

## Pottery industry in Lezo, Aklan: its marketability, sustainability, and challenges

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**Abstract:** The pottery industry in Lezo, Aklan is a business that manufactures and sells different pottery products. This qualitative research using a case study approach examined the marketability, sustainability, challenges, and coping strategies of pottery owners. It aimed at ascertaining the profile of the pottery owners and workers, their marketing and adaptive strategies, challenges experienced in the marketability and sustainability of their business, and their coping strategies. The validated researcher-made focus group discussion questions were used to gather data from the 12 participants, nine (9) DTI registered pottery owners, and three (3) workers. Data were analyzed and interpreted using frequency and thematic analysis. Findings revealed that pottery owners and workers were females. Most owners were between 32 to 40 years old. All were married, high school graduates, and had been in the industry for 13 to 19 years. On the other hand, most workers were single, ages 18 to 30 years old, and college level. Owners were selling and promoting their products through displaying in stall areas, posting on social media, word of mouth, cash, installment, and digital/online payment, and mostly having pick-ups and few deliveries. Several challenges were related to the product's marketability, customer demand and supply, customer preferences and satisfaction, and sustainability of business capital, raw materials, and workers' salaries. In response, owners employed coping strategies such as borrowing capital from lending institutions, promoting products on social media, and collaborating with colleagues/workers to increase the volume of products. Despite these challenges, the owners' resilience and adaptability through strategic planning and community support help in the sustainability and success of the pottery industry.

**Keywords:** Marketing strategies, Marketability, Sustainability, Adaptive strategies, Challenges, Coping strategies, Pottery

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## INTRODUCTION

Pottery has emerged as one of the most important components of heritage and identity building in several parts of the Philippines. According to historical reports, the Philippines' pottery tradition has assimilated into the national legacy. Archaeological excavations and historical research have revealed that these customs have influenced the way of life of all the ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines. Every ethnolinguistic group in the Philippines has its unique style, method, or technique for assembling and producing pottery, according to pottery production. Notable is the inventive hand modeling techniques used by diverse ethnolinguistic groups across the various locations, which ultimately reflect their identities (Geronimo, 2018).

According to Martini et al. (2016), pottery is the most useful arts and crafts. Pottery is either for functional or decorative purposes. It has been around since the beginning of time because of the need for plates and bowls. Another main use was containers for storing food items, liquid and dry goods. Most palayok (pots) were produced and used for daily cooking, though small pots with notches might have been intended as grave furniture. Other forms include pouring vessels, jugs, dishes, vases, and native dippers (tabo). Others are made of ornamental ware like goblets, footed dishes, and globular bottles. It was also mentioned in the study of Pobar et al. (2016) that pottery is a ceramic material that makes up pottery wares that

include earthenware, stoneware, and porcelain. It was also defined as clay that was modeled, dried, and fired, usually with a glazed or finished into a vessel or decorative object. The most important is clay, a naturally occurring material composed primarily of fine-grained minerals. It is generally plastic at appropriate water content and will harden with drying or fire. Although clay usually contains phyllosilicates, it may contain other materials that impart plasticity and harden when dried or fired. Pottery in Bohol utilized clay found in the locality where the pottery operated. It is unique because the workers first stamped the clay using their feet to make it fine. It was also molded by the hands of the workers without the aid of any tool or molder except for hollow blocks and fire bricks. It was observed that it existed for quite some time but was noticed to be very slow in its improvement in terms of operation, number of products, and product quality.

Stresha (2018) mentioned in the study that pottery was the unique art of making artifacts from clay in Nepal. It produces different kinds of clay and ceramic items such as flowerpots, water, grain storage jars, large vessels for distilling rice spirits called *rakhi*, cooking pots, tableware, stoneware cups, bowls and plates, stoneware pitchers and mugs, etc. The results show that there is good scope in this industry. People in this industry face challenges or problems like a shortage of raw materials, manpower, and space to dry the formed pottery, fire pottery, and store the finished goods along with the different raw materials. The appeal of handmade pottery has grown in recent years, driven by a rising preference for artisanal and unique products. Consumers are increasingly willing to pay a premium for such items, often seen as more meaningful and authentic. The improved quality standards in places such as Nepal have enabled traditional ceramics to find a foothold in global export markets, highlighting the potential for robust international trade. In addition, the demand is further bolstered by the cultural significance of pottery, which embodies traditions and heritage, making it particularly attractive in tourism and educational contexts. In regions like Pagelaran, pottery production is closely tied to local culture, enhancing its value to domestic and international audiences (Yunikawati et al., 2024).

Sustainability has become a key focus for the pottery industry. Producers are increasingly exploring ways to reduce their environmental impact by utilizing waste materials and adopting energy-efficient production methods (Vasić et al., 2024). However, traditional pottery practices can still pose environmental risks if not carefully managed, as resource-intensive processes like clay extraction may lead to the depletion of natural resources. Efforts to balance traditional craftsmanship with sustainable practices are vital for ensuring the industry's long-term viability. Such measures address environmental concerns and align with the growing consumer preference for eco-friendly products.

Despite its marketability and sustainability potential, the pottery industry faces several challenges. One major issue is the shortage of high-quality raw materials such as clay, which disrupts production and limits the capacity of artisans to meet demand (Shrestha, 2018). Another pressing concern is the lack of younger artisans entering the field, threatening the preservation of traditional skills and practices. This generational gap raises questions about the future continuity of the craft (Yunikawati et al., 2024).

While the pottery industry faces considerable obstacles, the growing consumer interest in sustainable and artisanal products presents a unique opportunity for revitalization and innovation. By addressing operational challenges and embracing eco-friendly practices, the industry has the potential to thrive in both local and international markets. Efforts to preserve cultural heritage and support artisans will ensure the craft's resilience in the face of modern challenges. Furthermore, competition from industrial products made from metals and plastics has eroded the market share of traditional pottery, as these alternatives are often cheaper and more widely available (Bhagavatheeswaran, 2022).

The pottery industry significantly advances the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through sustainable practices and community-centered initiatives. By emphasizing resource efficiency, environmental stewardship, and community engagement, the sector aligns with the overarching objectives of the SDGs, showcasing its potential to drive positive change across various dimensions of sustainability. For instance, revitalizing pottery urban kampongs, such as those in Malang City, bolsters community resilience and inclusivity, directly addressing SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) (Ramdlani, 2018). This initiative fosters heritage tourism, creates economic opportunities, and enhances living conditions and environmental quality. At the same time, the industry faces environmental challenges, particularly regarding high energy consumption and carbon emissions during glazing and firing processes (Lu et al., 2019). Despite these opportunities, challenges like resource constraints and market competition necessitate collaboration among stakeholders to ensure the effective adoption of sustainable practices.

Aklan is a highly regarded craft in the art of pottery making, a tradition deeply rooted in its people's culture and daily lives. People of Aklan have mastered the creation of beautiful clay pots, which serve both practical and artistic purposes. According to the source, the clay pots, traditionally used for cooking and storage, were more than utilitarian objects; they embodied the artistry and creativity of the locals, and the decorative motifs by the artisan not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the pottery but also reflect the connection between the artisans and their surroundings, capturing the essence of Aklan's heritage. Indeed, the Municipality of Lezo, known as the "Pottery Capital of Aklan," is a hub of this vibrant tradition. Lezo's pottery products have earned recognition for their craftsmanship and their deeper cultural significance. Each creation symbolizes the Lezo people's values, traditions, and cultural identity. The craft represents resilience, creativity, and community pride, integral to the town's identity. Pottery making in Lezo is not merely a craft but a way of preserving and passing down the cultural heritage that defines the town. Furthermore, the pottery industry in Lezo contributes significantly to the local economy, supporting livelihoods while fostering a sense of pride among the artisans. Tourists and collectors are often drawn to the unique designs and the cultural stories embedded in each piece, making Lezo's pottery a representation of Aklan's rich traditions on a broader stage. By continuing to practice and innovate this age-old craft, the people of Lezo ensure that their legacy remains alive, reflecting their community's enduring spirit and cultural wealth (Reyes, 2023). Additionally, Lezo is a fifth-class municipality in the Philippine province of Aklan. Pottery is the leading industry in the municipality, contributing to the residents' lives and revenue. Residents near the river bank earned a living by handcrafting clay pots and jars from locally available materials, saving money and making the town popular for these beautiful items (Yecla et al., 2022).

Aklan contributes significantly to the local economy, supporting livelihoods while fostering a sense of pride among the artisans. Tourists and collectors are often drawn to the unique designs and the cultural stories embedded in each piece, making Lezo's pottery a representation of Aklan's rich traditions on a broader stage. By continuing to practice and innovate this age-old craft, the people of Lezo ensure that their legacy remains alive, reflecting their community's enduring spirit and cultural wealth. The innovative people of Lezo are engaged in the manufacturing and selling of different types and designs of pottery products like cooking pots, flower pots, flower vases, cooking burners, charcoal burners, bricks, water and grain storage jars, plates, cups, chicken feeders, etc.

