



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## Customer preferences and level of competitiveness of Calapan city public market vendors

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### Abstract

The local public market is normally where small farmers sell their food, however the arrival of supermarkets and grocery stores in the province has reduced buyer traffic to the local markets. Although supermarkets are selling more local goods, the vast majority of their products remain national. This condition encourages the local market to understand client preferences and achieve competitiveness. This study explores customer preferences and vendor competitiveness in the Calapan City Public Market. Adopting a descriptive-correlational design, data were gathered from 383 customers using a researcher-developed questionnaire that examined preferences related to product, price, and place, alongside vendor competitiveness. Results showed that customers highly value product freshness, quality, local sourcing, variety, and appealing presentation. In terms of pricing, affordability, consistent pricing, and perceived value were prioritized. Accessibility, including strategic entrances/exits and sufficient market space, was also a significant preference. The findings suggest that customers' satisfaction with products, pricing, and accessibility greatly influences the overall competitiveness of vendors and the market as a whole. Vendors have a clear route to improving their market performance and attractiveness by addressing these criteria. To increase the market's competitiveness, a number of strategic proposals are put out in light of these observations. These include fortifying relationships with regional producers, putting in place efficient inventory management systems, expanding product offerings, enhancing packaging and presentation, promoting locally sourced goods, offering customer loyalty programs, keeping prices competitive and transparent, improving market accessibility and organization, and placing a high priority on safety and first-rate customer service.

**Keywords:** Customer Preferences; Competitiveness; Public Market; Vendors

### 1. Introduction

Significant losses can arise when businesses fail to address uncertainties in customer preferences, particularly as the selling season approaches. Without an effective framework to understand customer preferences, businesses risk products appearing to be sold out or the selling season ending without gathering sufficient data to optimize marketing strategies [1]. Research highlights that key marketing elements influencing customer satisfaction include promotion, pricing, and product marketing quality [2]. As a business function, marketing includes activities like pricing, promotion, and distribution with the goal of being able to give all the needs of the customers while also achieving the goals and objectives of the organization.

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In the Philippines, the promotion and development of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are supported by the Magna Carta for Small Enterprises (Republic Act No. 6977), which was later amended by RA 8289 and RA 9501. This legislation acknowledges the vital role of MSMEs in economic growth, providing them with the necessary framework for development, assistance, and access to resources. Despite these efforts, limited research has focused on the specific impact of customer preferences on the competitiveness of small businesses, particularly market stallholders in Calapan City. Public markets in Calapan City serve the daily needs of the people living there from rice, clothing, water, seafood, fruits, vegetables, and others. Nonetheless, vendors in such markets are facing difficulties due to lots of competitors they have along with natural disasters they face and lack of financial resources leading to threatening their livelihood.

Although previous studies have examined marketing strategies for small businesses, the resilience and competitiveness of market stallholders, especially in Calapan City, remain underexplored. By examining how consumer choices affect market stallholders' commercial competitiveness, this study aims to close that gap. The goal of the study is to pinpoint the main elements that make them successful and provide marketing plans that are suited to their particular difficulties. Market stallholders at Calapan City Public Market may increase their competitiveness, fortify their resilience, and lay the groundwork for long-term sustainability by comprehending consumer preferences and implementing focused initiatives. The study's conclusions will offer insightful analysis and useful suggestions to help these companies expand and become more flexible in a market that is dynamic and always shifting.

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## 2. Review of Related Literature

