



CONSUMERS' AND VENDORS' EXPERIENCES ON THE REHABILITATED CENTRAL MARKET OF ILOILO CITY

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ABSTRACT

The descriptive-qualitative study determined the lived experiences, perceived benefits, challenges, coping mechanisms, and recommendations of consumers and vendors following the rehabilitation of Central market in Iloilo City. Using a phenomenological design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with fifteen (15) participants, seven (7) vendors and eight (8) consumers, and were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that rehabilitation improved cleanliness, organization, facilities, and overall user experience, resulting in better comfort, accessibility, and convenience, as well as better facilities and operational efficiency. However, participants also encountered challenges such as accessibility concerns, unfamiliarity with the new layout, rising costs, weak mobile signal, and low customer turnout. To cope, participants adopted strategies such as budgeting, planning, and familiarization with the market set-up. The study concludes that while the rehabilitation has enhanced the market environment, continuous improvements are needed to address existing challenges and promote a more inclusive, efficient, and sustainable public market.

Keywords: *Experiences, Consumers, Vendors, Rehabilitated Central Market*

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INTRODUCTION

Public markets have long served as essential spaces for economic exchange, social interaction, and cultural identity. In many Philippine cities, public markets serve as primary sources of affordable goods for consumers and stable livelihoods for small-scale vendors. They function not only as places where goods are bought and sold, but also as community hubs that reflect local traditions, daily routines, and livelihoods. For many consumers, public markets are valued for accessibility and affordability, while for vendors, they serve as primary sources of income and long-term livelihood. Beyond their economic function, these spaces foster daily social encounters that contribute to a sense of community and belonging. Because of this multifaceted role, the condition and management of public markets directly influence the quality of life of urban residents.

In Iloilo City, the Iloilo Central Market has historically played a central role in the city's commercial and social life. As one of the oldest and busiest markets in the city, it caters to a wide range of consumers and supports numerous small-scale vendors. However, prior to its rehabilitation, the Central Market faced challenges such as aging infrastructure, congestion, sanitation concerns, and safety issues, which affected both consumers' shopping experiences and vendors' working conditions.

In response, the local government undertook a comprehensive rehabilitation of the Central market as part of its urban development and public service improvement initiatives. Market rehabilitation projects are often intended to modernize facilities, enhance cleanliness and safety, and improve operational deficiency. According to the World Bank, investments in

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public infrastructure such as markets are crucial in supporting inclusive economic growth and improving access to essential services, particularly for low-income communities.

While infrastructure redevelopment aims to bring positive change, previous studies suggest that physical improvements alone do not guarantee positive outcomes for all stakeholders (Gehl, 2010). Research on redesigned public spaces indicates that changes in layout, accessibility, and management can significantly influence users' experiences, behaviors, and sense of well-being (Chen & Lee, 2023). For vendors, rehabilitation may affect customer flow, income stability, and daily work routines, while consumers may experience changes in convenience, comfort, and market atmosphere.

Despite the importance of these human-centered impacts, existing studies on market rehabilitation often focus on economic performance and physical outcomes, with limited attention given to the lived experiences of consumers and vendors, particularly in local Philippine contexts. Understanding these experiences through a qualitative lens is essential to determine whether rehabilitation efforts align with stakeholders' needs and expectations.

This study, therefore, sought to explore the lived experiences of consumers and vendors in the rehabilitated Central Market of Iloilo City. By capturing their narratives and perceptions, the research aimed to provide deeper insights into the social and experiential impacts of market rehabilitation and to inform future public market development and urban initiatives, as well as to formulate possible policies for overall market improvement.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This chapter presents and discusses the research design and method, respondents of the study, sampling design and technique, data-gathering procedure, research instrument, and data analysis used in the study. This study aimed to determine the experiences of consumers and vendors in the rehabilitated Central Market of Iloilo City.

Research Method

The research method utilized in this study was the Qualitative Method using In-depth interview and Key Informant interviews (KIIs). Qualitative research is characterized by its intent, which related to understanding some aspects of social life, and its methods which generate words, rather than numbers. As data for analysis, this method aimed to answer questions about what, how, or why of a phenomenon rather than how many or how much (Patton & Cochran, 2022).

During the interview, the aim was to get the participants' central or necessary views and experiences on a particular question. And was carried out in a relaxed, conversational manner to effectively encourage participants to share their feelings, experiences, thoughts and opinions in an honest and open manner.

The researcher used an audio or voice recorder to capture, record, and document their answers during the interview, with the participants' consent.

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The researcher combined the data that had been gathered after a series of interviews, and then used a thematic technique to evaluate the information for pattern, themes, and recurrent concepts.

Research Design

This study used the descriptive-phenomenological research design. The purpose of a descriptive study is to observe, describe and document aspects of a situation as it naturally occurs and sometimes to serve as basis for assumptions or theory.

