

IDENTIFYING ATTRACTIONS AND DEVELOPMENT AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

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Abstract: Tourism drives economic growth, cultural preservation, and community development. Santiago City, rich in heritage and natural beauty, has strong potential as a tourist destination. However, many areas, especially Barangays Bannawag, Naggasican, and Patul, remain underdeveloped. This study aims to identify and assess key attractions in these barangays and explore opportunities for sustainable tourism. By analyzing infrastructure, promotion strategies, and local strengths, the research offers recommendations to help position Santiago City as a competitive and community-driven tourist destination.

Tourism drives economic growth, cultural preservation, and community development. Santiago City, rich in heritage and natural beauty, has strong potential as a tourist destination. However, many areas, especially Barangays Bannawag, Naggasican, and Patul, remain underdeveloped. This study aims to identify and assess key attractions in these barangays and explore opportunities

Key findings reveal that sustainable tourism development depends on active community participation, digital promotion, and strategic planning. Social media platforms, especially Facebook and TikTok, play a vital role in promoting local attractions, with youth-led content creation boosting visibility and engagement. Collaborative efforts among government, private sectors, and local communities are essential for balanced growth, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. The study recommends enhancing tourism education, improving infrastructure, training in digital marketing, and establishing inclusive partnerships to support long-term tourism development in Santiago City.

Keywords: Tourism development, sustainability, community, promotion, heritage.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is more than a leisure activity; it is a powerful engine for economic growth, cultural preservation, and community empowerment. Recognized by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2015) as a key driver of socio-economic progress, tourism significantly contributes to national and global economies by creating employment opportunities across sectors such as hospitality, transportation, retail, and entertainment. In today's tourism landscape, travelers increasingly seek destinations that offer authentic, immersive, and sustainable experiences. Santiago City, located in the northern Philippines, is well-positioned to meet these evolving preferences with its rich cultural heritage, scenic natural landscapes, and vibrant local communities (Gretzel et al., 2021).

Despite its potential, many of Santiago City's tourist attractions remain underdeveloped, particularly in barangays like Bannawag, Naggasican, and Patul. Barangay Bannawag is noted for its local food culture and handmade crafts, making it ideal for culinary and craft tourism. Its fertile land also supports agricultural products that can be turned into authentic souvenirs (Bieger, 2021). Barangay Naggasican, with its lush agricultural setting, offers great promise for eco-tourism and farm-based activities that appeal to nature lovers. Meanwhile, Patul is emerging as a center for café and farm tourism, blending agriculture with a growing café culture to create a scenic and relaxing visitor experience (Koe & Tan, 2020). These areas align with global trends that emphasize sustainable and community-based tourism practices.

The purpose of this study is to identify and assess key tourist attractions and development opportunities within Santiago City, with a focus on promoting sustainable tourism that enhances both visitor experiences and local well-being. The objectives include highlighting the unique features of selected barangays, exploring strategies for sustainable tourism development, improving infrastructure and tourism services, and contributing to broader academic literature on rural tourism (Jafari, 2020; Gómez & Pina, 2021).

By addressing a gap in the understanding of Santiago City's tourism potential, this study offers practical recommendations for local stakeholders. It aims to support the city's growth as a tourism destination in a way that is economically viable, environmentally responsible, and culturally respectful

Background of the Study

Santiago City, a city in the Cagayan Valley region of the Philippine archipelago, has been tagged as the "Gateway to the North" as this city connects to various regions in Luzon, with a location strategically at the northern part of the region. This city, so rich in cultural and historical values as well as natural beauty, made its entry known to the people as it is growing recognition to be a potential tourist destination (Department of Tourism, 2021). Attractions include the natural wonders of the place, historical landmarks, and cultural settings—all factors that build this city into a notable tourist destination in the region. However, for Santiago City, the development and strategic planning to become a more pronounced tourist destination should continue to maximize the tourism potential for this city.

Santiago City is an active city with tremendous economic and commercial value. Over the years, it has also developed into a tourism destination, combining natural attractions, cultural attractions, and historical attractions. Current tourism destinations within the city include the picturesque Balay na Santiago, the majestic St. James Church, and the active Robinsons Place Santiago, a contemporary entertainment-and-leisure venue (Cruz, 2020).

All these destinations highlight the city's cultural heritage, religious importance, and economic development, making it an up-and-coming travel destination in the region. In addition to the current attractions in Santiago City, three barangays have been identified as having potential for development into tourism destinations. The list includes Barangay Bannawag, Barangay Patuland, and Barangay Naggasican (Santiago City Tourism Office, 2022).