### 2.1. Customer Preferences

Modern market dynamics are shaped by a complex interplay between consumer behavior, marketing strategies, and company rivalry. The literature emphasizes how important strategic marketing is, especially for microbusinesses that operate in fiercely competitive markets. The market performance of street sellers in Kupang City is severely hampered by a lack of product innovation, poor digital adoption, and inefficient pricing tactics, according to one study. Many microbusinesses struggle to compete due to traditional sales approaches and minimal engagement with modern digital tools. Nonetheless, the study shows that vendors had notable gains in customer engagement and sales performance when they used an integrated marketing approach that incorporates digital promotion, product variety, and smart pricing. According to these findings, small businesses need to use digital platforms and innovative pricing tactics in response to the shifting marketing landscape in order to become more profitable and competitive [3]. Long-term success in the fiercely competitive global industry requires effective marketing techniques. Another study highlights how globalization and technological advancements have altered the competitive environment, requiring the implementation of more flexible and adaptive corporate strategies. In the face of quickly changing consumer preferences and new market trends, businesses run the risk of becoming outdated if they don't make these changes [4]. In marketplaces for organic foods, the impact of strategic pricing, distribution, and digital marketing on customer purchasing decisions is especially noticeable. As to the survey, companies that make investments in well-planned digital marketing campaigns and consumer education initiatives generally witness a rise in enduring customer relationships and brand loyalty. As digital platforms become primary sources of product information, firms must strategically leverage online content, influencer marketing, and social media engagement to enhance consumer trust and market presence [5]. Beyond marketing strategies, consumer behavior is influenced by various economic and social factors, shaping the dynamics of purchasing decisions in different industries. A study investigating pork purchasing behavior in informal street markets reveals that affordability, convenience, and price sensitivity are key determinants of consumer choices. The research finds that while consumers prioritize cost-effective purchases, they also conduct informal safety assessments before making buying decisions. Many buyers are willing to pay a premium for quality and food safety, suggesting that businesses that prioritize product transparency and quality assurance measures can secure consumer trust. The study also identifies gaps in existing food safety regulations, proposing that policy interventions should focus on specific consumer segments, such as low-income groups and less-educated individuals, to enhance overall market conditions. These findings highlight the need for targeted consumer awareness programs and stricter enforcement of safety standards to protect public health and improve market transparency [6]. Another study explores the impact of consumer environmental concerns on corporate innovation, particularly in the development of clean technologies. Findings suggest that when consumers prioritize sustainability, businesses are more inclined to invest in eco-friendly product development, especially in highly competitive industries. The report emphasizes how customer behavior that is environmentally sensitive is increasingly influencing company sustainability activities. Businesses that integrate their strategies with sustainable innovation enjoy a competitive edge as consumer demand for green products increases. Furthermore, according to this research, businesses should include sustainability into their brand identity to make sure that environmental stewardship is ingrained in their company policies, marketing narratives, and product offers. Businesses that fail to adapt to these shifting consumer values may struggle to maintain relevance in markets where sustainability is becoming a critical purchasing factor [7].

## 2.2. Level of Competitiveness

Public markets serve as essential hubs for urban development, significantly contributing to food security, economic opportunities, and enhanced walkability in cities. These markets are essential to social cohesion and economic sustainability because they provide reasonably priced food options, generate employment, and encourage community connection. One study evaluated the location, accessibility, and management systems of public marketplaces on three continents in comparison. The results show that public marketplaces in the heart of cities are essential for social welfare and urban renewal, especially for underserved areas. These marketplaces act as cultural landmarks that support the preservation of regional customs, offer reasonably priced goods and services, and generate employment possibilities. The study does, however, also draw attention to the difficulties presented by the demands of urban expansion, where the growing commercialization of public areas causes market activities to diverge from their historical function as public goods. Certain marketplaces are threatened with privatization or displacement as cities expand, making them less accessible to lower-income consumers. In order to ensure that public markets continue to fulfill their original function without being supplanted by powerful commercial interests, this change calls for policies that strike a balance between economic growth and social benefits. Effective urban planning strategies must consider these factors to protect the public market system as a crucial component of sustainable city development [8]. The flexibility of vendors to adjust to shifting consumer preferences is crucial for sustainability, according to study on Indonesia's traditional marketplaces that examines the internal competition that market merchants face. Traditional markets, which provide household products and fresh fruit at affordable costs, have long been an essential component of Indonesian trade. However, traditional market vendors are facing increasing pressure to differentiate themselves as supermarkets and other modern retail venues develop. The survey claims that dealers employ a variety of strategies to maintain their competitiveness, including delivering a large selection of goods at affordable costs and prompt customer service. Even if big retail chains are becoming more and more prevalent, these strategies aid traditional markets in keeping their clientele. The results indicate that traditional markets can stay relevant in changing retail environments by implementing consumer-oriented marketing strategies, such as boosting customer experience, increasing product presentation, and utilizing digital marketing tools. Policies that boost small business owners' competitiveness by providing funding, infrastructural upgrades, and digital literacy initiatives [9]. Beyond market structure and competition, energy efficiency in food vending plays a crucial role in business sustainability. The advantages of switching to contemporary energy sources are shown by a study that contrasts the use of firewood and cooking gas among Nigerian food vendors. According to the study, vendors who use cooking gas outperform those who use firewood in terms of efficiency, profitability, and working conditions. Cooking gas reduces preparation time, minimizes exposure to harmful smoke, and enhances overall hygiene standards. However, despite these advantages, many vendors hesitate to transition due to a lack of awareness, limited access to affordable gas supplies, and the high initial cost of switching to new cooking equipment. The study suggests that increased investment in technology and government initiatives promoting clean energy adoption can help food vendors transition to more sustainable practices. Raising awareness about the long-term cost savings and health benefits of modern energy sources can encourage wider adoption, ultimately leading to improved business efficiency and environmental sustainability [10]. Competitiveness in market environments extends beyond small vendors to broader marketplace dynamics, including innovation and service provision. One research looks at how companies might use technology and strategic marketing to increase their competitiveness in the market. Results show that customer happiness and overall economic success are influenced by technical advancements, customer service enhancements, and efficient marketing communication tactics. Companies are better positioned to draw in and keep customers when they make investments in digital platforms, loyalty plans, and data-driven marketing strategies. Furthermore, modernization initiatives can increase operational efficiency by implementing automated inventory management and digital payment systems [11]. According to the study, businesses with declining supplier connections are less competitive because unpredictable supply chains make it more difficult to meet consumer demands and production targets. Conversely, firms that cultivate long-term strategic partnerships with suppliers enjoy greater stability, improved product quality, and cost advantages. This underscores the significance of supply chain resilience in maintaining business performance. [12].