Furthermore, pottery in Lezo, Aklan is known for manufacturing and selling different pottery products. Based on the Department of Trade and Industry list, the number of pottery business owners in Aklan is decreasing. Therefore, the researcher conducted this study to assess the marketing strategies, adaptive strategies, and challenges encountered by the pottery

industry in terms of marketability and sustainability, as well as to determine the coping strategies as solutions for the betterment and revitalization of the industry.

*Statement of the problem*

This study was conducted to determine and assess the marketability, sustainability, and challenges that pottery industry owners and workers in Lezo, Aklan faced.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the profile of business owners and workers in the pottery business?
- 2) What are the marketing strategies of the pottery owners?
- 3) What adaptive strategies are used by the pottery owners to sustain their business?
- 4) What are the challenges encountered by the pottery owners in terms of marketability and sustainability?
- 5) What are the coping strategies employed by the pottery owners to overcome the challenges?

## METHODOLOGY

*Research design*

The study utilized a qualitative case study research design, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the marketing strategies, challenges, and coping strategies of pottery owners in Lezo, Aklan. Qualitative research focuses on understanding complex situations within their real-life context, using methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. A case study design was deemed appropriate as it enables a detailed investigation of personal experiences, motivations, and the factors influencing decision-making. This approach helps in uncovering insights into the marketing challenges faced by pottery owners and the strategies they employ to navigate these challenges.

*Locale of the study and respondents*

The study was conducted in Lezo, Aklan, Philippines, a town recognized for its pottery industry. The participants of the study were selected through purposive sampling, based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The study focused on nine (9) female pottery owners registered with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and three (3) female pottery workers. The selection criteria ensured that the participants were directly involved in pottery production and had relevant experience in managing marketing and sustainability challenges. The participants were chosen based on their willingness to participate and ability to articulate their experiences and insights.

*Research instruments*

The research employed a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire comprised 17 open-ended questions, translated into Aklanon-Bisaya to align with the participants' common language. The questionnaire was validated by experts in the field and approved by an advisory committee. The FGD format allowed participants to elaborate on their marketing strategies, adaptive strategies, challenges related to marketability and sustainability, and coping mechanisms. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to share detailed responses, fostering deeper insights into the industry.

*Data analyses procedure*

The study employed thematic analysis, a qualitative research method used to identify and interpret patterns or themes within the collected data. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, which involves several key steps. First, the researcher

familiarized themselves with the transcribed data, reading it multiple times to identify recurring ideas. Next, initial codes were generated by labeling significant portions of text. These codes were then grouped into themes, capturing broader patterns relevant to the research objectives. The themes were reviewed, refined, and defined to ensure clarity and coherence. The final stage involved report writing, where themes were presented with supporting excerpts from participant responses. A bilingual expert validated the transcriptions and translations to ensure accuracy, and the findings were returned to participants for credibility verification.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Profile of pottery owners and workers in the pottery business*

As shown, all of the business owners were females, with no male owners as participants. Mostly were married (7 out of 9), and one (1) owner was separated as for their civil status (1 out of 9). In terms of age, the majority of owners were within the 31-40 years age group (5 out of 9), followed by the age group of 51 years and above (2 out of 9), and one (1) belonged to an age bracket of 41-50 years (1 out of 9). In terms of education, most owners were high school graduates (3 out of 9), with two (2) college undergraduates (2 out of 9), and the rest were split along the category of elementary undergraduate (1/9), elementary graduate (1 out of 9), high school undergraduate (1 out of 9), and college graduate (1 out of 9). When it came to years in the industry, most owners have 13-19 years of experience being an entrepreneur (3 out of 9), with others distributed across 27-33 years (2 out of 9), 34-40 years (2 out of 9) followed by 5-12 years (1-9) as the lowest number of years in industry, and 20-26 years in industry (1 out of 9). Concerning the monthly income, most owners earned between P5,001-P10,000 pesos, which was the top most bracket income earned by the pottery owners (7 out of 9), followed by monthly income of less than P3000 (1 out of 9), and a bracket monthly income of P3001 – P5000 earned by 1 pottery owner (1 out of 9). The business ownership of 6 owners belonged to the category of solopreneur (6 out of 9), and 3 owners belonged to a cooperative association (3 out of 9).

For workers, it also showed the predominance of females (7 out of 7) in the pottery industry workforce. In terms of civil status, the distribution was more varied, with three (3) singles (3 out of 7), followed by two (2) married (2 out of 7), then one (1) as separated (1 out of 7), and another one (1) who was widowed (1 out of 7). Most were between 18-30 years (3 out of 7), with others split across the age bracket of 31-40 years (2 out of 7) and then 51 years and above (2 out of 7). Among workers, college undergraduates represented the largest group (3 out of 7), followed by elementary graduates (2 out of 7), and a split of one (1) high school graduate (1 out of 7) and one (1) college graduate (1 out 7). For numbers of years in industry, there was a tie between 5-12 years of experience (2 out of 7) and 34-40 years (2 out of 7), followed by 13-19 years in industry (1 out of 7), 20- 26 years in industry (1 out of 7), and 27 -33 years in industry (1 out of 7). Workers earned mostly in the bracket of P5001- P10000 (4 out of 7), and 3 workers earned a monthly income of less than P3000 (3 out of 7). Regarding employment status, most workers were full-time/permanent (5 out of 7), with 2 working part-time (2 out of 7). The salary mode of payment for workers was predominantly daily (5 out of 7), with 2 workers paid weekly.

Overall, the data revealed a predominantly business owned by a female workforce. Ownership, with the majority among workers and owners falling within specific age ranges, educational backgrounds, and income groups. Results were confirmed in a study in Sambirata Village, wherein most pottery makers are middle-aged women who utilize non-productive land for their craft, thus transforming it into a reliable income source (Koni Herawati, 2022).

Women in microenterprises, including pottery, often operate in environments that balance family responsibilities with business activities, reflecting a shift in traditional gender roles (Mendoza & Tadeo, 2022). The rise of female ownership in crafts, although still lower than in other sectors, indicates a growing recognition of women's capabilities in traditionally male-dominated fields (Müller & Erlei, 2016). Furthermore, Gonzales et al. (n.d.) said women play a crucial role in the family, serving as wives, leaders, administrators, managers of family income, and mothers. They ensure maximum return from every spent amount and distribute it judiciously, focusing on necessities, comforts, and luxuries. Women also contribute to the family income through their own earnings, both within and outside the home. They perform domestic tasks and use waste products for productive purposes. Additionally, financial resources are essential for women to participate in honorary tasks, such as providing meals to poverty-stricken individuals. Women may donate or use their skills to promote knowledge and skill upgrading when financially weak or limited. However, when financially strong, they contribute significantly to promoting goodwill and the welfare of community members. Women's labor force status relative to men is an important benchmark of their status in society. Overall, women's role in the family is vital for sustainable development and quality of life.

#### *Marketing strategies of pottery owners*

Data presents the marketing strategies of pottery industry owners. The marketing strategies in terms of selling mode revealed that most of the owners (5 out of 9) displayed products at their stall areas at Bayangan, Village, Lezo, Aklan. Also, four (4) out of nine (9) owners adopted wholesale or pre-order selling, another four (4) owners utilized posting on social media like Facebook/messenger, and one (1) owner used word of mouth. Each owner used these strategies to get customers in nearby and far places.

In terms of payment, most owners (7 out of 9) used the cash basis, which they believed they could receive right away the money, with some owners (3 out of 9) adopting installment/partial, and others (2 out of 9) owners used digital payments like Palawan Pay and Gcash. These strategies gave them an idea that their business would gain an income.

Regarding promotion, most owners (4/9) utilized word of mouth, where family, relatives, and friends helped those owners gain more customers talking about business products. Some owners (3/9) used social media promotion, particularly Facebook and Messenger, to increase their customers and actively posted their products online to reach a wider audience with some receiving large orders from businesses or institutions after seeing their posts of pottery products, while two (2) owners participated in trade fairs and local community engagement, and another two (2) owners also displayed their products at their stall area at Bayangan Village, Lezo, Aklan. They believed they could still gain customers using those strategies. These modes of promotion were the strategies used to promote their products from the local to the national market.

The majority of the owners (8/9) asked their customers to pick up the products at their stall area at Bayangan Village, Lezo, Aklan, as their mode of delivery of the products. There were also customers asking for delivery services to their designated places. Five (5) owners delivered products to the customers' home/stall or designated places, and customers paid for the delivery services. Fewer owners (1 out of 9) practiced cargo shipment delivery. Owners found it easy and less hassle as they practiced these delivery modes for their products.

