

# Comparative Analysis of Marketing Challenges of Thriving Versus Failed Micro-Enterprises in Los Baños, Laguna: Development of Proposed Survival Strategies

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## ABSTRACT

Micro-enterprises are vital to the Philippine economy, especially in areas like Los Baños, Laguna, where they help create jobs and support local growth. However, many of these small businesses struggle to survive because of marketing and operational problems. This study compares the marketing challenges of thriving and failed micro-enterprises in Los Baños to develop practical strategies that can help struggling businesses. Using Survival-Based Theory and the 7Ps Marketing Mix, the study examines how successful and failed enterprises differ in terms of adaptability and efficiency. A total of 100 micro-enterprises (50 thriving and 50 failed) were selected from 1,186 registered businesses using quota sampling. Data were collected through a validated questionnaire covering Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence. Findings show that thriving micro-enterprises are more adaptable, especially in product improvement, branding, and distribution. They also manage pricing, internal operations, and employee engagement more efficiently. In contrast, failed businesses showed weaknesses in market responsiveness, system management, and workforce handling. The study highlights clear gaps in adaptability and efficiency between the two groups. Based on the results, strategies are proposed to help failed micro-enterprises improve responsiveness, streamline processes, apply value-based pricing, and strengthen employee capability.

**Keywords:** Adaptability, Efficiency, Micro-enterprises, Marketing challenges, Survival-Based Theory, 7Ps of Marketing Mix

## INTRODUCTION

### Nature and Scope of the Problem Investigated

Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) are key drivers of economic growth in the Philippines, creating jobs and supporting local economies. Micro-enterprises, with fewer than 10 employees, provide accessible livelihoods for many Filipinos. They contributed 32.69% of total employment or about 5.6 million jobs in 2022 (DTI, 2022). However, many struggle with limited capital, market access, and technology, causing high failure rates (Anais et al., 2024; McCareins, 2024; Zhou, 2024). In Laguna, an economic hub with an economy exceeding ₱1 trillion in 2023, these opportunities and challenges are clearly evident (Hedreyda, 2024; Trinidad, 2024). This study examines thriving and failed micro-enterprises in Los Baños, Laguna, focusing on marketing challenges and strategies through Survival-Based Theory and the 7Ps of Marketing Mix.

### Research objectives

Particularly, the study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To determine the key profiles of thriving and failed microenterprises in Los Baños, Laguna over the past three years;
2. To determine the specific marketing challenges do thriving and failed microenterprises faced in each of the 7Ps aligned with the strategies of survival-based theory, focusing on adaptability in terms of product, place, physical evidence, and promotion, and efficiency in terms of process, price, and people.
3. To determine the difference between the thriving and failed micro enterprises across the 7Ps aligned with the strategies of survival-based theory, focusing on adaptability in terms of product, place, physical evidence, and promotion, and efficiency in terms of process, price, and people.
4. To identify survival strategies can be developed for failed microenterprises.

### Research Framework

As shown in Figure 1 the study’s conceptual framework integrates the 7Ps marketing mix and Survival-Based Theory to analyze micro-enterprises’ success and failure. The 7Ps guide firms in achieving customer satisfaction and market positioning (Allen, 2023). Rooted in Herbert Spencer’s ideas, the theory highlights adaptability and efficiency as key survival strategies (Khairuddin, 2005; Gathungu & Ndungi, 2018; Nelson & Winter, 1982; Miesing & Preble, 1985; Lynch, 2000). “Adaptability” applies to product, place, and promotion, ensuring responsiveness to market shifts, while “efficiency” in price, process, and people ensures sustainability. This comparative analysis examines how thriving and failed micro-enterprises employ these strategies to ensure long-term viability.