Phenomenology is a qualitative methodology focused on understanding the meaning of lived experiences, which requires deep, interpretive, and textual analysis rather than numerical measurement. Phenomenology can be considered a philosophical approach to qualitative research. The purpose of phenomenology is to understand how others see the world and how that view can deviate from the main views, focusing on the subjective interpretation of a person of what they experienced. Phenomenology is conducted by interviewing subjects to obtain their impressions, and experiences, and is often used in fields such as psychology, sociology, and social work.

Phenomenology qualitative research is an approach to research that centers on comprehending and investigating people’s living experiences of a certain event (Trymata, 2023). Phenomenology in qualitative research explores the subjective and individualized interpretations that people ascribe to experience, going beyond just reporting observable behaviors. Phenomenology, which has philosophical roots, aims to understand the nature of human experiences and how people interpret their surroundings.

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Participants of the Study

The respondents, who were selected through purposive and convenience sampling, consisted of fifteen (15) respondents: seven (7) vendor-respondents who were stall owners or sellers operating within the market in the different market section; and eight (8) consumer-respondents who were individuals who regularly visit the market to purchase goods such as food, vegetables, meat, and other commodities, and who were selected based on their experiences in buying products and interacting within the market environment, both before and after the rehabilitation.

Sampling Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to explore the lived experiences of consumers and vendors in the rehabilitated Iloilo Central Market.

Given the nature of the study, a non-probability sampling method was employed. Specifically, the researcher used purposive sampling to select participants who have direct experience and sufficient knowledge about the phenomenon being studied.

Purposive sampling was chosen because it allows the researcher to intentionally select individuals who can provide rich and relevant information. The participants included: Consumers who regularly visit and purchase goods from the market, and Vendors who have been operating before and/or after the rehabilitation. These participants were selected based on their ability to share meaningful insights regarding the changes, challenges, and experiences within the rehabilitated market.

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Research Instrument

The research instruments used in this study were carefully designed to assess the experiences, perceptions, and challenges of both consumers and vendors in the rehabilitated Central Market of Iloilo City.

To generate primary data, the research instrument utilized in this study was a semi-structured interview guides. The interview questionnaire had five questions focusing on the purpose of the study, and to make sure that it would answer the statement of the problem.

Depending upon the participants' permission, voice recorders were also used for data gathering and documentation.

The questionnaire is divided into two parts:

Part I: Demographic Profile for Consumers (age, gender, frequency of market visits, and monthly family income); and for Vendors (Age, Gender, Years Occupying a stall, and Market Section)

Part II: Questions about experiences, benefits, challenges or difficulties, coping mechanisms, and suggestions/recommendations in an open-ended manner.

Validity of the Research Instrument

To address the objectives of the study, the researcher made a draft of interview questions. The draft was then submitted to the panel of experts to validate each question for review, evaluation, and modification: after which, corrections and suggestions were incorporated in the final interview guide.

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Fraenkel & Wallen (2007) defines validity as the appropriateness, meaningfulness, correctness, and usefulness of inferences a researcher makes. In content-related evidence of validity, the content and format must be consistent with the definition of variables and a sample of the subject to be measured, and it is also helpful in validating the items in the questionnaire.

Comments, corrections, and suggestions of the panel of validators regarding the interview schedule were considered using the appropriate form of Good and Scates (Appendix A).

Data Gathering Procedures

The data for this study were gathered through the use of semi-structured interview guides to obtain in-depth insights from consumers and vendors in the rehabilitated Iloilo Central Market.

Prior to data collection, the researcher secured a formal letter of permission from the appropriate authorities to conduct the study within the market premises. Coordination with market administrators was also undertaken to ensure smooth and organized data gathering.

The interview guides were developed based on the objectives of the study and were subjected to expert validation to ensure their relevance, clarity, and alignment with the research variables.

During the actual data gathering, the researcher personally conducted face-to-face interviews with selected consumers and vendors using a purposive and convenience sampling

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technique. Each participant was approached respectfully and was informed about the purpose of the study.

Before the interview began, informed consent was obtained from each participant. They were assured that their responses would be kept confidential, their identities would remain anonymous, and their participation was entirely voluntary. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy; otherwise, detailed notes were taken.

The interviews were conducted in a conversational manner, allowing participants to freely express their experiences, opinions, and challenges regarding the rehabilitated market. Follow-up questions were asked when necessary to gain deeper understanding.

After each interview, the recorded responses were transcribed (from Hiligaynon to English) and reviewed. The collected data were then organized, coded, and prepared for thematic analysis.

Data Analyses

The information gathered was analyzed using a thematic approach. The data collected from the interviews with consumers and vendors were evaluated using qualitative data analysis techniques, appropriate for a phenomenological research design. The main goal was to summarize, analyze, and interpret the data gathered or the lived experiences of the respondents and identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights.