#### *Mode of selling*

Pottery owners utilized the stall display to sell their products. Participants 1, 4, 8, 9, and 10 mentioned they displayed their products at local stalls, where customers could physically view and purchase their pottery products. Participant 10 mentioned “sa stall malang ko gabaligya” (I sell only in my stall area). Other pottery owners used wholesale and pre-order modes of selling. Just like participant 1 mentioned:

*Ro akong pagbaligya hay pwede man nga wholesaler. Usually Ma'am, do among gid nga sa wholesaler namon hay through messenger or sa social media baea ngaron nga gina post do mga baligya para mag ganyak man it akong mga customer ag another one-man hay sa stall sa akon nga. idto sa among area sa Bayangan Village. (I sell my products wholesale through posting on social media like Messenger and Facebook to encourage customers to buy, and I have displayed products at my stall area at Bayangan Village.)*

Participant 2 in her statement mentioned that “may akon ta eagi nga ginabaliyaan ang ginabakae eagi” (I already have my buyer for my ready-made products). Likewise, Participant 6 also had an on-call customer from the mall.

This selling mode is practical for those with repeating or bulk orders, helping stabilize their business. Participants 1, 3, 4, and 8 adopted the posting on social media as their selling mode. Participant 3 said:

*Good morning, Ma'am. Sa akon mat ah ma'am nga strategy sa akon nga product nga pottery hay naga post ako sa social media, sa facebook gina public kot aron Ma'am para tanan do tawo nga makakita sa akong produkto hay Makita ag kung nailaan nanda hay dikaron dayon Ma'am gaguwa do mga orders nga halin sa ibat ibang lugar. Example Ma'am akon ngaron nga pag post idto sa fb hay hakita ako mam it St. Luke hospital, lucky gid ako Ma'am dahil naka order sanda kakon it duyon hoh nga volume baea Ma'am nga bueotangan it sabon para sa mga pasyente every six (6) months don Ma'am sanda kakon ga order. (Good morning, Ma'am. My strategy in my pottery product is I am posting it on public thru social media so that people will see my product and collect orders from different places. Like for instance, St. Luke's Hospital ordered my products posted on Facebook. I was very much lucky. They ordered from me volume of pottery soap holders for their patients. They ordered soap holders every six (6) months).*

Several participants used a combination mode of selling. Participant 1 and Participant 4 adopted a combination of stall display selling, whole or pre-order, and posting on social media. Participant 8 practiced the stall display selling and posting on social media. Only Participant 9 used the stall display selling and word of mouth. He said:

*Good morning sa akong mga colleague, good morning, Ma'am sa mode of selling nakon Ma'am hay sa stall mat ah or else may mga customer ag mga suki mga duyon gina recommend akon nga produkto or gina ano nakon na sales talk. (Good morning to my colleagues, good morning. Ma'am, my mode of selling is displayed only in my stall area, and my customers also recommend my products. I also do the sales talk for possible buyers).*

This reliance on customer referrals highlights the importance of building trust and satisfaction in smaller communities or niche markets.

#### *Mode of payment*

The preferred mode of payment for most pottery owners was cash payment, but there was also an increasing acceptance of partial or installment with some digital payments. Most participants emphasized the ease and security of cash transactions. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9,

and 10 preferred cash basis only. Participant 10 said “cash mat ah. Wa it installment” (Cash only. No installment).

Participant 9 explained why they do not accept installment payments. In her statement: *Ro payment karon Ma'am hay cash, cash imaw. Wa ko it installment, cash git ah imaw. (The payment mode is cash basis only. No installment basis). To avoid complications, Ag sa mode of payment hay cash, wa ako gabaton it installment and consignment kasi di man abi nimo tanan masaligan do customer sometimes abba kung ubos na do product. tapos hay eh consignment di pa nakabayad at kung wasak eot a ro imong product ro habakae kimo it customer hay eh di T.Y. wala ng bayad.* (My mode of payment is cash basis. I do not accept installments and consignments because you can't trust some customers. Sometimes, my product was already sold out, but there was no payment. If other products arrive broken, they will no longer pay for it).

However, some participants have adapted the modern payment methods, offering digital options like GCash and Palawan Pay. Participant 1 mentioned, “usually, gid Ma'am hay cash gid mam do pag singil sa among baligya. May una man Mam nga sa wholesaler namon hay pa-ag i sag cash sa Palawan, duyon”. (Ma'am, my customers usually pay in cash and others in GCash or through Palawan). Participant 3 shared how digital payments make large orders easier to manage, receiving half the payment upfront and the remaining upon delivery).

*Do payment Ma'am sa akon nga pottery product gasend eagi do St. Lukes Hospital bago ipadala kanda do product. Ag ko maipadala ko na kanda thru shipping gapadala dayon sanda it nabilin nga balance. Duyon Ma'am ro akon nga ano mabahoe gid akong pasaeamat sa social media dahil dikaron gid ah Makita do imong mga produkto it mga tawo Ma'am ag gakita ka sa imong produkto.*” (Ma'am, before my product arrived there at St. Lukes Hospital, they send me half payment of my total price thru Palawan Ma'am. And when my products were shipped already and arrived at their area, they sent me the remaining balance thru Palawan Padala also. A big thanks to social media because my pottery product was introduced and gained us financially.

#### *Mode of promotion*

Word of mouth plays a crucial role in promoting pottery products. Mostly of the owners like Participants 1, 2, 8, and 10, practiced word of mouth as their strategy of promoting their products. Participant 1 in her statement:

*Gina apply namon Ma'am for trade fair kat duyon nga word of mouth. For example, abi mana mam sa word-of-mouth namon ngaron mam hay halimbawa ro among wholesaler namon nga suki nga customer hay halimbawa mana Ma'am hay may anda ngato nga na deliveran sa anda nga gin obra kamon nga mga wholesale namon nga baligya hay gin word of mouth man don nga idto mana kay Russel and pottery nga manami man mana kato mag bakae.* (We display in the trade fair and through word of mouth to promote our pottery products. For example, there are wholesalers who come to my store to buy my pottery products, and if they are satisfied with their purchase, they will tell also others to buy at Russel Store. This helps promote my products).

Participant 2 mentioned that “*huo (word of mouth) syempre hay kung may mag adto mat ah kakon hay idto lang man kita adto kay Nang Eva adto syempre barato hay.*” (I also promote my product through word of mouth. There are customers who came to my stall and bought pottery product and they also promote it because they were satisfied).

The same also with participant 8 said “*word-of-mouth idto mana kita mabakae kay Ma'am Lezel nga pottery product hay barato ta idto Ma'am.*” (Through word of mouth. Like my customer convincing other people to buy to Lezel pottery product because it is not expensive). Participant 10 also used purely word of mouth to promote her products.

Social media promotion, particularly through Facebook and Messenger, was one of how the owners promoted their products. This illustrates how online platforms enable sellers to reach customers beyond their immediate geographic area. Participant 3, for example, recounted how their Facebook post led to a recurring order from a major institution:

*Good morning, Ma'am. Sa akon mat ah ma'am nga strategy sa akon nga product nga pottery hay naga post ako sa social media, sa facebook gina public kot aron Ma'am para tanan do tawo nga makakita sa akong produkto hay Makita ag kung nailaan nanda hay dikaron dayon Ma'am gaguwa do mga orders nga halin sa ibat ibang lugar. Example Ma'am akon ngaron nga pag post idto sa fb hay hakita ako mam it St. Luke hospital, lucky gid ako. Ma'am dahil naka order sanda kakon it duyon hoh nga volume baea Ma'am nga bueotangan it sabon para sa mga pasyente every 6 months don Ma'am sanda kakon ga order.*” (Good morning, Ma'am. My strategy in my pottery product is I am posting it on public thru social media so that people will see my product and collect orders from different places. Like for instance, St. Luke's Hospital once saw my product when I posted it on Facebook and I was very much lucky. They ordered from me a volume of pottery soap holders for their patients They order soap holders every six (6) months.)

Participant 8 stated that “*sa Facebook Ma'am. Gina post man.*” (I posted my product on Facebook). Participant 9 added that she posted my product on Facebook.

Facebook was another promotion mode that was particularly effective in local communities, where local engagement, community sponsorships, and donations serve as promotional tools. Some participants also engaged in trade fairs and sponsored school programs to showcase their products.

