

Enterprise management strategies in agricultural fairtrade products

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ABSTRACT

Purpose — *One of the fairtrade's major purposes is to raise the socio-economic of small-scale farmers. Numerous studies have found that fairtrade has a beneficial effect on farmers' profitability. Meanwhile, this study focused on the product management strategies of enterprises engaged in fair trade products.*

Method — *The researchers used 50 legally registered enterprises located and operated in the province of Cavite. The significant findings were drawn and analyzed using a descriptive research design.*

Result — *It was discovered that the majority of respondents were sole proprietors with few employees, had been in business for less than three years, and had an average initial capital of Php 3,000,000.00 or less. The product management strategies were very effective, and the majority of the participants used package labeling, fair pricing, and personal branding. Furthermore, the study identified challenges encountered in the implementation of product management strategies, such as poor consumer knowledge about packaging, financial resources that affect product pricing, and consumers' lack of brand exposure.*

Contribution — *The study provides detailed product management practices or strategies among fairtrade products, which will serve as a springboard for status quo analysis and baseline studies to explore and develop pandemic- and post-pandemic-sensitive resilient strategies that will promote the sustainability of fairtrade enterprises.*

Keywords: *agricultural products, fairtrade, product management strategies*



INTRODUCTION

The certification for fairtrade products generally aims to raise the economic and social status of marginalized producers, specifically small-scale farmers in the developing nation. Fairtrade certification may provide additional opportunities beyond the cooperative producer organization, which influence the farmers' agricultural practices (Elder et al., 2013). The fairtrade program transfers income to farmers by establishing a price floor and a different distribution channel that avoids middlemen between the raw commodity and global markets (Podhorsky, 2015). Cruz (2015) explained that one of the benefits of the producer if they become fairtrade-certified, is the assurance of the price stability of their produce. The fairtrade also supported responsible consumption practices among consumers by promoting the purchase of goods produced and traded under fair conditions (Raynolds, 2020). Agricultural products in the Philippines which are included under fair trade are sugar, bananas, coffee, and cacao.

Enterprises need to consider product management strategies toward fairtrade agricultural products since some consumers perceive fairly products as too expensive. Product management is essential for enterprises to understand the product's value. Moreover, it guides an enterprise in investing resources to deliver a competitive product. It is instrumental in achieving a business goal across the product life-cycle, which entails the stages of pre-development, development, introduction, growth, maturity, decline, and end-of-life (Kopp, 2022). Furthermore, it unites product development, marketing, and sales which can increase the profit of enterprises (Altexsoft, 2019). Fairtrade products are traded competitively in a heavily competitive market characterized by a huge volume of alternatives, complimentary and free entry, and exit. Commonly in the Philippines fairtrade products are commonly agricultural products (Habaradas & Aure, 2014). In the province of Cavite, fairtrade products include rice, coffee, banana, and cacao products, which belong to the challenged enterprises by the effect of the pandemic (Dagpin et al., 2022).

The study of Bomersall (2012) gave a wide perspective of understanding fairtrade products in the Cavite market, which highlighted that awareness and capacity to pay were the main factors of enterprise growth. A study was conducted by Didier and Lucie (2008), who pointed out the capacity to pay as a key player in business growth in western countries. This situation threatens the fairtrade products as economic recession was included during the pandemic. Considerably, according to Hughes et al. (2018), an appropriate understanding of strategy within the enterprise, including products, provides an avenue for business growth that can be market sensitive. Hence, the researchers explored

the product management practices of fairtrade products to create a pandemic-sensitive perspective. Today, international and local markets in the Southeast Asian region are experiencing necessary effects, which in turn influence various enterprises ([Tadeo et al., 2023](#)), including fairtrade products. Considerably, the province of Cavite is continuously seeking ways to stimulate and craft a resilient market environment for local enterprises, and the researchers saw a pathway of inspecting and understanding product management strategies as a platform for resilient fairtrade enterprises. Additionally, the majority of the small amount of fairly produced goods is designated for exportation. The benefits of fairtrade products on farmers' lives were hardly known and evident in the Philippines. Hence, it is important to convey that those products do not necessarily have to cost more than others and offer additional benefits. Product innovation and responding to changing business environment in the new normal are some of the problems that lead to business failure ([Dagpin et al., 2022](#)).

Thus, the researchers determined and analyzed the product management strategies of enterprises engaged in agricultural fairtrade products. It may stimulate relevant enterprises to develop more product-focused approaches, which could lead to sustainable business operations as an enterprise jump-start strategy amidst pandemic.