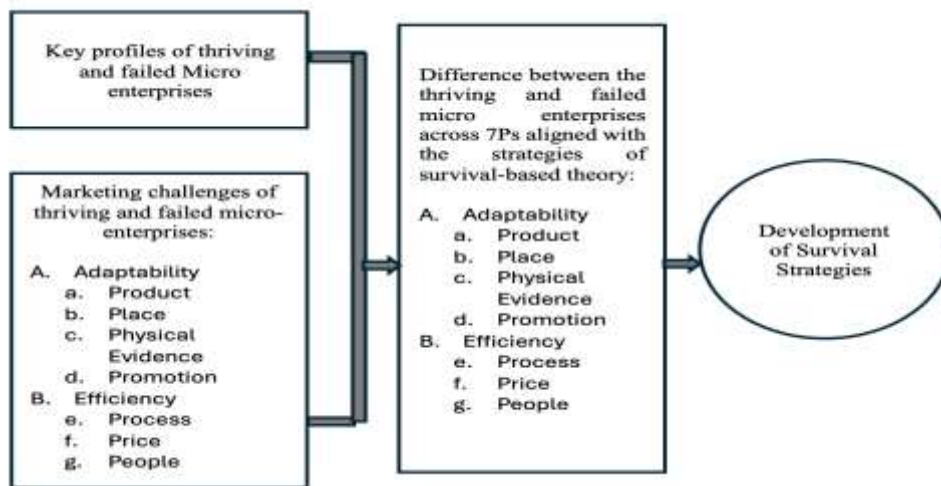


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

### Research Significance

This study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how micro-enterprises utilize the 7Ps of marketing mix theory to address customer needs and sustain market competitiveness, emphasizing **adaptability** and **efficiency** as underscored by the Survival-Based Theory. Through the comparative analysis of thriving and failed micro-enterprises, the research identifies effective **marketing practices** and development proposes survival strategies for struggling enterprises. The findings contribute to **policy** formulation and program development aimed at strengthening the micro-enterprise sector. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the larger **social action** implications of good marketing strategies, notably their

ability to promote job creation, income production, community development, and economic resilience while also supporting local entrepreneurial empowerment.

### Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study included:

1. **Sample Population. Sample Population.** The study analyzed thriving and failed micro-enterprises in Los Baños, Laguna, from 2020 to 2022.
2. **Focus Areas.** The study examined the 7Ps of marketing and the survival-based theory's adaptability and efficiency to determine strategies behind micro-enterprises' success or failure.
3. **Time Frame.** Covered three years of operations for relevant insights.
4. **Data Collection.** Used surveys and municipal records on profiles, challenges, and strategies.
5. **Outcome.** Proposed survival strategies to improve resilience, adaptability, and sustainability.

### Limitations of the Study

Despite its depth, the study had several limitations.

1. **Geographical Limitation.** Focused only on micro-enterprises in Los Baños, Laguna, so results may not apply to other areas.
2. **Time Constraint.** Covered only 2020–2022, limiting long-term trend analysis.
3. **Non-Generalizability.** Quota sampling and limited data on failed businesses reduced wider applicability.
4. **Focus.** Centered on marketing challenges under the 7Ps and survival-based theory.

### Definition of Terms

The study defines key terms to clarify its framework.

**Adaptability.** How micro-enterprises adjust marketing and operations to market changes and competition.

**Efficiency.** Maximizing output while minimizing time, cost, and resources.

**Failed Micro-Enterprises.** Businesses that close within one month to two years due to limited resources or poor marketing.

**Marketing Challenges.** Problems in promoting products and keeping customers with limited funds and weak digital use.

**Micro-Enterprises.** Businesses with 1–9 employees and assets below ₱3 million.

**Survival-Based Theory.** Highlights adaptability and efficiency to stay competitive.

**Survival Strategies.** Use of the 7Ps to build business resilience and competitiveness.

**Thriving Micro-Enterprises.** Businesses that succeed and grow for over two years.

### Review of Pertinent Literatures

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), especially micro-enterprises, significantly contribute to employment, innovation, and local economic growth in the Philippines. However, their sustainability is challenged by poor cash flow management, financial limitations, and inadequate market planning (McCareins, 2024; Editor, 2023). These issues restrict their ability to compete and expand. Moreover, limited brand recognition and insufficient technological investment hinder competitiveness in the digital marketplace (IT Specialist, 2023).

Gathungu and Ndungi (2018) highlighted Herbert Spencer's survival-based theory, as explained by Khairuddin (2005), emphasizing adaptability and efficiency as key strategies for business survival.