## 2.3. Public Market Vendors

Market vendors operate in complex environments where various challenges and opportunities influence their livelihoods and business sustainability. In the Koronadal City Public Market, vendors face hardships stemming from environmental factors, local policies, resource limitations, and customer interactions. These difficulties range from poor market infrastructure and unstable weather conditions to inconsistent foot traffic and shifting consumer preferences. Despite these obstacles, vendors exhibit remarkable resilience, often drawing motivation from their families to persevere in their trade. Many individuals enter market vending as a means to provide financial stability for their households, underscoring the necessity of policies and programs that promote vendor welfare. Government initiatives focusing on improved market facilities, access to credit, and vendor education can significantly enhance socio-economic stability, enabling vendors to sustain their businesses in the face of economic uncertainties. The study further highlights

that while financial struggles are prevalent, social support networks among vendors and their families play a crucial role in business continuity and personal well-being [13]. A similar trend emerges among fish vendors in the Iriga City Public Market, where business sustainability is influenced by product pricing, fluctuating demand, and market competition. Many vendors, primarily middle-aged women, operate with modest incomes, making financial management a critical aspect of their business survival. The seasonal nature of fish supply, coupled with fluctuating prices due to external economic factors, affects profit margins and forces vendors to develop adaptive strategies. Effective pricing techniques, inventory control, and customer engagement are essential for sustaining profitability in this highly competitive environment [14]. Women vendors in Tambo Market, Iligan City, also demonstrate resilience despite experiencing economic volatility and structural barriers. The study finds that many of these vendors struggle with unstable product pricing, stiff competition, and a general lack of government support. However, their autonomy in business operations, flexible working hours, and reliance on cooperative networks and familial assistance contribute to their economic empowerment. Unlike other business models, market vending allows women to balance income generation with household responsibilities, giving them greater control over their financial and personal lives. While the presence of informal cooperative systems helps sustain business operations, systemic issues such as limited access to capital, inadequate infrastructure, and policy gaps hinder long-term stability. Addressing these challenges requires institutional support, including access to microfinance, business training programs, and policies that recognize and protect the contributions of women vendors [15]. Beyond the Philippines, research on wet markets and local marketplaces highlights common economic and social dynamics among vendors in different regions. In Nanjing, China, vendor profitability is shaped by multiple interrelated factors, including business expenses, payment schemes, and district-level socio-economic conditions. Variables such as local GDP, urban infrastructure, and regulatory policies significantly impact vendor earnings, particularly in peri-urban areas where consumer purchasing power fluctuates [16]. A study in Serbia further underscores the economic and cultural significance of local marketplaces, particularly in rural and peri-urban settings. These markets facilitate economic exchanges between villages and cities, allowing vendors to connect with diverse consumer groups and participate in regional trade. Beyond their commercial function, local markets also contribute to community development by fostering social interactions, cultural preservation, and daily migration patterns that enhance regional connectivity. The research emphasizes the importance of structured market operations, transparent decision-making processes, and development strategies that support vendors and local economies alike. Without effective market governance, vendors may face unstable business conditions, reduced profitability, and limited growth opportunities [17].