METHOD

Research design

The researchers employed a descriptive research design. Considerably, this approach was utilized to determine the product management strategies, perceived effectiveness, and challenges experienced by the participants in employing product management strategies.

Sources of data

This study used both primary and secondary data. Survey questionnaires were used to collect primary data from participants. Secondary data, on the other hand, were gathered from published scholarly articles and academic references.

Sampling design

The researchers utilized purposive sampling in selecting the target participants. The researchers identified enterprises engaged in fairtrade agricultural products through a scanning and screening approach. Considerably, these enterprises

were legally registered and verified through the business permit and licensing office of their respective cities and municipalities. The total 50 target participants were located in selected areas of Cavite, specifically in Amadeo, Naic, Silang, the City of Tagaytay, the City of General Trias, and Cavite City, respectively.

Research instrument

During the data collection, the researchers used self-constructed survey questionnaires. The self-made instrument contains all the necessary information that helps the researchers meet the study's objectives. Specifically, the researcher used close-ended questionnaires to determine the product management strategies of enterprises engaged in fair trade agricultural products. The computed Lawshe's Content Validity (LCV) was 0.77. Cronbach alpha was calculated as 0.664 validity which conformed with instrument-statistical validity and reliability values.

Statistical treatment

Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage distribution, and computed mean were used. Through the statistical analysis, the researchers were able to draw analysis on the status of enterprises engaged in agricultural fairtrade products, specifically the effectiveness of its product management strategies.

Data Analysis

This scale was used to assess the perceived effectiveness of the enterprises' product management strategies. It employs a qualitative approach, with 5 representing the value of very effective and 1 representing the value of ineffective.

Table 1. Perceived effectiveness scale of product management strategies

| Range | Descriptive value | Qualitative approach |
|--------------|--------------------------|---|
| 4.20-5.00 | Very effective | The product management strategies of enterprises are very effective |
| 3.40-4.19 | Effective | The product management strategies of enterprises are effective |
| 2.60-3.39 | Moderately effective | The product management strategies of enterprises are moderately effective |
| 1.80-2.59 | Slightly effective | The product management strategies of enterprises are slightly effective |

| | | |
|-----------|---------------|--|
| 1.00-1.79 | Not effective | The product management strategies of enterprises are not effective |
|-----------|---------------|--|

Source: data processed (2022)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 2. Forms of business organizations

| Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Sole proprietorship | 31 | 62.50 |
| Partnership | 10 | 20.00 |
| Corporation | 8 | 16.50 |
| Cooperative | 1 | 2.00 |
| Total | 50 | 100.00 |

Source: data processed (2022)

Table 2 shows the participants' frequency and percentage of the business profile in terms of forms of business organization. This presents that 62.50% of the participants were registered as sole proprietors while 2.00% are under cooperative. This implies that most of the participants are registered sole proprietors.

Table 3. Number of employees

| Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------|-----------|---------------|
| 1 to 9 employees | 34 | 68.50 |
| 10 to 99 employees | 15 | 30.00 |
| 100 to 199 employees | 1 | 2.00 |
| Total | 50 | 100.00 |

Source: data processed (2022)

Table 3 shows the participants' business profile regarding the number of employees. It reveals that 68.50% of the participants have 1 to 9 employees, while only 2.00% have 100 to 199 employees. Considering the number of staff of the participants, they generally belong to a micro business.

Table 4. Length of the business operation

| Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Less than 3 years | 36 | 72.00 |
| 3 to 5 years | 3 | 6.00 |
| 6 to 8 years | 4 | 8.00 |
| 9 to 11 years | 3 | 6.00 |
| More than 12 years | 4 | 8.00 |
| Total | 50 | 100.00 |

Source: data processed (2022)

Table 4 presents the business profile of the participants in terms of the length of business operation. It shows that 72.00% of the participants operated for about less than 3 years. On the other hand, there were 6.00% of participants operated for 3 to 5 years. Generally, most of the participants were in the infancy stage of the business cycle.

Table 5. Average initial capital

| Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|---------------|
| Php 3,000,000.00 and below | 36 | 72.00 |
| Php 3,000,001.00 to Php 15,000,000.00 | 9 | 18.00 |
| Php 15,000,001.00 to Php 100,000,000.00 | 2 | 4.00 |
| Php 100,000,001 and above | 3 | 6.00 |
| Total | 50 | 100.00 |

Source: data processed (2022)

Table 5 presents the business profile of the participants in terms of average initial capital. This shows that 72.00% of the participants have average initial capital of Php 3,000,000.00 and below, while 6.00% of the participants have average initial capital of Php 100,000,001.00 and above. Generally, the results reveal that most of the participants are considered micro businesses. Based on the 2021 statistical data of the Philippine Statistical Authority, 90.54% of the total MSMEs are micro enterprises ([Department of Trade and Industry, 2021](#)).