Spencer argued that adaptable firms respond effectively to environmental changes, while efficiency ensures optimal use of resources. A balance between both enhances long-term success (Lynch, 2000). Marketing strategies are also vital for survival and sustainability. McCarthy in 1960 introduced the 4Ps, Product, Price, Place, and Promotion, while Booms and Bitner in 1982 expanded them to 7Ps by adding People, Process, and Physical Evidence (Allen, 2023). These elements guide micro-enterprises in meeting customer needs, setting profitable prices, improving distribution, enhancing promotion, ensuring service quality, and establishing customer trust through tangible proof of value.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The study used a quantitative approach with a descriptive research design to gather and analyze data. This method focuses on observing and describing a population or situation without examining cause-and-effect, making it suitable for identifying patterns and trends (Sirisilla, 2023). It was appropriate for examining and comparing the marketing challenges of thriving and failed micro-enterprises. Primary data were collected through survey questionnaires, while secondary data profiles of successful and failed micro-enterprises were obtained from the Municipal Office of Los Baños, Laguna. Survey responses were then statistically analyzed to generate meaningful insights.

### **Research Locale**

The research locale for this study was the municipality of Los Baños, located in the province of Laguna, Philippines. Los Baños is known for its rich history, academic institutions, and economic activities, which included a variety of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The municipality offers a unique blend of urban and rural elements, making it an ideal setting for studying the diverse business practices and challenges faced by MSMEs, particularly microenterprises.

### **Population and Sampling Design**

The study used data from 1,186 registered micro-enterprises in Los Baños, Laguna (2020–2022) obtained from the Municipal Treasury Department. Businesses were classified as failed (closed within 1–2 years) or thriving (operating over 2 years with steady growth). Using quota sampling, 50 thriving and 50 failed micro-enterprises were surveyed to identify marketing challenges and strategies based on the 7Ps of Marketing Mix and survival-based theory.

### **Research Instrument**

The study used a survey questionnaire as the main data tool, administered online via MS Forms and face-to-face meetings. Data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The survey, answered by micro-enterprise owners and managers in Los Baños, Laguna, focused on the 7Ps of marketing and the Survival-Based Theory. It was translated into Filipino for clarity and validated by experts before a pre-test to ensure accuracy.

Table 1 presents the Table of Specification (TOS) aligning with the study's objectives to assess marketing challenges among micro enterprises. It includes 35 indicators across the 7Ps of Marketing Mix, reflecting adaptability and efficiency under the Survival-Based Theory. Using a Likert Scale to measure challenge intensity, the TOS enabled analysis of differences between thriving and failed enterprises and identified strategies from successful ones to guide survival approaches for struggling micro enterprises.

**Table 1. Table of Specification (TOS)**

Type	Category (7Ps of Marketing Mix)	Sub-Category (Survival-based theory)	Indicators to measure the intensity of the marketing challenges	Type of Response
Marketing Challenges	Product	Adaptability	7	NA - Not applicable
	Place		6	1 - Not a problem
	Physical Evidence		4	2 - Minor problem
	Promotion		3	3 - Significant problem
	Process	Efficiency	5	4 - Severe problem
	Price		3	
	People		7	
		<b>Total</b>	35	

### Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher obtained secondary data from the Municipal Government of Los Baños, Laguna, through the Treasury Department, covering the years 2020 to 2022. Using Excel, the data were analyzed to identify trends and classify thriving micro-enterprises (operating for more than two to three years) and failed ones (operating for one month to two years). Primary data on marketing challenges were gathered through face-to-face surveys with selected micro-enterprise owners and managers using Microsoft Forms. The data were analyzed using frequency and percentage to determine key characteristics, profiles, and the intensity of marketing challenges across the 7Ps, aligned with Survival-Based Theory. The top indicators for both thriving and failed businesses were compared to assess adaptability and efficiency. Based on these findings, proposed survival strategies were developed to help struggling micro-enterprises overcome marketing challenges and enhance sustainability.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Key Profiles of Thriving and Failed Microenterprises in Los Baños, Laguna over the Past Three Years

As shown in table 2 from 2020–2022, 1,186 micro-enterprises were analyzed, with 52.7% still active by 2024. Survival improved after pandemic disruptions in 2020 (34.5%), aligning with Mubarak (2019), Nicola et al. (2020), and Ramkumar et al. (2021), who cited lockdowns, weak demand, and labor issues as major factors influencing micro-enterprise failure and recovery.