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### 3. Material and methods

#### 3.1. Research Design

A descriptive-correlational research design was used in this investigation. The scientific method of monitoring and characterizing a subject's behavior in its natural state is known as a descriptive study design [18]. This approach was employed by many scientific fields, particularly business, psychology, and social science, to get a broad picture of the topic. Investigating, quantifying, and characterizing one or more facets or traits of one or more groups, communities, or phenomena are the general goals of descriptive research [19].

##### 3.1.1. Descriptive Research Method

Customers' preferences for products, prices, and locations at the Calapan City Public Market, as well as the degree of competition among merchants, were described using the descriptive research approach. The association between consumer preferences and the degree of competition among sellers at the Calapan City Public Market was evaluated using a descriptive-correlational study design.

##### 3.1.2. Subject and Sampling

The study consisted of 383 customers selected from a total population of 70,496 customers who regularly visited the Calapan City Public Market, Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro, during the fiscal year 2023–2024 as its respondents.

#### 3.2. Procedures and Instrumentation

The primary data-gathering tool utilized by the researchers was a questionnaire they created in order to evaluate the degree of market competition as well as consumer preferences for product, price, and location at the Calapan City Public Market. Also, there were three sections to the survey questionnaire. The first section asked about the characteristics of the Calapan City Public Market firms, including their type of business, ownership structure, number of employees, and average monthly revenue. The second section concentrated on consumer preferences for product, price, and location among market sellers. The third section looked at how competitive the market's vendors were.

The sample size of respondents was determined using the list of registered market merchants in the Calapan City Public Market in Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro. The researchers asked the adviser for permission to distribute the survey questionnaires and carry out the study before doing so. The respondents received the surveys in person and had an hour to fill them out. Following the completion of all responses, the data was combined. The data was then statistically treated. For statistical analysis and interpretation, the collected data were compiled, tabulated, and totaled.

#### 4. Results and discussion

At Calapan City Public Market, the results and discussion section explore the key elements influencing consumer preferences and market competitiveness. This study emphasizes how crucial customer-centric tactics are to preserving the market's allure, especially in light of the increased competition from convenience stores and supermarkets. Important themes surfaced, such as vendor response, price, accessibility, and product quality and freshness, all of which affect market success and customer happiness. These results are consistent with other studies that highlight the importance of traditional marketplaces as centers of trade and cross-cultural exchange.

The study highlights the relationship between consumer preferences and market competitiveness using survey data and vendor observations. Fresh, high-quality products and reasonable prices are highly preferred by customers and are important factors in their decision-making process. The market's accessibility and cleanliness add to its allure and highlight the importance of a well-kept and well-located area. In order to maintain market relevance and cultivate client loyalty, vendors also emphasized the significance of product diversity and response to consumer feedback.

This part offers practical suggestions for improving the market's competitiveness through a thorough examination of correlational data and client input. Market participants can establish a more engaging and customer-friendly atmosphere by filling in the gaps in innovation, hygiene, and product display. The results provide a road map for adjusting to shifting consumer tastes and behaviors in addition to validating the vital function that conventional marketplaces play in local communities.

**Table 1** Level of Customer Preferences in Term of Product

Item	Mean Score	Verbal Description	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. I prefer buying from public market because, I know that the vegetables, fish and meat sold are coming from the local farmers and I know they are fresh and of high quality.	3.65	Very High	Highly manifested	1
I am more likely to shop at public market stalls because they offer a wide variety of products to choose from.	3.49	High	Moderately manifested	3
It is important to me that the products I need are always available when I visit the public market.	3.58	Very High	Moderately manifested	2
I prefer purchasing from vendors who offer locally sourced or organic products.	3.45	High	Moderately manifested	4
The way products are packaged and presented by the vendors influences my purchasing decisions.	3.29	High	Moderately manifested	5
Overall Mean	3.49	High	Moderately manifested	

Table 1 presents the level of customer preferences at Calapan Public Market in terms of product items. To begin with, the highest mean score in the table is 3.65, categorized as very high. This indicates that customers highly value buying from the public market because they trust that the vegetables, fish, and meat sold are sourced from local farmers, ensuring freshness and high quality. This preference suggests that consumers prioritize quality and freshness, emphasizing the importance of maintaining strong relationships with local producers and promoting transparency about product origins. On the other hand, the way products are packaged and presented by vendors influenced

purchasing decisions, receiving lowest mean score of 3.29, which is also described as high. This indicates that while product presentation is valued, it is not as significant as freshness, variety, and availability. Vendors may benefit from adopting better packaging practices, but it should not be prioritized over maintaining the quality and supply of products. Overall, the mean score of 3.49, described as high, implies that, on average, customers at Calapan Public Market have positive preferences toward various aspects of the products sold. These insights suggest that while certain aspects, such as freshness and availability, are crucial, others like variety, local sourcing, and presentation, while important, are slightly less influential.