Table 6. Product management strategies of enterprises in the packaging

| Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Visual packaging | 33 | 26.83 |
| Package labeling | 39 | 31.71 |
| Promotional packaging | 14 | 11.38 |
| Unique packaging | 14 | 11.38 |
| Easy to remove packaging | 18 | 14.63 |
| Compostable packaging | 5 | 4.07 |
| Total | 50 | 100.00 |

Source: data processed (2022)

Table 6 shows participants' frequency and percentage of product management strategies in terms of packaging. This section presents that 31.71% of the enterprises used package labeling. Moreover, the 5 participants, or 4.07% of the enterprises, are using compostable packaging. The result shows that most of the enterprises used package labeling. The findings of [Sung \(2021\)](#) supported that container design affects consumer purchase intentions. Moreover, materials were also taken into account as a source of information. It indicates that different

consumers' purchasing habits, including material and textual aspects, are affected. Moreover, [Fenko et al. \(2018\)](#)'s study stated that textual claims and metaphorical illustrations of coffee bean packaging on consumers' responses are influenced by both visual elements and textual claims depicted on the package.

Table 7. Product management strategies in pricing

| Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Fair pricing | 31 | 36.05 |
| Competitive matching | 21 | 24.42 |
| Value-based pricing | 30 | 34.88 |
| Partitioned pricing | 2 | 2.33 |
| Perceived-value pricing | 1 | 1.16 |
| Other/s | 1 | 1.16 |
| Total | 50 | 100.00 |

Source: data processed (2022)

Table 7 shows the frequency and percentage of product management strategies of participants in terms of pricing. This section presents that those 31 participants, or 36.05% of enterprises, employed a fair pricing strategy. Additionally, 1.16% of participants use the perceived-value pricing strategy the least. The result reveals that most enterprises are using a fair pricing strategy. [Samoggia et al. \(2021\)](#) found that people who buy and consume food are increasingly looking for emotions and values. They ensure that the products are socially and environmentally sustainable. The consumers' interest in product price fairness is increased. Moreover, [Konuk \(2017\)](#) supported the findings that price fairness leads to food satisfaction. It implies that price fairness is one factor that satisfies the consumer. Consumers will not feel taken advantage of by producers of organic food.

Table 8. Product management strategies in branding

| Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Personal branding | 42 | 43.75 |
| Corporate branding | 5 | 5.21 |
| Brand co-creation | 6 | 6.25 |
| Brand identity | 22 | 22.92 |
| Brand image | 20 | 20.83 |
| Other/s | 1 | 1.04 |
| Total | 50 | 100.00 |

Source: data processed (2022)

Table 8 shows the frequency and percentage of the product management strategies of participants in terms of branding. This section presents that those 42 participants, or 43.75% of the enterprises, are personal branding. Moreover, 5 participants, or 5.21% of the enterprises, are least using the personal brand. The result reveals that most of the participants are using personal branding. The study of [Alonso-Gonzalez et al. \(2018\)](#) gave substance to personal branding, allowing the individual to become unique not only from a personal point of view but also from the professional one. It is a method that will identify the traits and qualities that make the individual unique compared to other professionals. Moreover, the study by [Vilander \(2017\)](#) stated that a person's reputation and image are their brand. In the eyes of others, it is shaped by appearance, channel preference, presence, and activities. In essence, personal branding communicates a person's identity, level of expertise, and desired outcomes. It was also addressed that a careful understanding of what to communicate and the right kind of content to share will help someone develop a personal branding plan.

Table 9. The perceived effectiveness of product management strategies of participants

| Category | Mean | Descriptive value |
|-----------|------|-------------------|
| Packaging | 4.44 | Very effective |
| Pricing | 4.46 | Very effective |
| Branding | 4.42 | Very effective |

Source: data processed (2022)

Table 9 shows the perceived effectiveness of product management strategies of participants. The table showcases the perceived effectiveness of product management strategies in terms of packaging, pricing, and branding were very effective, with corresponding mean values of 4.44, 4.46, and 4.42, respectively. Generally, the product management strategies of participants are very effective.