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The study involved qualitative methodology using semi-structured interview questions.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim or in exactly the same words as use originally (and translated to English), and the researcher will interpret the data collection.

Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Thematic analysis aims to identify essential or exciting themes, such as patterns in data, and to use these themes in a research paper or topic (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017).

It's a flexible method used to understand experiences, behaviors, or thoughts. Thematic analysis is adaptable and a great way for researcher to get closer to their data and analyze the data acquired during the interview (Kiger and Varpio, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study determined the experiences of consumers and vendors in the rehabilitated Central Market of Iloilo City. The research method utilized in this study was qualitative, using in-depth interviews with selected consumers and vendors, and the research design was phenomenology. The responses were analyzed using thematic analysis.

The participants in the study were seven (7) market vendors, and eight (8) consumers, for a total of fifteen (15) participants purposely chosen within the market premises.

A researcher-made interview schedule guide was used as an instrument to gather data.

Voice and audio recorders were also used for data gathering and documentation, depending upon the participant's permission.

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The questionnaire underwent content validation by a panel of experts. The Criteria for the Content Validation by Good and Scates was used to determine the validity of the questions in the interview guide. The researcher considered all comments and suggestions relative to the validation of the tool. After the questionnaire was found valid, permits were prepared to allow the researcher to start conducting the in-depth interview.

Permits from the adviser, Dean of the Graduate School, and Market-in-Charge were obtained to allow the researcher to conduct the study. The researcher personally went to the Central Market of Iloilo City to conduct the interview.

The researcher consolidated all collected data after the series of interviews. The information was gathered, analyzed, and interpreted using the thematic approach.

The following are the findings of the study:

Based on the in-depth interview with the consumers and vendors of the rehabilitated Central Market of Iloilo City, results revealed the following:

The rehabilitated Iloilo City Central Market has brought notable improvements in its physical environment, facilities, and overall market experience, as perceived by both consumers and vendors.

Experiences and Benefits. Consumers and vendors alike recognized significant enhancements in the physical environment, cleanliness, comfort, and convenience. Improved hygiene, organized layouts, accessibility, and inclusive facilities contributed to a safer and more user-friendly shopping experience. Consumers particularly appreciated the variety of products, strategic location, modern payment options, and affordable goods, while vendors

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benefitted from enhanced facilities, operational efficiency, protection from environmental factors, and economic stability. Both groups noted the market’s modernization as a positive factor, reflecting the city’s efforts to provide modern, well-maintained, and functional public market spaces.

Challenges and Difficulties. Despite these improvements, both consumers and vendors reported challenges. Consumers highlighted environmental comfort issues, accessibility and mobility difficulties, unfamiliarity with the new space, rising costs, and infrastructure limitations. Vendors faced low customer turnout, accessibility barriers, economic pressures, and limited awareness among potential buyers. Both groups identified minor issues with facilities, hygiene, and navigation, which slightly affected the overall market experience.

Coping Mechanisms. Consumers adapted to these challenges by planning their movements, familiarizing themselves with stalls, budgeting, and pacing their shopping. Vendors demonstrated patience, resilience, and reliance on customer flow, accepting external factors beyond their control while doing their best to sustain operations during low-sales periods. These strategies reflect the adaptive behaviors required to navigate a rehabilitated but still developing market environment.

Policy Recommendations. Based on the findings of the study, stakeholders (Consumers and Vendors) provided constructive recommendations to further enhance the market.

The key areas of improvement includes: Accessibility and Mobility by Installing escalators, ramps, and ensuring elevators function properly, providing clear signage for better

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navigation, and internet and mobile connectivity for digital transactions and to ease online transactions; Hygiene, Cleanliness, and Facility Maintenance by maintaining restrooms, preventing leaks, managing drainage, and ensuring timely cleaning and sanitation schedules; Safety and Functionality by Adding warning signs, ensuring operational infrastructure, and enhancing security measures; Variety, Vendor Participation, and Economic Opportunities by encouraging more stall occupancy, expanding product options, and supporting affordable pricing; and Inclusivity and User-Friendliness by prioritizing PWD access, creating a welcoming environment, and ensuring facilities cater to all market users.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study on the experiences of consumers and vendors in the rehabilitated Iloilo City Central Market, the following recommendations are hereby proposed:

The Local Government Unit (LGU) and market administration are encouraged to further enhance accessibility and mobility within the market by ensuring that all vertical transport facilities, such as elevators, are fully operational and regularly maintained. The installation of additional escalators and visible signage is also recommended to improve navigation and accommodate all market users, particularly senior citizens and persons with disabilities (PWDs). Likewise, the LGU should improve transportation links and develop additional parking facilities to address accessibility issues.