Participant 1 mentioned that participation in trade fairs helped wholesalers discover their pottery, especially if there was a school program. In her statement:

*Gina apply namon Ma'am for trade fairs kat duyon nga word of mouth. For example, abi mana Ma'am sa word-of-mouth namon ngaron Ma'am hay halimbawa ro among wholesaler namon nga suki nga customer hay halimbawa mana mam hay may anda ngato nga na deliveran sa anda nga gin obra kamon nga mga wholesale namon nga baligya hay gin word of mouth man don nga idto mana kay Russel and pottery nga manami man mana kato mag bakae.* (We display at the trade fair and through word of mouth to promote our pottery products. For example, some wholesalers come to my store to buy my pottery products, and if they are satisfied with their purchase, they will also tell others to buy at Russel Store. This will help promote my products).

Participant 2 added a statement that: *may una Ma'am nga sponsored sa school ag sa donate man ako kapin kung may program, graduation.* (I also have a sponsor who asked me to donate in school, especially if there is a graduation program).

However, not all participants have had positive experiences with trade fairs. She was even disappointed because their products were lost in their displayed area. Participant 9 shared that: *tapos before abi Ma'am hay gina invite kami sa mga trade fair but since nga, naga kaeaduea eot ah do product nga ginapa display kamon it ano hay wa eot ah kami nag cope-up sa trade fair.* (We were invited to trade fairs before, but since some products were lost, we did not join trade fairs anymore). In addition, Participant 4, and Participant 6 used the displaying of their product at their stall area in Bayangan Village Poblacion, Lezo, Aklan for the customer to go there and see their products.

### *Mode of delivery*

The delivery mode varies between pick-up, home delivery, and cargo shipment depending on the seller's capacity and customer preferences. Many pottery owners, such as Participants 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, and 10, asked customers to pick up their ordered products from their stall area after the products were ready. Participant 2 said “ huo Ma'am, may una man kami nga pick up, usually hay sa wholesaler. Ginapa pick up eat ah nakon don Ma'am, wa man abi akot saeakyan”. (There is also pick up for my pottery products, usually by wholesalers at my store.) Also added by Participant 4 said “may akon mat ah nga customer nga ga order eat ah kakon tapos hay eh deliver ko sa anda nga stall area.” (I have a customer who bought a pottery products, and I delivered it to their stall area.) Similarly, Participant 9 explained “sometimes gapa Kalibo kami for delivery or ga deliver kami which is ginapa deliver ag napa shoulder nakon sa customers do delivery fee.” (Sometimes, we went to Kalibo for delivery, or we delivered to our customers, but the delivery fee was paid by our customers. While Participant 8 and Participant 10 let their customers pick up their products at their stall area. For larger or distant orders, cargo shipment was used to send their product safely and securely. Just like Participant 3 shipped the products to distant locations using cargo services “Do akon karon nga kwan sa pag deliver hay through cargo shipment.” (My mode of delivery is thru cargo shipment).

The marketing strategies employed by pottery owners showed that stall display selling was the most practiced by pottery owners, and sometimes, they practiced word-of-mouth selling. Owners utilized mostly on a cash basis as a mode of payment and the adoption of the present technology, like accepting digital payments through platforms such as GCash and Palawan Pay, and less on digital payments. In terms of promotion mode, owners used word of mouth to gain more customers and less practiced participating in trade fairs and stall displays of their products. More often, customers picked up their products at their stall area at Bayangan Village, Lezo, Aklan, which seldom delivered to their customer's home/stall designated area.

The marketing strategies adopted by pottery industry owners utilizing both digital platforms and traditional selling methods reflected broader trends in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) where a hybrid marketing approach is becoming increasingly common. The reliance on social media platforms such as Facebook and Messenger aligned with the findings of Amin and Hussain (2021), who asserted that social media marketing allows small businesses to reach a broader customer base with minimal costs, fostering customer interaction and expanding visibility beyond local markets. In the case of pottery sellers, this digital engagement has led to new business opportunities. However, the continued emphasis on word of mouth and local stall displays mirrors traditional marketing techniques often favored by businesses in rural or semi-urban areas. According to Sheth (2020) word of mouth remains a powerful marketing tool in communities where trust and personal relationships play a significant role in purchasing decisions. The gradual adoption of digital payment systems, such as GCash and Palawan Pay, further reflects a trend observed by Yao et al. (2022), who noted that SMEs in developing economies were increasingly integrating digital payment technologies to enhance transactional convenience and catered to tech-savvy customers. However, the preference for cash payments among many participants indicates a cautious approach toward digitalization.

### *Adaptive strategies used by pottery owners to sustain their business*

The data presents the adaptive strategies utilized by the pottery owners to sustain their businesses. Top of it were the marketing strategies. For example, in the selling mode, 8 out of 9 owners practiced stall display selling, where customers saw all the different products displayed. For the mode of payment, seven (7) owners used cash payments because they found security in it, while in the mode of promotion, four (4) owners believed that word of mouth was the most adaptive strategy in promoting their business. Families, relatives, and friends helped owners increase their customers. Eight (8) owners had their customers pick up the products at the stall areas in Bayangan, Village, Lezo, Aklan for their mode of delivery due to less hassle and easy delivery. These marketing strategies were the most effective and adaptive strategies practiced by the owners to sustain their businesses.

The resilience and survival tactics of seven (7) owners are that they always have a positive outlook on their business. They have faith and optimism that they will survive despite low product demand.

The next adaptive strategy was income management, where six (6) owners focused on fluctuating demand or low income, and four (4) owners used to increase the production of products during high demand and supply. Owners still sustained their businesses even though they experienced a fluctuating demand for their business.

Competition in business cannot be avoided. The best competitive strategy of the five (5) owners was through customer loyalty, taking good care, and doing good services to the customers. The two (2) owners' competitive strategies were through product differentiation, and one (1) owner offered lower or discounted prices and freebies.

Another adaptive strategy of owners was participating in local training and skills development. Three (3) owners served as resource persons. Meanwhile, three (3) were not attending local training and skills development because they believed they have already their knowledge and skills, which they practiced and still learning from their own skills and ideas. Two (2) owners attended as local training and skills development participants.

Pottery industry owners faced significant fluctuations in their monthly income, which required them to adopt various income management strategies to stay afloat. Participants 1, 4, and 6 noted that income dropped during certain months, especially June, July, and August. When demand was low, Participant 1 explained:

*Makaron gid ah Ma'am hay mahina gid ah kami Ma'am since it June, July, August nga mga month hay duyon gid ah do kung baga hay season ko among negosyo. So, ko datong pandemic Ma'am hay tiba-tiba gid ah kami kato kami owa it tueog tueogay sige lang obra tapos hay kung usually Ma'am hay sa time ngato hay nang pagpatak it October, November, December kasi ro mga mawron Ma'am hay may mga bonus kaya ...ga avail man sanda magbakae it product na display nanda sa andang mga baeay. (Ma'am starting from months of June, July, August is a season of low income of our business. So, during pandemic ma'am was our highest income. We experienced no sleeping time. We made a lot of products by months of October, November, and December because there is a bonus. Customers buy the products to be displayed in their homes.)*

Participant 3 similarly reflected on how business was so good during the pandemic that they had to work extra hours "*Ma'am hay hato ta, do gacie gina obra namong adlaw para mag obra eang it ka-ang dahil do ga order.*" (There are nights we made days making pottery because customers ordered a volume of pottery products). However, in the post-pandemic period, many owners found that their income was insufficient to cover daily expenses. Participant 1 noted that "*matsa kueang gid ah Ma'am. Kueang gid ah Ma'am, syempre hay do among capital hay ga duhong wa gahueag dahil mahina do baeakean hay syempre hay ro among workers kailangan kada adlaw hay bayaran mo git ah.*" (Our income is inadequate because our capital was frozen due to the low demand for products, and our workers must be paid for their daily wages, ma'am).

To manage limited resources, pottery owners focused on meeting essential expenses, such as paying workers. Participant 1 stated, *matsa kueang gid ah Ma'am. Kueang gid ah Ma'am, syempre hay do among capital hay ga duhong wa gahueag dahil mahina do baeakean hay syempre hay ro among workers kailangan kada adlaw hay bayaran mo git ah ron Ma'am.* (Our income is insufficient because our capital is frozen due to the low demand for products, and our workers must be paid their daily wages ma'am). This prioritization ensured the continuity of their operations despite financial challenges. Several participants discussed the impact of frozen capital and accumulating debt during slow business periods. Participant 9 shared: *Alinon mo man Ma'am bisan mayad ka sa sales talk kung owa it customer nga nagabakae. Actually, Ma'am hay batyag gid ah namon nga mahina ngane tagtag kami, tagtag sa utang...mahina gid ah, abu nga ka-ang nga gina bukot don dahil owa it gina boe-a it mga customer dahil pieilion abi. Sometimes ngane hay da anda eat ah nga gina bakae hay isang piaraso daywang piraso which is syempre sa ka kaabuon namon nga stalldisplay ang lugar namon dikaron sa printe eang do mabak ean. Indi ta ro sa likod, ngane batyag gid ah namon makaron do mahina namon nga Negosyo* (We have no choice, even though how good you are in sales talk, still there is no customer to buy our product. Ma'am, we really feel that our business is slowing down, we have so many debts. Our pottery products are kept because our customers did not claim them and they got only selected items-- one or two pieces of items. Of course, from all of us in our stall display area, only in front stall display area can earn an income. So, we really felt down in our business).