Table 10. Challenges in employing product management strategies in terms of packaging

| Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|---------------|
| Inadequacy of product design | 13 | 20.31 |
| The packaging is not interesting | 4 | 6.25 |
| No ethical marketing of the product | 6 | 9.38 |
| Competitive in the form of packaging is weak | 8 | 12.50 |
| Poor consumer knowledge about the packaging | 14 | 21.88 |
| Other/s | 19 | 29.69 |
| Total | 50 | 100.00 |

Source: data processed (2022)

Table 10 shows the frequency and percentage of challenges the participants experienced regarding packaging. This section presents that the majority of the participants, or 21.88%, have experienced poor consumer knowledge about the packaging, while the packaging is not interesting is the least, with 6.25% of the participants having experienced it. The result reveals that most participants experienced poor consumer knowledge about the packaging and the challenges. [Ndule \(2020\)](#) findings supported that the packaging significantly influenced the consumer purchasing the product. Moreover, the study of [Heredia-Colaco et al. \(2017\)](#) promoted the idea that fair trade certification is a key differentiator for brands. In the brand with low familiarity, fair trade certification's inclusion seems important where the low familiar brand seems positively interfere with customers' product valuation with these added on-package attributes.

Table 11. Challenges in employing product management strategies in terms of pricing

| Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|---------------|
| Financial resources which also affect the price of the product | 16 | 25.81 |
| Product price with no fair trade message | 4 | 6.25 |
| The enterprises have low profitability | 9 | 14.52 |
| The enterprises do not have effective marketing strategies. | 6 | 9.68 |
| The enterprises have labor problems, which also affect the pricing of the product. | 11 | 17.74 |
| Other/s | 16 | 25.81 |
| Total | 50 | 100.00 |

Source: data processed (2022)

Table 11 shows the frequency and percentage of challenges experienced by the participants in terms of pricing. This section presents that the majority of the participants, with 25.81% experienced financial resources, which also affects the price of the product, while the product price with no fair trade message is the least with 6.45% of the participants experienced. The result reveals that financial resources, which also affect the price of the products, most of the participants experienced challenges. The findings of [Prakash & Verma \(2019\)](#) supported that the problem of the initial period of a business is the financial resources. Additionally, financial obstacles show that timely and appropriate financing at a fair rate is a prerequisite for the growth of enterprises. Moreover, [Gilchrist et al. \(2017\)](#) showed support for financial resources. It shows how firms with fewer financial resources raise prices in comparison to those with more resources. Competitive enterprises must cope with expensive price adjustments and external financial risks when setting prices to actively manage current demand

against future predicted demand. As a whole, the study examined how enterprises with little internal liquidity greatly impact pricing.

Table 12. Challenges in employing product management strategies in terms of branding

| Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|---------------|
| Lack of promotion of the brand | 19 | 23.75 |
| Consumer brand awareness is weak | 12 | 15.00 |
| Lack of brand exposure to the consumer | 19 | 23.75 |
| Difficult to introduce the product | 10 | 12.50 |
| Lack of expertise in making decisions about the product branding | 7 | 8.75 |
| Lack of managerial implications | 5 | 6.25 |
| Other/s | 16 | 25.81 |
| Total | 50 | 100.00 |

Source: data processed (2022)

Table 12 shows the frequency and percentage of the challenges experienced by the participants in terms of branding. This section presents that 23.75% of the participants lack promotion of the brand, while the least of the participants lack managerial implications with 6.25%. This result reveals that most challenges experienced by the participants are lack of promotion of the brand. The study of [Lee et al. \(2017\)](#) explained how the dominance of other locally brewed coffees, together with the operations of foreign café franchises, will cause them to face obstacles, including a lack of consumer brand exposure, and this discussion provided support for the lack of brand exposure. Additionally, [Lou et al. \(2019\)](#) found that having several brands for agricultural products will cause agricultural firms to have poor brand awareness, poor market awareness, and a lack of initiative to grow brands. On the other hand, the study of [Song et al. \(2019\)](#) supported the findings that the relationship between brand image, brand love, and brand respect has been recognized as having a significant impact on increasing brand loyalty. In the context of name-brand coffee shops, it is important to concentrate on brand image management, which includes the exterior surroundings and internal perception. Moreover, the study of [Vaikunthavasan et al. \(2019\)](#) recognized the issue MSMEs in Northern Province were facing and found that one of the biggest issues was marketing, namely in the areas of product, price, promotion, and distribution. Due to the high expense of advertising and marketing to transmit the message about the products or services, SMEs have been using only a limited number of media to disseminate information. The findings of [Tadeo & Muralla \(2022\)](#) supported the results of the study, where packaging and promotion were the key challenges of One Town One Product (OTOP) in Cavite which can be attributed to fairtrade products.