To address concerns regarding hygiene and cleanliness, it is recommended that market management implement stricter and more consistent sanitation practices. Regular monitoring

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of restrooms, proper waste disposal systems, and efficient drainage maintenance should be prioritized to sustain a clean and healthy environment for both consumers and vendors.

In terms of safety and functionality, the market administration should strengthen existing safety measures by installing warning signs in critical areas, ensuring that all facilities are in good working condition, and increasing the security presence within the market. This will help create a safer and more secure environment for daily transactions.

To improve economic activity and vendor participation, the LGU may consider introducing support programs, incentives, or promotional initiatives to highlight the market's unique offerings. These should encourage full occupancy of stalls and attract more visitors, including tourists. Strengthening marketing strategies through social media promotions and local events can also increase market visibility and foot traffic. Moreover, it is recommended to provide capacity-building programs for vendors focusing on digital payments, record-keeping, and customer service.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the market administration, in coordination with the local government of Iloilo City, prioritize the improvement of internet connectivity and mobile network signals within the Central Market. This will enable vendors to adopt modern payment systems and facilitate more convenient transactions for consumers. Reliable internet access is essential for supporting modern business practices such as digital payments and online customer transactions. The installation of additional signal boosters or Wi-Fi access points within the market premises may be considered. Partnering with telecommunications providers to enhance network infrastructure in the area can also significantly improve signal

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strength and stability. Furthermore, the provision of free or affordable public Wi-Fi services would benefit both vendors and consumers by enabling more efficient transactions and access to information.

To promote inclusivity and user-friendliness, market facilities and services should be continuously improved to cater to diverse users. Ensuring that the market environment is welcoming, accessible, and accommodating to all individuals will significantly enhance user satisfaction.

It is recommended to facilitate knowledge sharing among vendors, especially between older and younger members, to support adaptation to new systems. Vendors are encouraged to work with the LGU and management to advocate for their needs and ensure the fair implementation of policies. Vendors may also develop initiatives to promote local products and build a strong brand identity for the market.

Furthermore, regular consultations with stakeholders, including vendors and consumers, should be conducted to address concerns and improve market services.

Finally, future researchers are encouraged to conduct further studies focusing on the long-term economic and social impacts of the rehabilitated market. Quantitative research may also be undertaken to measure customer satisfaction and changes in vendor income. A quantitative study to measure the impact of rehabilitation on sales volumes and consumer spending patterns is also recommended.

A comparative study involving other rehabilitated public markets may provide additional insights into best practices and effective market management strategies. Moreover,

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an assessment of the market's role in promoting local food systems and sustainable consumption is recommended.

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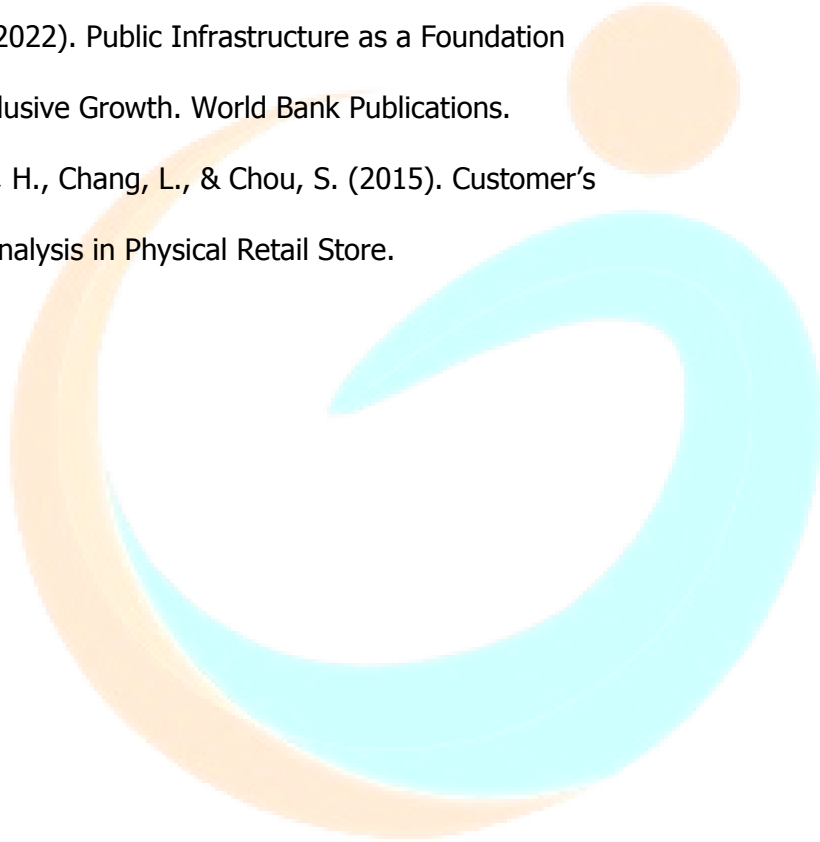
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