each define success differently, yet their strategic choices—including embracing technology and forming strategic partnerships—have driven their businesses forward. Charry's expansion to multiple branches exemplifies leveraging technological tools for efficient management, while Marie's focus on training skilled bakers underscores the importance of investing in human capital through modern learning platforms. James's collaborations with major brands and the establishment of Springland Resort demonstrate how forming strategic partnerships and innovative ventures can open new opportunities. Their journeys illustrate that in today's baking industry, adopting technology and forging strong alliances are key to adapting to modern challenges, ensuring growth, resilience, and

lasting success. Their stories serve as an inspiring reminder for aspiring entrepreneurs to harness innovation and collaboration in their pursuit of excellence.

Therefore, to enhance sustainability and efficiency in waste management practices, it is further recommended that future research should explore the integration of digital tools such as data analytics platforms to optimize waste collection and processing. Additionally, fostering partnerships between industry stakeholders, local governments, and technology providers can facilitate the development of innovative solutions and shared best practices. Implementing comprehensive training programs for personnel can further improve operational effectiveness and environmental compliance. These strategies will not only streamline waste management processes but also promote the adoption of sustainable practices across industries.

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