Also with other owners, Participant 10 shared her experience “*hasta Ma'am nag makara akot gueang hay kung amat bakean ako kung amat di man.*” (In my old age, sometimes I have my sales, sometimes I have no sales).

Most owners and workers suffered low income every day because there was no high demand for their products because of competitors like plastic products from China. As narrated by Participant 3, most of the time, customers bought pottery products at the front stall displayed area only, no more at the back area. Participant 9 said, “still surviving even with little income just to cope with their daily needs.” These financial difficulties necessitate strategies to maintain operations and address outstanding obligations.

Marketing strategies are very important in running a business. Marketing strategies encourage people to buy products or services that you are offering. Coming up with the right marketing strategies involved a lot of trials and tests. The point of the marketing strategies is to have a competitive edge over competitors in the market. In addition to these practical strategies, the psychological resilience of pottery business owners plays a crucial role in their success. Their reliance on faith, optimism, and perseverance mirrors the concept of psychological capital discussed by Luthans et al. (2017). It emphasizes how attributes like hope and resilience enable small business owners to navigate adversities and sustain their ventures. Moreover, these findings underscore a multifaceted approach to resilience in the pottery industry, combining financial strategies, skills development, community engagement, and personal fortitude to overcome challenges and ensure sustainable operations.

The key surviving tactic pottery makers employed was their ability to maintain strong rapport with loyal customers, who continued to support them during tough times. Participant 4 credited loyal customers for helping them through difficult periods, saying, “*I have my loyal customers to buy my pottery products*”.

To stay competitive, some owners focused on introducing new designs to stand out in the market. Participant 9 shared that training sessions taught them how to market products and introduced new designs they could produce and display in Roxas City. This ability to

adapt and innovate has become crucial for survival as pottery makers try to find unique selling points to counter the dominance of cheaper alternatives in the market.

Training and skills development play a crucial role in pottery businesses' sustainability, but the learning approaches vary. Many pottery owners actively seek training opportunities facilitated by government agencies, such as the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), to improve their skills. Participants 2, 4, and 6 attended a seminar/training as a resource person. Likewise, Participant 3 attended a seminar facilitated by DTI, while Participant 9 shared that he attended a seminar focused on marketing strategies organized by the same agency. This training equipped owners with practical skills and introduced them to new designs and business management techniques. Participant 9 highlighted the value of these seminars, saying, "DTI also taught us how to manage our daily expenses without affecting our capital". In addition to attending seminars, some experienced pottery owners had taken on the role of teaching others engaged in the pottery business.

Participant 6 experienced attending seminars and training as a resource person. In her statement: *Last Year mam nag attend ako it seminar sa Sibalom Antique, pero ana man to Ma'am it DTI pero kami ta do nag turo idto, kami ta do nag training sa mga students sa Universities sa Antique, daywa malang kami katong pottery.* (Last year, I attended the seminar in Sibalom, Antique. It was facilitated by the DTI, and we are the ones who taught the students of the University of Antique about making pottery products.)

Meanwhile, Participant 2 became a resource person, conducting demonstrations on pottery-making in various schools. In her statement "*Baw, permi gid ang karon Ma'am nga gina inadtunang sa amon, ko Sabado hay...nag demo kay Doctor Zonio, oh tapos nag adto eon akot Manila sa ano...idto ako nag demo sa...nalipat eot ang basta a Manila abu eot ah ang ha adtunang, sa mga eskwelahan ako ta permi ga demo.*" (Yes, I'm always attending training/seminar workshops and a resource person for demonstrations in making pottery products in any school and Manila).

However, not all owners relied on formal training. Participants 1, 8, and 10 did not attend any seminar/training; they preferred learning through experiences. They enjoyed producing their own product with their own creativity design which make their product more marketable in the world market.

Despite facing financial difficulties and competitive pressures, pottery business owners demonstrate remarkable resilience and a commitment to survival. Many participants mentioned the challenges of low sales and high competition, yet they remained optimistic. Participant 3 acknowledged the current challenges saying "*amon nga pa agi hay ro impact kamon hay usually down kaya among pamatyagan makara hay mahina gid ah ... but it's okay. We survive and eat 3 times a day.*" (So, the impact on us is usually down ... We survive and eat 3 times a day). This sentiment was echoed by Participant 6, who stated that despite their low income, they managed to meet their basic needs. They appreciated their loyal customers and have a positive outlook. As pottery owners always believed that God provides their everyday needs, even though in their most tough times.

Pottery industry owners relied on seasonal income management strategies, which echoed the adaptive behaviors outlined by Bocken et al. (2017), who discussed how small businesses adjust their operations based on fluctuating demand and changing economic conditions. Income management techniques such as prioritizing essential expenses and maintaining loyal customer relationships were consistent with the resilience strategies identified by De Massis (2016), who emphasized the importance of customer loyalty and financial prudence in sustaining small enterprises during periods of low income.

The findings from the responses of owners highlighted the resilience and adaptability of pottery industry owners in the face of fluctuating incomes, intense competition, and economic challenges. Income management strategies such as adjusting to seasonal demand, prioritizing essential expenses, and loyal customer relationships were vital for their survival. Owners maintained the loyalty of their customers to earn income just to cope with the daily expenses and needs of the family.

Additionally, the importance of skills development through both formal and self-directed learning aligned with the research of O'Cass and Weerawardena (2015), cited by Roostika (2019), who stressed that continuous innovation and skill acquisition are key to surviving competitive pressures, especially for businesses facing cheaper mass-produced alternatives. The fact that many pottery owners also taught and shared their knowledge with others supported the idea of knowledge transfer and capacity-building as essential components of business sustainability (Hitt et al. 2016). The findings on resilience and the role of faith and optimism in overcoming challenges were also reflected in the work of Luthans et al. (2017), who highlighted the significance of psychological capital and personal resilience in small business owners' ability to navigate adversity and sustain their enterprises.

#### *Challenges encountered by pottery owners in terms of marketability and sustainability*

The data presents the challenges the pottery owners encounter regarding marketability and sustainability. The pottery owners faced several challenges related to marketability. The first challenge was the sales income management of owners. In forecasting sales, seven (7) owners focused on this challenge, and one (1) owner focused on lower-income sales.

Another challenge was the customers' preferences and satisfaction, which are always sought by the customers to satisfy their chosen products. Five (5) owners focused on product quality and design, while two (2) owners concentrated on price, discount, and freebies.

For saleable pottery products, four (4) owners focused on cooking pots as the most saleable products, and three (3) owners concentrated on cooking burners. Likewise, three (3) owners concentrated on flower pots, two (2) owners focused on bricks, two (2) owners concentrated on chicken feeders, and two (2) owners concentrated on charcoal burners.

Regarding sustainability, the major challenge of seven (7) owners was the financial constraints, which included the business capital needed to run their business. Six (6) owners' challenges were on workers' benefits, and another two (2) owners' challenges were on workers' daily salary.

In operational management, seven (7) owners focused on the availability and maintenance of traditional ovens (pugon) for cooking operations, while five (5) concentrated on sourcing materials like quality clay, which could affect the production of pottery products if they did not maintain the good quality of clay and other materials.

Buyers or customers were the most important people in the business because they made a profit for the pottery owners. But there was always a challenge, especially on the kind of customers with five (5) owners having their own loyal customers while 3/9 have a transient/occasional buyer.

For customers' demand and supply of products, four (4) owners collaborated with other colleagues/workers, while one (1) owner tended to have her increased production of products or overproduction to supply the customers' demand. On the other hand, the requested delivery services for customers were pick up in stall/home and delivery in designated home/stall places.

The challenges encountered by the pottery owners were already normal to their situation as entrepreneurs. Owners always find ways to solve such challenges for the marketability and sustainability of their businesses.

Capital and income management significantly impacted their ability to grow and maintain their businesses. One of the most prominent issues in marketability was the limited variety of saleable products. Many pottery owners focused on specific items that were in demand, such as cooking pots, cooking burners, flower pots, bricks, chicken feeders, and charcoal burners.

### *Marketability*

For instance, Participant 1 mentioned, “*ahhh...kakon abi Ma’am hay sa, akon abi Ma’am nga products hay bricks as in naka focus eat ah imaw sa bricks, duyon. Usually, Ma’am kung abu akong order hay gina order ko man una sa akong mga kaibahan or napa obra ko.*” (For me Ma’am, I focused only on bricks product. If there are so many orders, I asked my colleagues to make it).