**Table 2. Proportion of Thriving and Failed Micro-enterprises**

Years Period	Failure		Thriving		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Business in 2020 monitored until 2022	133	65.5	70	34.5	203
Business in 2021 monitored until 2023	253	41.8	352	58.2	605
Business in 2022 monitored until 2024	175	46.3	203	53.7	378

Total	561	47.3	625	52.7	1186
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**Specific Marketing Challenges Thriving and Failed Microenterprises Faced in each of the 7Ps Aligned with the Strategies of Survival-based Theory**

Table 3 shows that the results show that adaptability strongly influences business survival. These findings confirm that adaptability is crucial for success. Supporting studies by Cammayo and Perez (2021) and the Indeed Editorial Team (2024) highlight MSMEs’ difficulty adapting to market changes. Elliot et al. (2018) and the CFI Team (n.d.) noted that poor store design reduces customer engagement, while Globe Telecom (2024), Quimba et al. (2021), and Sachs (2023) emphasized the importance of digital adaptation and flexible marketing for business growth.

**Table 3. Summary of Adaptability**

Summary of Adaptability	Classification	(n)	Not Applicable	Not a problem (%)	Minor problem (%)	Significant problem (%)	Severe problem (%)
Overall Product	Failed	50	0	11.2	32.5	42.0	14.4
	Thriving	50	0	47.2	36.7	10.4	5.8
Overall Place	Failed	50	0	7.7	37.7	37.7	17.0
	Thriving	50	0	47.2	38.1	8.0	6.7
Overall Physical Evidence	Failed	50	0	24.3	38.7	25.8	11.2
	Thriving	50	0	49.8	37.7	8.0	4.5
Overall Promotion	Failed	50	0	21.6	35.2	32.0	11.2
	Thriving	50	0	41.3	40.7	11.3	6.7
<b>Adaptability Overall</b>	<b>Failed</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>35.7</b>	<b>35.9</b>	<b>14.0</b>
	<b>Thriving</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>46.8</b>	<b>37.9</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>5.9</b>

In table 4 it summarizes that the efficiency data showed clear differences between failed and thriving micro-enterprises in **Process, Price, and People**. These findings align with Cammayo and Perez (2021), who noted that poor leadership, low morale, and weak management harm MSMEs. Similarly, Khedekar (2024), The Hindu Bureau (2024), and Indifi (2024) linked inefficiency to lack of funds, skills, and technology. Taylor (2021) and Editor (2023) added that unclear strategies weaken adaptability. Strong systems, trained staff, and effective pricing drive business success.

**Table 4. Summary of Efficiency**

Summary of Efficiency	Classification	(n)	Not Applicable	Not a problem (%)	Minor problem (%)	Significant problem (%)	Severe problem (%)
Overall Process	Failed	50	0	23.0	40.2	29.7	7.2
	Thriving	50	0	42.3	43.2	12.9	1.6
Overall Price	Failed	50	0	15.1	42.8	29.3	12.8
	Thriving	50	1	33.4	46.3	14.2	6.1
Overall People	Failed	50	1	20.2	41.8	29.1	9.0
	Thriving	50	1	37.4	47.1	12.0	3.5
<b>Efficiency Overall</b>	<b>Failed</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>41.5</b>	<b>29.3</b>	<b>9.1</b>
	<b>Thriving</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>38.3</b>	<b>45.6</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>3.4</b>

### Differences Between Thriving and Failed Micro Enterprises across the 7Ps Aligned with the Strategies of Survival-Based Theory

Table 5 the data show a clear gap in adaptability and key marketing mix elements, product, place, physical evidence, and promotion, between thriving and failed micro-enterprises. Thriving businesses faced fewer issues and showed stronger adaptability, while failed ones struggled across these areas. This highlights that adaptability and effective marketing practices are essential for success. Thriving enterprises demonstrated greater flexibility and responsiveness to market shifts. These findings support Elliot et al. (2018), who emphasized the 7Ps’ role in building customer value and trust, and align with survival-based theorists such as Khairuddin (2005), Gathungu and Ndungi (2018), and Lynch (2000), who identified adaptability and efficiency as key to survive.

