

Original Article

# Selling Strategies and Business Practices of Rice Retailers: A Qualitative Study in a Rural Philippine Setting

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**Abstract.** This study examines the sales strategies of rice retailers in Cabanglasan, Bukidnon, Philippines, in a competitive, economically uncertain market. While previous studies have explored general retail practices, limited research has focused specifically on the strategic and operational challenges faced by small-scale rice retailers in rural municipalities—an essential gap this study addresses. Using a qualitative approach, key informant interviews (KII) with 10 rice retailers at the Poblacion market, and employing thematic analysis, identified patterns in their sales practices and operational difficulties. The findings reveal two major themes: effective sales strategies and key challenges. Retailers reported that strong salesmanship, offering high-quality rice, and applying strategic pricing, such as customer discounts, strengthened customer trust and loyalty. In contrast, they faced challenges, including intense competition, inadequate record-keeping, and financial risks associated with extending credit—issues that disproportionately affect smaller retailers and compromise their financial stability. The study underscores the need to build customer relationships, ensure consistent product quality, and apply competitive pricing strategies, while also addressing operational weaknesses, such as poor documentation and credit management. It concludes by recommending support programs in business management, financial literacy, and record-keeping to strengthen the long-term viability and competitiveness of rice retailers in the area.

**Keywords:** Rice retailers; Sales strategies; Retail management; Small business sustainability; Marketing strategies.

Rice is a staple commodity in the Philippines and a vital component of food security, making its availability and affordability a primary concern for households (Chen & Zhao, 2023). As a primary source of daily nutrition, rice consumption significantly influences household expenditure and purchasing patterns. Retailers play a crucial role in the food system by serving as intermediaries between farmers and consumers, ensuring a steady supply of rice and maintaining market stability (Feryanto et al., 2023). Understanding the dynamics of rice retailing, including pricing and sales strategies, is therefore essential for supporting livelihoods, controlling inflation, and promoting fair market practices. Recent studies indicate that retail rice pricing is complex and cannot be assumed to reflect market trends; retailers actively make decisions that influence prices and availability, thereby affecting both profitability and consumer access (Hafizah et al., 2020; Isla, 2023).

Given these pricing dynamics, sales performance becomes a critical factor for the sustainability of rice retailers. Effective sales strategies directly impact profitability, competitiveness, and growth, while also supporting the local economy by providing employment and accessible purchasing options. Prior research has explored general aspects of rice retailing in the Philippines. Still, no studies have focused on the unique context of Cabanglasan, Bukidnon. In this municipality, rice retailing is a primary livelihood for many residents and is influenced by local market conditions, consumer behavior, and supply chain factors. Investigating this context provides insights into the challenges and opportunities that small-scale retailers face in a rural economy, filling a significant research gap. This study, therefore, aims to examine the sales strategies employed by rice retailers in Poblacion, Cabanglasan, Bukidnon, to enhance their sales performance. By identifying effective practices and operational challenges, the research seeks to offer evidence-based recommendations to improve profitability, market competitiveness, and local economic resilience, thereby contributing to both rural development and policy formulation for sustainable food systems.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences and sales strategies of rice retailers in Cabanglasan, Bukidnon. A phenomenological qualitative design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives, providing rich, contextual insights into their practices, challenges, and decision-making processes (Creswell, 2018). This design is particularly well-suited to capturing nuanced information on sales strategies and operational experiences in a real-world retail setting.

### **Research Locale**

The research was conducted at the Cabanglasan Public Market, the town's primary trading hub for agricultural products, including rice. The market comprises approximately 50 rice retail establishments and serves as a key economic center for local farmers and consumers. Cabanglasan was selected because it is representative of rural rice retailing in Bukidnon, where many households rely on rice retail as a primary source of livelihood. Its unique market dynamics, including competition, customer demographics, and supply chain characteristics, make it an ideal setting for investigating strategies to enhance sales performance.

### **Research Participants**

This study involved 10 rice retailers, selected purposively to ensure participants had relevant knowledge and experience in rice retailing. Inclusion criteria were: (a) actively operating a rice retail business in Cabanglasan Public Market, (b) at least one year of experience in rice retail, and (c) willingness to participate in an interview. Retailers not involved in direct sales or with less than one year of experience were excluded. Ten participants were sufficient to achieve data saturation, as there are only 100 rice retailers in Cabanglasan, Bukidnon, and some participants declined to participate because they found it difficult to answer questions, even though the language used was their mother tongue. Also, consistent with qualitative research guidelines suggesting that 8–12 interviews are adequate to capture recurring themes in a focused population (Boyd, 2001; Creswell, 1998).