Participant 2 also mentioned that their saleable products were mostly cooking pots (kueon) and chicken feeders (saeaburan it manok). Some pottery owners, like Participant 3, made charcoal burners (*ulangan*) for sale. Participant 4 had so many marketable products like charcoal burners, cooking pots, and cooking burners, and asked her colleagues to make those products. Likewise, the saleable products of Participant 6 & Participant 10 were the charcoal burners and flower pots, and the same was true for Participant 8; only the flower pots were her saleable product. Meanwhile, of all participants, Participant 9 had many different saleable products, including the bricks she made by herself instead of paying workers.

Despite their product offerings and demand for more orders, they faced challenges when customer demand increased. As indicated by Participant 3:

*Sa akon mat ah Ma’am hay usually abi hay ga obra ako it saboran it manok, kalan ag ulangan nga kalan hay kung abu karon Ma’am do ga order kakon hay daywa kami ko ang asawa karon ga obra, daywa kaming partner. Ginatawan namon don Ma’am it dates ag kung an oboe-on nanda.* (In my case ma’am, I usually made chicken feeder and charcoal burner because those were the demands of my customers. I, with my husband made the products. We only gave our customers the schedule to pick up the said products.)

This reflects how pottery owners struggled to meet the larger volume of demands of customers. Most often, owners asked the help of their colleagues just to fulfill orders on time. Participant 1 also confirmed “*usually, Ma’am kung abu akong order hay gina order ko man una sa akong mga kaibahan or napa obra ko.*” (If there are so many orders, I ask my colleagues to make it.) While Participant 2 experienced “*ako eat ah ga obra Ma’am, agahunan ko pat aron it pag obra, pag bugtaw it agahon hay ruyon ta eagi ang unahon don basta ma ano nakon matatapan datong order ngato, ako eat ah isaea*” (I woke up early in the morning and I only made it by myself in making those products). In the same situation, Participants 6, 8, and 9 made their products instead of asking colleagues and paying labor for workers.

Participant 3 mentioned, “*hay kung abu karon Ma’am do ga order kakon hay daywa kami ko ang asawa karon ga obra, daywa kaming partner. Ginatawan namon don Ma’am it date ag kung an oboe-on nanda.*” (If there were more demands I, with my husband, made the products. We only give our customers the schedule to pick up the said products).

Participant 4 narrated that her other products, like cooking pots, charcoal burners, and cooking burners, were made by workers because she didn’t know how to make them. However, other products were also made on their own and produced by her husband.

Other challenges related to production were the lack of sufficient finances to manage materials and operational costs. All participants rely on borrowing money as a major problem

in business capital, such as buying raw materials like clay (*daga*), salaries for workers, daily needs, and other needs in running their business.

Participant 2 shared, “*I also borrowed from a lending company as additional capital to run my business.*” Participant 1 expressed similar struggles, saying, “*pinaka major gid do financial, syempre Ma’am hay sa kung halimbawa abi kung may ga offer baea ngara sa capital hay syempre Ma’am kung may tawo ka Ma’am nga na swelduhan nga worker.*” (The major problem I have is financial, most especially expenses for workers and capital for our business). Participant 3 also experienced financial constraints as her capital for their business. She borrowed money from a lending institution, which intended to pay for the place where she got her raw materials(clay) to make a pottery product.

This inconsistency affected the profitability business creating another barrier in sustaining marketability. Regarding sustainability, pottery owners encountered difficulties maintaining customer loyalty and managing operational costs. Some owners, like Participant 1, have loyal customers that had passed down through the family. She said, “*I have my loyal customers since they were the loyal customers of my sister-in-law. When my sister-in-law was gone, her customer was already in us.*” Participant 3 also shared that their loyal customers were from St. Luke’s Hospital, who ordered soap holders for patients. To sustain loyalty, Participant 3 ensured that the products were of high quality “*I made extra effort to make quality so that they would patronize and continuously order my products.*” However, maintaining loyal customers was a challenge, for it requires constant effort to meet customers' expectations and deliver consistent products.

In business management, challenges from competitors cannot be avoided. Competitors were the business partners of entrepreneurs. Management of the operation and labor force was another critical aspect of sustainability. Many pottery owners, including Participant 1 and Participant 4, faced difficulty paying workers on time. Participant 1 noted:

*May una gid don Ma’am nga sa workers especially gid ron sa workers Ma’am hay gina kueang kami sa among ginabayad kanda hay kung amat man don Ma’am hay ga hinyo don nga kung pwede anay hay sa sunod lang anay nga adlaw do bayad hay wa man gid siguro hay kung amat hay may grasya man nga ga abot hay may gabakae man sa among baligya hay hato man dayon among nabayad eon sa workers.* (Our problem was the payment for the salary of our workers. What we did was we paid their services in other day or else if there were times that we have our blessings, if our product was bought, we paid our workers right away).

In some cases, workers were given food for workers' benefits during times of financial difficulty. Participant 4 shared, “*I asked my workers for help if there were times my customers ordered a pottery product. And that was the time I gave them food for lunch.*” In some cases, the young labor force also faced challenges balancing work and personal life.

In managing sales capital income, several pottery owners discussed concerns with financial constraints by saving their earnings to reinvest in the business. Participant 1 shared, “*karon akon nga technique karon Ma’am hay gina save ko gid ah ro akong capital.*” (My technique for my sales is to save my capital because it is difficult for us if we have no capital). Similarly, Participant 4 stated, “*I made a volume of pottery products so that the income was volume also.*” This suggests that many owners rely on bulk production to maximize revenue during high-demand periods. Others, like Participant 3, incorporated additional business practices, such as selling clay to fellow pottery owners to maintain the capital of the business. Participant 3 shared, “*my husband got the clay in the rice field...The remaining soil from his trip delivery was sold to pottery owners and the remaining materials will be producing pottery products of our own for sale.*” Such strategies helped pottery owners manage their expenses and ensure a flow of income.

A study by Rogers (2020) discussed how limited product lines in traditional craftsmanship businesses can affect their ability to compete with larger, more diversified companies. Such challenges in adapting product lines to changing market demands often result in stagnant growth for small pottery businesses. This challenge aligned with the findings in the study by Hill and Wang (2021), which emphasized how accessing quality raw materials significantly affects the production capabilities of small businesses, especially in the craft industry. The reliance on debt to sustain business operations was consistent with the study by Fitzgerald et al. (2019), which revealed that financial instability and reliance on loans were the major obstacles for small-scale business owners, particularly those in developing industries like pottery. The financial strain mentioned by these pottery owners was echoed in the broader literature on small business sustainability (Fitzgerald et al., 2019). Customer loyalty and retention were pivotal for small businesses in artisan markets, as observed by Behr and Tsai (2022), who claimed that maintaining high product quality and personal customer relationships was essential for the long-term success of small-scale artisans. Payment delays and compensation issues are common in small-scale businesses, where cash flow can be unpredictable (White & Khan, 2020). As White and Khan (2020) noted, workers in small businesses often face inconsistent pay, which can lead to dissatisfaction and turnover.

#### *Coping strategies of pottery owners*

The data presents the coping strategies of pottery owners in overcoming their challenges. In marketability, the first challenge was sales income management, such as forecasting sales. Seven (7) owners saved money for their materials and daily operations, while one (1) owner earned a low income in balancing her sales and family's daily needs.

It was very difficult in their situation to manage their sales and income every day.

Regarding customer preferences and satisfaction, five (5) owners faced challenges with product quality and design but still maintained it, and two (2) faced challenges with price, discount, and freebies. This was the only way that the customers could satisfy their preferences and needs.

On the other hand, saleable pottery products were those products that were in demand by the customers. To cope with this, different pottery owners collaborated with other colleagues to produce saleable products and increase production.

In terms of sustainability, one of the major challenges was the financial constraints that included business capital for seven (7) owners. Owners borrowed capital from lending institutions/relatives to run their businesses and cope with this major challenge. Six (6) owners had challenges with the workers' benefits. The owners offered salaries with free food. Two (2) owners had challenges with workers' salaries. To solve this challenge, owners got the money intended for workers' salaries from their borrowed capital from lending institutions.

For the challenges on raw materials, five (5) owners were sourcing and buying quality raw materials from local suppliers, such as clay, sand, and charcoal, while one (1) borrowed raw materials from their colleagues.

In operational management, regarding the availability of traditional ovens (pugon) for cooking operations, three (3) owners mentioned that there were scheduled days for the owner's operation. It was confirmed by three (3) owners that the maintenance of the pugon came from an association's fund. On the other hand, five (5) owners confirmed that it was their own produced products, and three (3) owners produced products through collaboration with other colleagues/workers.