#### **4.1. Customer Preferences for Product Quality and Freshness**

The study revealed that customers highly value the freshness and quality of products sold at Calapan Public Market, reflected in the highest mean score of 3.65, categorized as very high. This preference aligns with findings by Ejimakor's study who highlighted that consumers prioritize fresh and high-quality produce from reliable sources [20]. Similarly, Li and Houston study emphasized that traditional markets are preferred due to their reliability in offering fresh food [21]. Customers' trust in the freshness and quality of vegetables, fish, and meat sourced from local farmers suggests the importance of transparent supply chains. By maintaining strong relationships with local producers, vendors can continue to attract customers who place significant value on these attributes. While other factors, such as variety and presentation, were also considered, the dominance of freshness and quality underscores their critical role in customer satisfaction.

#### **4.2. Pricing as a Determinant of Market Appeal**

Affordability emerged as a major factor influencing customer decisions, with a mean score of 3.56, described as very high. Customers appreciate reasonable pricing, particularly for locally produced goods, which reinforces the market's position as a source of value for money. This observation supports the findings of Mai et al's study who noted that competitive pricing is essential for customer retention and market advantage [22]. Although the perception that locally produced food is more affordable received a slightly lower score of 3.36, this still reflects a strong preference among shoppers. Vendors observed that customers associate fair prices with the quality of products, reinforcing the importance of balancing affordability with high standards. Also, price-conscious consumers are more likely to frequent traditional markets due to favorable pricing and nutritional labeling [23]. To remain competitive, market stakeholders should implement consistent pricing strategies that reflect the perceived value of their offerings.

#### **4.3. Accessibility and Physical Features of the Market**

The strategic location of Calapan Public Market significantly contributes to its appeal, with accessibility earning a very high mean score of 3.58. This finding highlights the convenience of the market's location as a key factor in attracting customers. Public markets serve as both economic and sociocultural hubs, and their accessibility plays a critical role in fulfilling these functions. [24] Cleanliness and hygiene, while receiving a slightly lower mean score of 3.34, remain important aspects of customer preferences. Customers expect a clean and organized environment, as a well-maintained space enhances their overall shopping experience. Vendors also noted that customers value sufficient space within the market, which allows for comfortable browsing. Ensuring that stalls are organized logically and accessibly can further improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. These findings suggest that market management should prioritize both physical accessibility and hygiene to create a positive shopping environment.

#### **4.4. Vendor Competitiveness and Areas for Improvement**

The study highlighted the diverse range of products as a key strength of vendors, with this factor receiving the highest mean score of 3.58. Customers appreciate the variety available at the market, which caters to different needs and enhances its competitiveness. This aligns with Dyer's assertion that product diversity contributes significantly to customer preference [25]. However, the introduction of innovative products, such as organic options or ready-to-cook meals, scored slightly lower with a mean of 3.29, suggesting room for improvement. Also, innovation in product displays and offerings can enhance consumer engagement and encourage purchases [26]. Vendors acknowledged that maintaining safety and responsiveness to customer feedback are critical to fostering loyalty. They also emphasized the importance of cleanliness and organization in building positive perceptions of the market. By addressing these areas, vendors can enhance their competitiveness and better meet evolving customer expectations.

#### **4.5. Relationship Between Customer Preferences and Market Competitiveness**

The analysis revealed a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.6422$ ) between customer preferences and the level of competitiveness at Calapan City Public Market. This finding is supported by a study which indicates that higher levels of customer satisfaction directly contribute to the market's competitiveness [27]. Factors such as pricing, product

variety, and vendor responsiveness significantly influence customer loyalty, emphasizing the need for a customer-centric approach. Also, the broader social functions of public markets, including promoting food security, walkability, and urban development, which further enhance their competitiveness [28]. The statistically significant correlation underscores the importance of aligning market strategies with customer preferences to ensure long-term success. By understanding and leveraging this relationship, market stakeholders can develop targeted initiatives that enhance both customer satisfaction and market appeal.