**Table 5. Difference between Thriving and Failed Micro-Enterprises (Summary of the Adaptability)**

Summary of Adaptability	Classification	(n)	Not a problem (%)	Minor to Severe Problem (%)
Overall Product	Failed	50	11.2	88.8
	Thriving	50	47.2	52.8
Overall Place	Failed	50	7.7	92.3
	Thriving	50	47.2	52.8
Overall Physical Evidence	Failed	50	24.3	75.7
	Thriving	50	49.8	50.2
Overall Promotion	Failed	50	21.6	78.4
	Thriving	50	41.3	58.7
<b>Adaptability Overall</b>	<b>Failed</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>85.7</b>
	<b>Thriving</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>46.8</b>	<b>53.2</b>

Table 6 The study found major efficiency gaps between thriving and failed micro-enterprises, aligning with the Survival-Based Theory. Failed businesses struggled in Process, Price, and People, showing issues in service delivery, pricing strategy, and staff management. These findings support Lynch (2000), who linked operational efficiency to survival, and Elliot et al. (2018), who emphasized competitive pricing for market relevance. Additionally, Khairuddin (2005) and Gathungu and Ndungi (2018) highlighted that efficiency in operations and human resources is vital for enterprise longevity.

**Table 6. Difference between Thriving and Failed Micro-Enterprises (Summary of Efficiency)**

Summary of Efficiency	Classification	(n)	Not a problem (%)	Minor to Severe Problem (%)
Overall Process	Failed	50	23.0	77.0
	Thriving	50	42.3	57.7
Overall Price	Failed	50	15.1	84.9
	Thriving	50	33.4	66.6
Overall People	Failed	50	20.2	79.8
	Thriving	50	37.4	62.6
<b>Efficiency Overall</b>	<b>Failed</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>79.9</b>
	<b>Thriving</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>38.3</b>	<b>61.7</b>

### **Development of Proposed Survival Strategies for Failed Micro-Enterprises Proposed Survival Strategies for Failed Micro-Enterprises (Adaptability)**

The proposed survival strategies for failed micro-enterprises focus on adaptability and the 7Ps of marketing, particularly Product, Place, Physical Evidence, and Promotion. Businesses should remove poor-performing products, launch new ones based on customer feedback, and improve packaging. They must strengthen their market presence, use technology, and target niche markets. Enhancing branding, ambiance, and using cost-effective promotions like social media and community events can boost competitiveness and resilience.

### **Proposed Survival Strategies for Failed Micro-enterprises (Efficiency)**

The proposed survival strategies for failed micro-enterprises aim to improve efficiency through the 7Ps, focusing on Process, Price, and People. For Process, businesses should enhance employee skills, adopt structured systems, and use technology for faster operations. In Pricing, they must apply strategic, sustainable pricing based on costs and customer value. For People, clear communication, teamwork, and a positive culture are vital. These efforts strengthen capability, satisfaction, and growth.

## **RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS**

### **Summary of Findings**

**RO1:** The study of 1,186 micro-enterprises in Los Baños (2020–2022) found 52.7% remained active by 2024. Success depended on adaptability and strategic location, particularly in high-traffic areas, rather than business model or industry type.

**RO2:** The study compared thriving and failed micro-enterprises in Los Baños, Laguna using the 7Ps framework and survival-based theory. Results showed that adaptability across the marketing mix was the main factor separating successful businesses from failed ones. Thriving enterprises excelled in product innovation, customer responsiveness, packaging, location and distribution decisions, and the use of digital tools for promotions. They also demonstrated stronger pricing strategies, efficient processes, and better people management. Failed enterprises struggled with innovation, logistics, promotional targeting, branding, and responding to external pressures like inflation and competition. Overall, the findings highlight that strategic adaptability and operational efficiency across all 7Ps are crucial for long-term survival.