Loyal customers/buyers are difficult to find. So, to avoid this, five (5) owners maintained a good rapport with their loyal customers/buyers, while three (3) owners

impressed their occasional buyers by using different adaptive and effective marketing strategies just to satisfy their loyal customers.

In customer demand for products, four (4) owners were challenged by the volume of products. So, to solve this, owners collaborated with colleagues/workers to produce a volume of products. Two (2) owners adjusted to weather conditions (sunny days) to produce a volume of products, and one (1) owner increased her production or made overproduction. Meanwhile, for delivery services, four (4) owners delivered products to home/stall customers' designated places, and customers paid for the delivery services.

Pottery owners found ways to overcome challenges. For business capital, owners borrow from lending institutions just to cope with the finances needed to operate their business as a whole. Participant 1 mentioned that they borrowed from lending institutions to fund their operations. Additionally, Participant 6 highlighted that the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) offered small capital for their business, providing crucial financial support during challenging times. Participant 1 also mentioned about the salary for workers:

*May una gid don Ma'am nga sa workers especially gid ron sa workers Ma'am hay gina kueang kami sa among ginabayad kanda hay kung amat man don Ma'am hay ga hinyo don nga kung pwede anay hay sa sunod lang anay nga adlaw do bayad hay wa man gid siguro hay kung amat hay may grasya man nga ga abot hay may gabakae man sa among baligya hay hato man dayon among nabayad eon sa workers. (Our problem is payment for the wage of our workers. What we did is we paid their services every other day or else if there are times that we have our blessings like there are sales for our products, we pay our workers right away).*

The workers were the helpers and artisan of the pottery owners. Participant 4 said “*Duyon don Ma'am, duyon don nga gapa obra baea sa tawo nga gatao ako it mga soft drinks, tinapay, gapailabas ako, so ruyon.*” (That is the reality. If we have our workers, we give them snacks like soft drinks, bread, and also lunch.) Free food was the only benefit offered to workers. As participant 11 (worker) seconded in her statement “*owa, Ma'am, owa gid aron solo ang gid don Ma'am sa ing gin obrahan, pamahaw...ag ilabas duyon eang gid Ma'am.*” (We have no benefits only snacks and lunch were given.)

The coping strategies for sales and income management were that owners forecasted sales by saving for materials, conducting daily operations, and balancing sales and family needs. Participant 6 said, “*na save man Ma'am. Nabakae ko man it pinsan, bakeon ta aeagi (materials)*” (I saved my money for my materials. I bought a volume of my materials in pottery). Likewise in the statement of Participant 4:

*Akon abi ngaron Ma'am hay kung mageaha ako hay pinsan abi ron kung gina eaha nakon eh order eagi pinsan do kwarta karon Ma'am, kaya akong gina obra karon napaeain kot ah eagi karon do akong capital, ro akong pang grocery sa sueod it baeay mga gamit nakon sa pageaha ko agud di ma ubos akon ngato nga capital hay napaeain kot a eagi ron agud di baea ako maubusan it kwarta nga pang dugang sa akon ngato nga pang bakae it kahoy hay wa ko nabuoe kaya na save ko eagi. (For me Ma'am, I make a volume of pottery products so that the income is volume also. I separated my budget for the groceries and the materials for making my pottery product. I save my capital right away so that it will not bother me).*

The challenges are related to raw materials and equipment for the traditional oven (pugon), which is one of the important equipment in cooking pottery products. The Department of Science and Technology and the Department of Trade and Industry where the two agencies that gave financial assistance for the traditional oven (pugon) equipment, which was converted by pottery owners into association equipment. All pottery owners and workers

in certain areas in Lezo could use the said equipment. They got the clay (daga) at the hilly areas of the ricefield located at their place in Lezo, Aklan. One (1) pottery owner paid the rent of the lot. Some pottery owners bought and even borrowed materials like clay from their colleagues.

Operational challenges were also significant for pottery owners, particularly in sharing the traditional oven (pugon). Participant 1 mentioned that with only one traditional oven (pugon) available for all the pottery owners, scheduling was a challenge, especially when they had to cook a large volume of products in a limited time. To cope with it, owners carefully coordinated their work schedules, ensuring that each pottery owner used the shared equipment at their appropriate time. Participant 1 also shared about the raw materials. In her statement:

*Ano ron Ma'am, ro amon karon nga materials Ma'am hay clay pots don imaw Ma'am duyon ngaron nga clay hay idto don nabuoe sa idaeom it eanas sa barrio man don namon ina sa Lezo, amon eang karon hay do sa pageaha ag do gina gatong nga kahoy, ro baeas ngaron Ma'am hay duyon do among gina mix sa akon ngaron Ma'am nga clay nga bag-ong obra. (Our materials, ma'am, are clay for pots, which was also obtained from the rice field located at Lezo. We used charcoal in cooking and mixed sand in newly-made clay).*

Participant 3 addressed another operational challenge regarding the supply of charcoal saying, “*we provided individual charcoal. If it is your schedule to cook for your pottery in pugon, you must provide your charcoal.* They borrowed from others if the charcoal supply was insufficient, as Participant 3 did by asking her sister-in-law or a close friend.

These cooperative approaches helped the pottery owners overcome temporary shortages in resources. As Participant 3 added in her statement:

*Sa akon mat ah Ma'am hay do akon mat a abi ngarong asawa Ma'am hay imaw mat ah idto do gabuoe it clay sa eanas karon hay ana karon nga diskarte mabaligya imaw it daywang trip karon sa mga tawong gabakae it clay ag the rest on dayon karon hay amon eon dayon nga na obra para ratting gin baligya ngato nanang daywang trip (tricycle) hay gina bayad namon sa anang eogta nga naboe-an namon it clay, duyon..bali ro habilin nga anang ginbuoe sa eanas hay duyon eon dayon amon nga na obra nga ka-ang namon. (So, in my case ma'am, my husband gets the clay in the ricefield. He also sold the clay to our colleagues. We pay also to the owner of the lot where we got the soil. He sold the remaining soil from his trip to be used use also for our pottery products).*

Customers were the important people in business. A good rapport with customers is valued and appreciated; later, they will become loyal customers. Seldom were considered as occasional buyers.

Participant 1, in her 14 years in the industry, she had already loyal customers. She said “*ano Ma'am sa kakon mat ah siguro hay akong experience sa among negosyo hay 14 years eon ako hay kung baga hay sa ano siguro mam, sa suki-suki sa customer duyon eang gid siguro.*” (In my 14 years in this business, I have loyal customers who always come back to me if they will order a volume of products.) She also mentioned that taking good care of customers is very important because according to her statement “*Huo, syempre Ma'am, alagaan mo gid ah imong customer nga di ikaw masamad hay dikaron ikaw nabubuhi kanda.*” (Ma'am, as always, I take good care of my customers because they are my source of income).

Participant 4 said, “*when it comes to my customers, I always do my best to give them a quality product.* Participant 6 mentioned that she had lowered the prices of her products. She stated, “*There have been months when many customers have been buying our product. So, I*

*lower my prices and give discounts and freebies to them so that they will patronize my products.*

Operational challenges like limited facilities and resource shortages require careful coordination and strong social networks. By managing schedules effectively and with support from others, pottery owners could optimize their production capacity despite these constraints. Moreover, when larger orders came in, owners like Participation 9 did overproduction of pottery products.

*Kung baga hay my ga order abi mana it bricks nga thousand pieces ag tig napueo, so 10 thousand, bukon man it means nga 10 thousand hay dato eat ah ing obrahon, dapat hay obrahon nimo para kung baga hay may sobra nga pwede ibaligya dayon.* (If there are customers who ordered for one thousand bricks, it costs P10.00 each and the total amount is ten thousand pesos. You can make as more than one thousand so that you can sell also the remaining pieces.)

These approaches ensured that even if some products were not immediately needed, an extra inventory was available for future sales. Financial strategies, such as borrowing resources or capital and overproduction, enabled pottery owners to maintain cash flow and manage large orders more effectively. This flexibility helped them remain resilient despite unpredictable market demands and financial challenges. Efficient resource management was essential to minimize losses and ensure the quality of the products. Participant 4 provided an example of this when discussing the repaired of damaged pottery products:

*Sa product namon, may iba ta karon Ma'am nga di eot ah baea namon ma ano kasi kung mga maintok malang imaw Ma'am hay pwede mat ang ma semento imaw pero kung maeagko eot ah hay di eot namon on Ma'am mabawi. Hato eot ah amon nga di eot ah namon mabuoe rato.* (When it comes to product management to avoid losses, if there are small damage, we repair it by putting a cement material. But if there are big damage, we can't make it anymore.)