**Table 2** Level of Customer Preferences in Term of Price

Item	Mean Score	Verbal Description	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
I prefer to buy from the public market because the price of the products is affordable.	3.56	Very High	Highly manifested	1
I am more likely to shop at the public market stalls where I feel the price reflects good value for the quality of the products.	3.53	Very High	Highly manifested	3
It is important to me that public market vendors maintain consistent pricing for their products over time.	3.50	Very High	Highly manifested	4
I find that the prices of locally produced food at the public market are more reasonable.	3.36	High	Moderately manifested	5
Shopping at the public market allows me to get fresher products at lower prices.	3.55	Very High	Highly manifested	2
Overall Mean	3.50	Very High	Highly manifested	

Table 2 presents the level of customer preferences at Calapan Public Market in terms of product pricing. The highest-rated item in the table is the preference for affordability, which has a mean score of 3.56, described as very high. This indicates that customers highly value affordable prices when shopping at the public market, emphasizing that affordability plays a key role in their purchasing decisions. This suggests that maintaining competitive pricing is essential for attracting and retaining customers. The perception that prices of locally produced food are more reasonable had a lowest mean score of 3.36, which is described as high. While slightly lower than other items, this result still reflects a strong preference, indicating that customers generally believe that local products are offered at fair prices. Promoting local food items with clear pricing can appeal to price-conscious shoppers. The overall mean score of 3.50, described as very high, suggests that, on average, customers at Calapan Public Market have strong preferences for aspects related to price. This highlights the importance of affordability, perceived value, consistent pricing, and reasonable pricing of locally produced food in shaping customer decisions. Market stakeholders should use these insights to prioritize pricing strategies that align with customer expectations, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

**Table 3** Level of Customer Preferences in Term of Place

Item	Mean Score	Verbal Description	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
I prefer buying in the public market because it is easily accessible and located in a convenient area.	3.58	Very High	Highly manifested	1
I am more likely to shop at public market stalls because they maintain a high level of cleanliness and hygiene.	3.34	High	Moderately manifested	5
I prefer public market vendors because they have a well-organized space and are easy to visit.	3.41	High	Moderately manifested	4
The entrances or exits of the public market are strategically located for easy access.	3.46	High	Moderately manifested	2

Public market provides ample space for customers to move around and shop comfortably.	3.42	High	Moderately manifested	3
Overall Mean	3.44	High	Moderately manifested	

Table 3 presents the level of customer preferences at Calapan Public Market in terms of place, focusing on aspects such as accessibility, cleanliness, organization, and space. Starting with the highest-rated item, the preference for buying at the public market due to its easy accessibility and convenient location received a mean score of 3.58, described as very high. This indicates that customers highly value the convenience of the market's location, suggesting that its strategic placement is a significant factor contributing to customer satisfaction. Ensuring that the market remains easily reachable can help maintain customer patronage. The lowest-rated item is the preference for high levels of cleanliness and hygiene, which received a mean score of 3.34, categorized as high. While this score is lower compared to other factors, it still indicates that customers find cleanliness important. Market management should focus on maintaining and improving hygiene standards to meet customer expectations and further enhance their shopping experience. The overall mean score of 3.44, described as high, implies that customers generally have positive preferences regarding the physical aspects of the Calapan Public Market. Accessibility, strategic placement of entrances and exits, and sufficient space are particularly influential, while cleanliness and organization, though slightly lower, remain significant. Market stakeholders should leverage these insights to make informed improvements that align with customer priorities and promote an enjoyable and convenient shopping environment.

**Table 4** Level of Competitiveness of vendors in Calapan City Public Market

Item	Mean Score	Verbal Description	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
The Calapan City Public Market has a diverse range of products to cater to different customer needs and preferences.	3.58	Very High	Highly manifested	1
The Calapan City Public Market embraces innovation by introducing new and unique product offerings, such as organic options or ready-to-cook meal to differentiate from other supermarkets.	3.29	High	Moderately manifested	5
The Calapan City Public Market maintains clean and organized stalls to enhance the shopping experience for customers.	3.37	High	Moderately manifested	4
The Calapan City Public Market maintains the safety and security of the shoppers.	3.42	High	Moderately manifested	2
The Calapan City Public Market prioritizes customer satisfaction by addressing complaints or concerns promptly and efficiently.	3.41	High	Moderately manifested	3
Overall Mean	3.41	High	Moderately manifested	