These barangays have something unique to offer that fits best in tourism development, hence adding to the overall tourism pull of the city. Bannawag Norte, the sugarcane capital of Santiago City, boasts a rich agricultural heritage and diverse product offerings. Its culinary tradition centers on patupat, a popular Ilocano rice delicacy, and sukang Iloco, a sugarcane vinegar made from basi (Bannawag Norte Agricultural Cooperative, 2021). Beyond these, the barangay produces banana chips, malunggay chips, and muscovado sugar, showcasing its agricultural versatility. Furthermore, Bannawag Norte is notable for Burubor, a site with potential for development as a recreational swimming area, reflecting the barangay's commitment to economic diversification and community enhancement. Barangay Naggasican is one of the well-known barangays in Santiago City, recognized for its rabbit farming industry, which helps boost local agribusiness and provides jobs for residents (Naggasican Barangay Council, 2021). This barangay has also earned multiple awards and recognitions for its contributions to the city, making it a strong candidate for further tourism and agritourism development.

One of the standout enterprises visited was Cortez Food Products and Mulberry Farm, located at Patul, Santiago City. Renowned for its mulberry fruit wine and jam, Cortez Food Products has carved out a niche for its quality and flavorful offerings (Department of Trade and Industry, 2022). Recognizing the potential of these enterprises, Cortez Food Products and Mulberry Farm have been identified as potential for enrollment in the OTOP Next Gen Program.

This study is specifically designed to boost product development and market competitiveness, equipping enterprises with the necessary tools, resources, and knowledge to thrive in an increasingly competitive market. Santiago City can further enhance its tourism sector for the economic sustainability of local communities while maintaining cultural and natural resources by identifying further tourist-oriented development for these barangays. The study seeks to measure the tourism potential of the areas, the infrastructures, and promotion strategies required for tourism development, while also trying to suggest ways for developing sustainable tourism in Santiago City and nearby localities.

Research Questions

1. What are the most notable attractions in Santiago City, and how can they be developed and promoted to boost tourism?
2. What infrastructural and service improvements are necessary for sustainable tourism development in Santiago City?

3. How can Santiago City develop its tourism sector in a way that benefits local communities and preserves cultural and environmental resources?
4. What marketing and promotional strategies are most effective in attracting tourists to Santiago City?

Significance of the Study

This research on identifying key attractions and development opportunities in Santiago City as potential tourist destinations is vital to shaping the city's tourism landscape. By highlighting areas with untapped potential and proposing strategic directions for growth, this study aims to contribute to sustainable tourism development that benefits various stakeholders:

Barangay Officials. The study offers evidence-based insights that can assist local leaders and policymakers in crafting strategic, community-aligned tourism plans. It promotes informed decision-making that supports inclusive growth and resource optimization.

Residents. By showcasing the economic, social, and cultural benefits of tourism, this study empowers local communities to actively engage in and support tourism initiatives. It encourages community participation, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in local heritage.

Tourism Developers and Planners. The findings serve as a valuable resource in designing tourism programs that balance economic development with cultural preservation and environmental sustainability, ultimately improving the quality of the visitor experience.

Entrepreneurs. The study identifies emerging opportunities in the tourism sector, guiding local businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs in creating innovative services, forming partnerships, and making strategic investments.

Researchers. Conducting this study has deepened the researcher's understanding of the local tourism landscape and the multifaceted aspects of development. It also serves as a valuable academic contribution and a stepping stone for future scholarly and professional pursuits in the field of tourism planning and community development.

Future Researchers. This research lays the groundwork for further studies on tourism and urban development in Santiago City. It contributes to the academic discourse on sustainable tourism and offers a localized framework that future researchers can expand upon.

Theoretical Framework

The development of Santiago City specifically in the barangays of Patul, Bannawag Norte, Naggasican, and Balintocotoc as emerging tourist destinations is anchored in a set of interrelated theories that emphasize sustainable, inclusive, and experience-driven tourism. These theories serve as guiding principles for the current study, which aims to identify tourism potentials and development opportunities that are responsive to local contexts and community aspirations.

Sustainable Development Theory (United Nations, 2019) forms the foundational framework of this study. It highlights the need to balance economic advancement with environmental conservation and social equity. In relation to the present research, this theory ensures that identified attractions and proposed development strategies align with the long-term sustainability of natural, cultural, and human resources in Santiago City.

Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Theory (Elkington, 2019) reinforces the multidimensional assessment of tourism initiatives. The current study applies this theory by evaluating potential attractions not solely based on their economic value but also considering their social impact and environmental footprint. This approach supports the formulation of tourism strategies that are financially viable, socially responsible, and ecologically sound.