Discussion

Profile of the fairtrade enterprises

Generally, the fairtrade enterprises in Cavite were focused on the upland areas of the province. Considerably, most of the enterprises were sole proprietors, with 62% of the total participants. The findings support the data provided by the senate of the Philippines (2021), which mostly sole enterprises predominate microeconomics dimensions of the economy. Considerably, it supports the study of Pichay et al. (2021) and Tadeo et al. (2023), that most of the participants are a sole proprietorship. The study of Malinao (2022) coincides with the results wherein the local coffee producers in Ifugao province are mostly sole proprietorships. Similar to the study conducted by Abalos & Doria (2021), the majority of the registered enterprises in Pangasinan were sole proprietors. This structure of the form of business can be attributed to how farmers themselves become a seller of their own fairtrade products and link them to their market. Noting that they have only less than 9 employers, as showcased in Table 2. Moreover, most of the participants have less than three years in operation and were just starting up before within the pandemic timeline. The key characteristics of these enterprises were microenterprises having less than 3 million pesos which have 72.00% of the total participants. It confirms the report of the Philippines senate that there is 70% participation of microenterprises in the 95% micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME) economic composition of industries in 2021. The predominance of microenterprises is very common in southeast Asia, as studied by Mendoza & Tadeo (2023). This can be attributed to low-capital sourcing and accessibility of financial institutions in the region.

Product management practices of fairtrade enterprises

The fairtrade enterprises focused on simple package labeling with 31.71% of total participants. It is noted that among these packaging activities, this is the least costly and can be done with minimum manpower. Fairtrade products were bounded by fair pricing as suggested and purported by a competitive market under a competitive structure where products are widely subjected to substitution and very elastic cross-product momentum. The same attribute revealed that personal branding was utilized in branding as key product management. It is the least costly and can be executed by sole ownership and microenterprise. In addition, as perceived by fairtrade entrepreneurs, the strategy that was utilized was very effective. This response is common among low-capital enterprises with limited operations. The participants highlighted their knowledge to innovate their products, restricted financial access,

institution, and financial-augmenting support such as safety nets from the government. These problems confirm the flow effect of the pandemic on these enterprises, which heeds a more strategic approach to product management.

CONCLUSION

The participants' profiles are identified, and most of them are commonly used by one-person operations with a small number of employees that have been operating for less than three years, which is classified as the infancy or introductory phase in the business cycle. Furthermore, based on their initial capital, they are considered microenterprises. Enterprise product management strategies are classified into packaging, pricing, and branding. This study found that most participants employed package labeling, fair pricing, and personal branding strategies. Participants' product management strategies were effective in packaging, pricing, and branding. Participants reported a lack of consumer knowledge about packaging, making it difficult to implement product management strategies. Participants indicated that their financial resources affect the price of a product, while inflation tends to raise the price. Furthermore, participants reported difficulty implementing branding strategies due to a lack of brand promotion and consumer exposure.

Enterprises should evaluate their strategies, particularly in packaging, pricing, and branding. Despite the fact that their product management tactics were highly effective, reviewing those strategies can help them minimize the obstacles they encountered. In addition, they must prioritize the aforementioned obstacles in order to remain competitive in the market. Similarly, businesses should pay special attention to product packaging, as promoting the product alongside the packaging eliminates poor consumer knowledge. Furthermore, because they are classified as micro-enterprises, promotion should be done in various ways, including social media promotion.

On the other hand, having sufficient stable financial resources will not affect the product's price. In terms of promotion, being active on multiple social media platforms may help eliminate the challenges they encounter when implementing a branding strategy; promoting on multiple social media platforms allows enterprises to broaden their target audiences. Finally, businesses should connect their fair trade agricultural products to local cooperatives through One Town, One Product (OTOP). This would help enterprises involved in fair trade agricultural products promote their goods and products and fund their respective businesses.

The researchers suggest to future researchers to conduct a customer-segment analysis concerning the product management strategies that were conducted by the fairtrade entrepreneurs. Considerably, the researchers suggest exploring intermediating variables that may link consumer perspective and enterprise strategy to establish a behavioral and theoretical note that can further provide an in-depth analysis of the product management implementation paradigm in marketing.

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