Table 4 presents the level of competitiveness of vendors in Calapan City Public Market, assessing various aspects that contribute to the market's appeal and effectiveness in meeting customer needs. Starting with the highest-rated item, the statement regarding the diverse range of products available to cater to different customer needs received a mean score of 3.58, described as very high. This indicates that customers recognize and appreciate the variety offered at the market, which enhances its competitiveness compared to other retail options. The ability to provide a wide selection is crucial for attracting and retaining customers, suggesting that vendors should continue to expand and diversify their product offerings. The statement regarding the introduction of innovative and unique product offerings, such as organic options or ready-to-cook meals, scored a lowest mean of 3.29, described as high. While this score is lower than the other factors, it still suggests that customers are open to and value innovation in product offerings. Vendors should consider exploring new ideas and trends to differentiate themselves from supermarkets and attract a broader customer base. The overall mean score of 3.41, categorized as high, indicates that customers generally perceive a good level of



competitiveness among vendors in Calapan City Public Market. While there are notable strengths, particularly in product diversity and safety, there are also opportunities for improvement in innovation and responsiveness to customer feedback.

**Table 5** Relationship Between Customer Preferences and Level of Competitiveness of Calapan City Public Market

Variables	r-value	Critical r-value	Decision	Interpretation
Customer Preferences vs Level of Competitiveness of Calapan City Public Market	0.6422	0.116	Reject Null Hypothesis	There is a strong positive relationship between customer preferences and level of competitiveness of Calapan City Public Market

Table 5 presents the relationship between customer preferences and the level of competitiveness of Calapan City Public Market. The r-value of 0.6422 indicates a strong positive relationship between customer preferences and the level of competitiveness of Calapan City Public Market. The critical r-value is 0.116, which serves as a threshold for determining the significance of the correlation. Since the calculated r-value of 0.6422 exceeds the critical r-value, the decision is to reject the null hypothesis. This outcome implies that there is sufficient evidence to support the existence of a strong positive correlation between the two variables. The degrees of freedom for this analysis is 268, and the significance level ( $\alpha$ ) is set at 0.05. Given these parameters, the findings indicate that the correlation is statistically significant, reinforcing the interpretation that customer preferences play a crucial role in determining the competitiveness of Calapan City Public Market.

## 5. Conclusion

This study emphasizes how important consumer preferences are in determining how competitive the Calapan City Public Market is overall. The results show that consumers have favorable preferences, especially when it comes to product variety, quality, cost, and accessibility—all of which have a big impact on their loyalty and level of happiness. These preferences draw attention to the market's advantages in offering reasonably priced, locally sourced, and fresh goods—two major variables influencing consumer loyalty. While highlighting opportunities for improvement, such as implementing creative techniques and being more receptive to customer feedback, the study also highlights the competitive advantages of vendors, particularly in preserving product safety and variety.

The study's finding that there is a strong positive association between market competitiveness and consumer preferences highlights the need of giving customer-centric initiatives top priority. Vendors and market participants can increase the market's attractiveness by attending to the particular requirements and preferences of their customers, such as improving product quality, keeping prices reasonable, guaranteeing accessibility, and encouraging greater engagement. Furthermore, emphasizing product innovation and enhancing the market's cleanliness and organization can improve the shopping experience even more, promoting client loyalty and return business. These initiatives are in line with the twin objectives of ensuring consumer satisfaction and enhancing the market's standing as an important center of the local economy and culture.

In the end, this study provides insightful information for vendors, legislators, and market participants who want to maintain and improve public markets' competitiveness. In addition to enhancing market operations, putting the study's recommendations into practice will support Calapan City's overall socioeconomic development. The market may continue to flourish as a vibrant area that sustains livelihoods, satisfies consumer demands, and strengthens the social and economic fabric of the community by encouraging cooperation between merchants, patrons, and local government.

## Compliance with ethical standards

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### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

There is no conflict of interest.

*Statement of informed consent*

The identity of the survey respondents is strictly kept confidential to ensure their privacy. All data collected and analyzed are securely protected, adhering to ethical research principles. Information obtained from the survey remains fully undisclosed to uphold the data privacy of the customers of the Students' Small Online Businesses. The researchers maintained a professional approach in designing and conducting the surveys, ensuring the prevention of any misconduct issues involving the respondents.

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