### **Research Instrument**

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researchers. The guide contained open-ended questions focusing on sales strategies, operational challenges, and customer engagement practices. The instrument was validated by two experts in business and qualitative research to ensure clarity and relevance. A pilot test was conducted with two non-participating rice retailers to refine question phrasing and sequencing prior to formal data collection.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the Cabanglasan Public Market and lasted approximately 30–45 minutes each. Researchers obtained informed consent before each interview, ensuring participants were aware of the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and confidentiality measures. Interviews were audio recorded with permission and supplemented by observational notes. To ensure trustworthiness, researchers conducted member checking by summarizing key points from interviews and confirming their accuracy with participants.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. The process involved: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, (2) coding meaningful segments, (3) generating themes by

grouping related codes, and (4) interpreting patterns to answer the research questions. This approach facilitated the identification of recurring strategies and challenges relevant to rice retailers' sales performance.

### Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research standards. Ethics clearance was obtained from the university. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and anonymity. Data were securely stored and accessed only by the research team. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

## Results and Discussion

The findings of this study are presented through thematic analysis of interviews with rice retailers in Cabanglasan, Bukidnon. Three major themes emerged: Sales Performance Challenges, Record-Keeping Practices, and Strategies to Improve Sales Performance (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Summary of Themes, Sub-themes, Descriptions, Codes, and Significant Statements

Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Codes	Significant Statements
<b>Theme 1:</b> Sales Performance Challenges	1.1 Competition and Market Saturation	Retailers experience declining sales due to an increasing number of competitors and door-to-door rice sellers.	Competition, Saturation, Door-to-Door Selling	<i>"Daghan na kaayog gapamalogya ug bugas... lisod ang halin."</i>
	1.2 Economic and Seasonal Constraints	Slow earnings are attributed to economic crisis, weather conditions, and fluctuating customer demand.	Economic Crisis, Few Customers, Seasonal Demand	<i>"Very slow earnings because of a few customers due to the economic crisis."</i>
	1.3 Positive Sales Periods	Retailers acknowledge periods of high sales depending on season and customer flow.	Economic Crisis, Few Customers, Seasonal Demand	<i>"Chada siya kay naa me daghan customer taga adlaw."</i>
<b>Theme 2:</b> Record-Keeping Practices	2.1 Systematic Record Keeping	Larger retailers maintain daily, monthly, and annual records to monitor performance and comply with regulations.	Daily Record, Monthly Report, Annual Inventory	<i>"Makita namo among halin sa tibuok tuig."</i>
	2.2 Minimal or No Record Keeping	Small retailers keep few or no records due to low sales or immediate turnover of income.	No Listing, Mental Calculation	<i>"Dili na nako gina lista kay gamay raman ang halin."</i>
<b>Theme 3:</b> Sales Improvement Strategies	3.1 Customer Engagement and Service	Emphasis on sales talk and customer service to retain buyers and encourage loyalty.	Sales Talk, Customer Care, Friendliness	<i>"Tarungan lang gyud ug atiman ang customer para mubalik sila."</i>
	3.2 Product and Store Positioning	Retailers rely on accessible store locations and good-quality rice to attract customers.	Good Location, Quality Rice	<i>"Dali ra makit-an among tindahan."</i>
	3.3 Pricing and Credit Decisions	Retailers adjust prices, offer discounts, and allow credit selectively to maintain competitiveness.	Lowering Price, Discount, Credit	<i>"Magpa-utang ko pero sa mga trabahante ra."</i>

### Sales Performance Challenges

This theme captures the experiences of rice retailers concerning fluctuating sales performance. Their narratives reveal that competition, economic conditions, and seasonal customer behavior highly influence profitability. Understanding these experiences provides insight into the underlying factors shaping the retail rice market in Cabanglasan.

#### Competition and Market Saturation

Retailers consistently reported difficulties in earning due to the increasing number of competitors, including the emerging trend of door-to-door rice selling. This intensifies market saturation and disperses customer demand. *"Daghan na kaayog gapamalogya ug bugas... lisod ang halin."* Retailers emphasized that with more sellers, customers

now have many options, resulting in reduced foot traffic and lower daily earnings. Feryanto et al. (2023) noted similar competitive pressures in local rice markets, highlighting that the presence of informal sellers affects retail pricing and profitability.

### ***Economic and Seasonal Constraints***

Participants attributed slow sales to the ongoing economic crisis, rising prices, and decreased consumer purchasing power. Furthermore, earnings vary depending on weather conditions and agricultural cycles. *“Very slow earnings because of a few customers due to the economic crisis.”* These findings illustrate how macroeconomic instability impacts rural retail operations. Chen & Zhao (2023) confirm that rice remains a priority commodity, but consumer purchasing behavior shifts significantly during economic downturns.

### ***Positive Sales Periods***

Despite challenges, retailers acknowledged that sales increase during specific seasons, particularly when market customer traffic is high. *“Chada siya kay naa me daghan customer taga adlaw.”* This reflects a cyclical pattern in rice retailing, where demand peaks at certain times. Arianto et al. (2024) emphasized that customer volume and service quality strongly influence sales consistency, supporting the retailers’ observations.

The mixed experiences of rice retailers—ranging from slow earnings to occasional increases—highlight the dynamic nature of the rice retail market. Competition, economic conditions, and seasonal shifts collectively shape their sales performance. These results affirm earlier studies showing that retail success is sensitive to external market pressures and consumer behavior patterns.