This highlights the strategy of saving minimal damaged products by repairing by putting cement material on it to reduce waste. Additionally, Participant 4 emphasized the importance of using good quality soil to ensure the pot is not damaged during production. She stated, “*The outcome of the pottery product will depend upon the soil type*”. This indicates that careful selection of raw materials was a key strategy for improving the durability and quality of the pots. Resource management, including repairing damaged products and choosing quality materials, directly affected the sustainability and profitability of the business. Pottery owners could enhance their competitive edge and customers' preferences and satisfaction by minimizing waste and ensuring higher product quality.

Weather conditions significantly influenced the production process, and pottery owners adapted their strategies accordingly. Participant 1 explained that during sunny days, pottery production was easier and more efficient “*kung mayad ka eon gid ing karon don Ma'am hay madasig ka mas lalo kung masilak hay ka abu man do ma obra Ma'am hay kung ma uean di ka man kapa abu...*” (If you are already good at making pottery, it is easy to produce a volume of pottery products, especially on sunny days. You can make more pottery products if it is the rainy season). This clearly indicated how favorable weather conditions, such as sunshine, enhanced production efficiency. Similarly, Participant 2 said this sentiment “*lalo kung masilak hay ka abu man do ma obra.*” (Especially on sunny days). However, during rainy seasons, the pottery makers faced difficulties with wet charcoal hampers during the firing process in the traditional oven (pugon). In these cases, production was slowed and adjusted by managing their schedules to ensure all products were made on time. The reliance on weather conditions emphasized the need for adaptability in production planning. Pottery owners anticipated seasonal variations and adjusted their operations accordingly, including

increasing production during favorable weather and accommodating delays during less optimal conditions.

The coping strategies employed by pottery owners, such as sales and income management, financial constraints, sourcing of raw materials, customer demand and supply, operational management, and even adaptation to weather conditions, are aligned with broader themes found in small business and entrepreneurship. For example, borrowing capital or materials and overproducing to ensure future sales are commonly cited strategies for managing financial uncertainty in small businesses (Kraus et al., 2020). Resource management, including carefully selecting raw materials and repairing damaged goods, has been shown to reduce waste and improve product quality, enhancing business sustainability (Dyer et al., 2018). Additionally, adaptation to external factors like weather was essential in industries with production dependencies on environmental conditions, as highlighted in studies on agricultural and craft-based businesses (Miller et al., 2019). Operational challenges, such as limited access to shared facilities and resource shortages, were often mitigated through careful scheduling and social networks, a strategy frequently discussed in small-scale entrepreneurship research (Rauch et al., 2020). Thus, the coping strategies observed in the pottery business reflected a common practice in recent studies on resilience and adaptability in small-scale enterprises.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the findings, it can be concluded that a clear pattern of female dominance in both pottery owners and workers is evident. Female-led initiatives and ownership in the pottery industry may enhance marketability, sustainability, and community dynamics by promoting gender equality, economic independence, unique perspectives, and women empowerment. The trend in the results highlights the importance of gender, experience, and income in shaping the dynamics between business owners and workers in the pottery.

Pottery owners demonstrate flexible and adaptive approaches to business that blend traditional methods with modern technologies. They demonstrate resilience by continuously adapting their strategy to remain competitive and successful in a dynamic market.

Pottery owners show a deep resilience and resourcefulness that are essential for sustaining their businesses amidst economic challenges and market fluctuations. By applying effective marketing strategies, such as wearing a positive outlook, resilience, and survival tactics owners, continuously managing fluctuating demands for income management strategies, innovative responses to competition, showing a strong rapport with loyal customers and continuously maintaining self-learning skills, and participating in local training will benefit in reviving and revitalizing business. These adaptive approaches will remain crucial for maintaining business sustainability and fostering growth in an ever-evolving market.

Pottery owners face significant marketability and sustainability challenges that hinder their businesses' growth and stability. A business challenge can be overcome by applying effective and adaptive strategies. Implementing innovative solutions, adapting to change, and continuously monitoring progress are also essential. Building resilience and fostering a positive connection with industry colleagues and customers can further aid in overcoming obstacles.

The pottery owners demonstrate a range of resourceful coping strategies that allow them to navigate the challenges they face in their business. They manage resources effectively to ensure the successful sustainability of the business. These coping strategies reflected resilience, adaptability, and resourcefulness in overcoming challenges in the survival and success of the pottery businesses. Results also highlighted the importance of

flexibility, continuous learning, building strong customer relationships, and boosting marketability.

Based on the aforementioned findings, it is recommended that targeted initiatives be developed to further empower females. Both owners and workers may offer mentorship programs where experienced female owners and workers can guide younger workers, fostering knowledge transfer and career progression. Promoting the formation of women-led cooperatives could offer a pathway for women to increase their collective bargaining power, gain access to larger markets, and achieve better income stability.

Pottery owners may strengthen their digital presence through social media and online platforms to help them reach wider audiences. Pottery owners may form a cooperative organization and collaborate with business organizations, which may help the industry promote, allow for shared resources, better bargaining power, and reduce costs. This collective approach fosters innovation and strengthens local economies. Cooperatives also enhance the sustainability of industries by focusing on long-term community benefits rather than short-term profits. In addition, pottery owners may offer free delivery of products to customers' designated places.

Pottery owners may strengthen the use of "word of mouth" selling through family, relatives, and friends locally and elsewhere. Owners also may adopt flexible payment systems like digital payments and installment options. Strengthening their digital presence through social media and online platforms can help them reach wider audiences. Owners may often practice promoting their products through participating in trade fairs locally, regionally, and even nationally to gain a wider audience and maintain the stall area display of products so that transient buyers/ occasional buyers may see all the displayed products and buy their choice. Owners may offer free national and international shipment delivery to gain more customers. Owners may manage fluctuating demand by applying effective marketing strategies that can help them uplift their business and increase the production of saleable products ready for customer demand and supply. In addition, the Local Government Unit of Lezo may offer a free seminar and training for both pottery owners and workers to enhance their skills and update on the trending products of the pottery industry. Owners may attend training and share what they have learned.

Pottery owners may find linkages between their products' marketability and their business' sustainability. The pottery owners may attend seminars on financial management when running a business. They may form a cooperative where they can gradually start savings and serve as the capital for their business. Pottery owners may ensure safety measures and health protocols that help protect workers, especially those involved in high-risk tasks like firing, contributing to their well-being and long-term productivity, and may provide insurance and other benefits. They may diversify their product range to avoid dependence on a few high-demand items and invest in skills development through training workshops to improve product quality and efficiency. Additionally, incorporating product differentiation strategies, such as creating unique designs, offering customizations, or utilizing innovative materials, can help pottery businesses stand out in competitive markets and cater to diverse customer preferences. Pottery owners may form a cooperative organization and collaborate with business organizations, which may help the industry promote sharing resources, better bargaining power, and reduced costs. The industry and the local government unit of Lezo may collaborate to support the pottery industry by assisting, especially in sourcing raw materials, places, and additional traditional ovens (pugon) as cooking equipment. and recent equipment in cooking, which helps pottery owners produce a volume of products even if the weather is not good. This pottery, in return, will serve as a tourist spot in the town of Lezo. Additionally, the academe may explore through research the

challenges faced by pottery businesses, such as limited product range, financial constraints, and labor and operational management, to develop innovative solutions and strategies that enhance sustainability, marketability, and resilience in the industry.

Customers may support local pottery businesses by purchasing directly from artisans and sharing their experiences via social media or word-of-mouth. By providing constructive feedback, customers may help improve product offerings and customer services. Supporting these businesses promotes sustainable craftsmanship. They may support local pottery businesses by purchasing directly from artisans and sharing their experiences via social media or word of mouth. By providing constructive feedback, customers may help improve product offerings and customer services. Supporting these businesses helps the local economy and promotes sustainable craftsmanship. Owners may enhance customer relationships through loyalty programs and the giving of freebies and discounts.

The Local Government Unit may support the pottery industry by providing financial assistance on training programs, organizing local events, exhibitions, and collaborations with tourism agencies that will help promote the industry to attract more customers, revive the use of pottery products, and value economic purposes. This support will help pottery businesses grow and thrive in a competitive, local, and international market.

The academe may support the pottery industry by offering targeted educational programs and training workshops focusing on technical skills and essential business practices. These programs should be tailored to the unique needs of small business owners and workers, promoting practical, hands-on learning. Additionally, academic research could explore the challenges faced by pottery businesses, such as limited product range, financial constraints, and labor management, to develop innovative solutions and strategies that enhance sustainability, marketability, and resilience in the industry.

Future researchers may focus on sustainable practices within the pottery industry, such as eco-friendly materials and energy-efficient production methods. Market studies to understand consumer preferences for products can guide business strategies. Additionally, exploring technological innovations like 3D printing could improve production processes and expand design possibilities.

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