**RO3:** The results showed a strong difference between thriving and failed micro-enterprises across all 7Ps, reinforcing the Survival-Based Theory. Thriving businesses reported far fewer problems in Product, Place, Physical Evidence, Promotion, and Adaptability, indicating better market fit and responsiveness. Failed enterprises, however, showed very high issue rates often above 75% to 90% revealing major weaknesses in these areas. They also faced greater challenges in Process, Price, and People compared to thriving businesses. Overall, the findings confirmed that failed micro-enterprises struggled mainly due to poor adaptability and weak execution of the 7Ps, while thriving ones succeeded through stronger pricing, customer engagement, operational efficiency, and strategic alignment.

**RO4:** The study showed that failed micro-enterprises can improve survival by strengthening adaptability and efficiency across the 7Ps. For adaptability, they need to update products based on customer feedback, improve packaging, remove underperforming items, optimize location and technology use, enhance branding and store presentation, and adopt budget-friendly promotional methods like social media and local events. For efficiency, they should streamline processes, upgrade employee skills, implement fast-response systems, use data-driven pricing, and improve people management through better

communication, teamwork, and clear feedback systems. Overall, these strategies provide practical, theory-based actions to help failed micro-enterprises regain competitiveness, respond better to market changes, and build long-term resilience.

### **Derivable Conclusions from Research Data**

**RO1:** This study shows that the thriving and failed micro-enterprises in Los Baños, Laguna have similar structures, they mostly focus on the food industry, use brick-and-mortar setups, and rely on product sales. However, the key differences are in adaptability and location. Successful businesses adjust their distribution strategies and are found in high-traffic areas like Batong Malake and Baybayin. This shows that survival depends more on how flexible and well-placed a business is, rather than on its industry or business model.

**RO2:** Thriving businesses show greater adaptability in the 7Ps of marketing, especially in product innovation, logistics, branding, and promotion. They respond better to market changes, manage operations more efficiently, and address customer needs more effectively. On the other hand, failed businesses often lack innovation, struggle with supply chain issues, and fail to maintain brand consistency or reach their target audience. Moreover, thriving enterprises also perform better in internal processes, pricing, and people management. They have strong systems, flexible pricing strategies, and well-trained teams. In contrast, failed businesses often face staff issues, pricing challenges, and weak communication. These findings reinforce that both adaptability and efficiency are crucial to business resilience and align with the principles of survival-based theory

**RO3:** The study shows that successful micro-enterprises consistently perform better than failed ones in all areas of the 7Ps, supporting the Survival-Based Theory. Thriving businesses are more adaptable and better aligned with market needs, especially in product innovation, location strategies, branding, promotion, and employee management. Meanwhile, failed enterprises struggle across many aspects, particularly in adapting, managing processes, setting prices, and handling staff. Overall, the results highlight that survival depends less on structure and more on how well the 7Ps are applied, making adaptability and operational efficiency crucial for micro-enterprise success.

**RO4:** The study finds that the survival of failed micro-enterprises hinges on enhancing adaptability and efficiency across the 7Ps of the marketing mix. Effective strategies include refining product offerings based on customer feedback, improving location and digital presence, strengthening brand identity and promotion through low-cost channels, and optimizing internal operations. Efficiency-focused actions such as employee upskilling, structured workflows, data-informed pricing, and improved communication are also vital. These findings directly address the research question by presenting actionable, theory-aligned strategies that failed enterprises can adopt to regain competitiveness, respond to market demands, and achieve long-term sustainability.

### **Research and Policy Recommendations**

Based on the findings, several simple and practical recommendations can help microenterprises in Los Baños, Laguna to survive and grow.

1. Micro-enterprises should use customer feedback and regular market research to improve their products and services, ensuring they meet changing customer needs.
2. Use a combination of online platforms, social media, and physical stores to expand reach and reduce dependence on a single sales channel.

3. Government agencies like LGUs and DTI should prioritize training in digital marketing, branding, customer service, and adaptability to strengthen micro-enterprise skills, instead of focusing only on financial aid.
4. Future studies should examine how the academic calendar and UP students' spending patterns impact micro-enterprises, identifying vulnerable periods and helping develop strategies to reduce revenue loss during academic breaks.

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