### **Record-Keeping Practices**

This theme explores how rice retailers document their earnings and transactions, revealing significant variations in financial management practices.

#### ***Systematic Record Keeping***

Large or more established rice retailers maintain comprehensive financial records (daily, monthly, and annual). They use these documents to track trends and ensure compliance with government regulations. *“Makita namo among halin sa tibuok tuig.”* Record keeping helps them monitor profitability and prepare for audits. Honková et al. (2024) found that structured record systems improve transparency and reduce tax-related issues.

#### ***Minimal or No Record Keeping***

Smaller retailers often forego record-keeping due to low sales volume and immediate reinvestment of income into new stock. *“Dili na nako gina lista kay gamay raman ang halin.”* These retailers rely on mental calculations, which pose a risk of financial mismanagement. Limited documentation may hinder small retailers from assessing long-term performance or qualifying for financial assistance programs. Record-keeping practices differ widely among retailers. While larger businesses use systematic documentation for decision-making, smaller retailers rely on informal, memory-based approaches, which affects the accuracy of financial assessments and business planning.

### **Strategies Used to Improve Sales Performance**

This theme outlines the practices and decisions that rice retailers use to enhance their sales performance in a competitive environment.

#### ***Customer Engagement and Service***

Retailers noted that sales talk and good customer service are essential in retaining buyers. *“Tarungon lang gyud ug atiman ang customer para mubalik sila.”* Positive interactions are viewed as a simple yet powerful strategy for building customer loyalty. Shukla & Patel (2024) found that strong customer relationships significantly boost loyalty and repeat purchases in retail settings.

#### ***Product and Store Positioning***

Selling quality rice and choosing an accessible location were seen as key factors influencing customer decisions. *“Dali ra makita among tindahan.”* Good-quality rice also reduces customer complaints and encourages repeat purchases. Hua Wang (2024) emphasizes that addressing customer needs in unpredictable markets requires value-added strategies such as product quality assurance.

### **Pricing and Credit Decisions**

Retailers often adjust their prices to stay competitive. They also offer credit selectively, typically only to regular customers or employees. *“Magpa-utang ko pero sa mga trabahante ra.”* This practice helps maintain customer loyalty while managing the risk of unpaid debts. Strategic pricing and controlled credit offerings enable retailers to remain competitive without compromising financial stability.

Retailers use a combination of interpersonal skills, store positioning, and financial decisions to improve sales. These strategies reflect both adaptive marketing practices and customer-centered approaches consistent with contemporary retail trends. Across all themes, the findings indicate that rice retailers in Cabanglasan operate in a complex business environment characterized by competition, economic pressures, and consumer behavior. Their sales performance, financial management, and marketing strategies reflect practical adaptations to these conditions. These findings align with prior research emphasizing the importance of service quality, pricing strategies, and operational efficiency in retail food markets.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides meaningful insights into the sales experiences, record-keeping practices, and marketing strategies of rice retailers in Cabanglasan, Bukidnon. Beyond identifying performance differences among retailers, the findings reveal deeper structural issues shaped by store size, location, capital, and the intense competition within the local market. These insights highlight a critical imbalance: while larger retailers benefit from strategic locations and higher capital, small retailers face persistent challenges in maintaining stable earnings and complying with fundamental business management requirements.

The study contributes to understanding the realities of rural retail enterprises by emphasizing the importance of accurate sales record-keeping, customer-centered selling practices, and competitive pricing strategies. Notably, the results indicate that most small retailers rely on informal or manual record-keeping systems, which not only hinder their ability to assess profitability but also expose them to tax compliance risks. This underscores the need for interventions that strengthen their business literacy and operational capacity.

From a practical standpoint, the findings offer several implications. Local government units, cooperatives, and microfinance institutions can use these insights to design targeted programs—such as training on financial management, digital record-keeping, and pricing strategies—to help small retailers remain competitive in saturated markets. Furthermore, entrepreneurship educators may integrate these findings into lessons on rural enterprise management, highlighting the role of adaptive strategies such as sales tactics, strong customer service, and location-based advantages in sustaining small businesses.

For rural economic development, the results suggest that enhancing access to affordable capital and providing structured support systems bolster the resilience of micro-retailers, who play a vital role in community food security. Policy initiatives that promote digitized sales record systems or simplified tax compliance procedures may also improve transparency and reduce administrative burdens for small retailers.

Future studies may explore the adoption of digital record-keeping tools among rural retailers, compare retailing practices between urban and rural markets, or examine how customer loyalty evolves in highly competitive environments. Researchers may also consider investigating how cooperative business models or government subsidies influence pricing behavior and sales performance.

In sum, this study not only documents the challenges and strategies of rice retailers in Cabanglasan but also offers actionable insights to guide local businesses, policymakers, and educators in improving the sustainability and competitiveness of rural retail enterprises.

### **Contributions of Authors**

All authors contributed to the conceptualization of this study.  
Authors 1, 2, 3, and 4 led the research design, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript finalization.  
Authors 5 helped with the manuscript critique and finalization.

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## Conflict of Interests

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare relevant to this article's content.

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