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) Theory (Wang & Pfister, 2019) emphasizes the role of local communities as active stakeholders in tourism development. In connection with this study, CBT guides the identification of attractions and planning of tourism programs that promote community participation, cultural integrity, and equitable benefit-sharing. It ensures that development efforts empower local residents and reflect their values and needs.

Place Attachment Theory (Scannell & Gifford, 2019) explains the emotional and cultural connections between people and their environment. In the context of this study, this theory supports the integration of local traditions, landscapes, and identity into tourism experiences. By doing so, the attractions identified can foster meaningful connections for visitors while reinforcing community pride and stewardship.

Experiential Learning Theory (Bennett et al., 2020) underlines the importance of direct, hands-on experiences in shaping tourist understanding and appreciation. This theory informs the study's focus on agritourism and cultural immersion, which are central to the attractions being explored. Through experiential activities, tourists can gain deeper insights into local life, fostering greater satisfaction and cultural respect.

The theoretical foundations discussed sustainable development theory, Triple Bottom Line Theory, Community-Based Tourism Theory, Place Attachment Theory, and Experiential Learning Theory—collectively inform the conceptual, analytical, and practical direction of this study. Their integration provides a comprehensive and multidimensional framework that strengthens the design and execution of the research on identifying and developing potential tourist attractions in Santiago City.

The frameworks guide the study to promote tourism initiatives that do not compromise the natural, cultural, and human resources of Santiago City. This approach is essential for ensuring that tourism remains beneficial for future generations while meeting present needs.

Through the Triple Bottom Line lens, the study goes beyond economic gains and incorporates environmental and social assessments. This allows for the selection and planning of attractions that are viable, responsible, and socially inclusive.

The Community-Based Tourism perspective ensures that the voices, needs, and aspirations of local residents are central in the tourism development process. This promotes a sense of ownership, enhances local capacities, and helps build trust and cooperation between stakeholders.

The application of Place Attachment Theory supports the preservation and promotion of local heritage, traditions, and landscapes. It ensures that the identified attractions are not only marketable but also meaningful to both residents and visitors, deepening emotional connections and encouraging repeat tourism.

Experiential Learning Theory, the study encourages the development of interactive tourism activities that offer visitors immersive cultural and agricultural experiences. These types of attractions enrich tourist satisfaction while educating them about local lifestyles and values.

The use of these theories allows the study to generate actionable insights and recommendations that can support barangay officials, planners, and stakeholders in formulating strategic, evidence-based tourism development plans. The theoretical framework enriches the academic rigor of the study and situates it within a broader discourse on sustainable and community-based tourism. It also provides a localized model that future researchers and policymakers can adapt to similar urban or rural settings. These theories serve not only as academic foundations but also as practical guides for implementing responsible, participatory, and impactful tourism development in Santiago City. They ensure that the study is not limited to identifying potential attractions but is also oriented toward creating a tourism model that is inclusive, sustainable, and rooted in local identity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This review examines sustainable tourism development, focusing on its sustainability in tourism development, economic benefits, community participation, economic viability, cultural preservation, and experiential engagement for identification and development of a tourist destination.

Sustainability in Tourism Development

Tourism is a dynamic and rapidly growing industry that requires purposeful and sustainable planning to balance environmental, economic, and social goals. According to Streimikiene et al. (2021), sustainable tourism development management must not only satisfy tourists' needs but also provide meaningful experiences that raise awareness about sustainability issues and promote sustainable tourism practices among consumers. Their systematic literature review highlights that strengthening tourism competitiveness depends on integrating economic, social, and environmental objectives within destination development. The study also emphasizes the growing interest among tourism businesses in adopting new technologies that benefit the environment and local communities. However, challenges remain in motivating consumers to choose sustainable tourism services and in shifting their behavior toward more sustainable practices.

The rising interest in smart tourism destinations (STDs) has highlighted the importance of exploring their role in promoting sustainable development. This systematic literature review (SLR) aims to evaluate previous research achievements and outline future research directions regarding STDs within the sustainable development framework. Using a structured

approach, the review analyzed 20 scholarly articles based on clearly defined research questions, scope, and data collection methods. It focuses on understanding the current landscape of SLRs related to smart tourism destinations and their contributions to sustainability, examining aspects such as research objectives, methodologies, publication sources, timelines, and central themes. Additionally, the review addresses the strengths and limitations of existing SLRs in this domain, identifying gaps and suggesting areas for future investigation. Findings indicate that SLRs have been instrumental in assessing the economic, social, and environmental impacts of smart tourism destinations. The review also notes an increasing emphasis on smart city concepts, particularly efforts to minimize tourism's environmental impact and support sustainable development. Emerging research topics include progress toward sustainable development goals, the integration of green information technology, smart energy solutions, and effective waste management strategies (El Archi et al., 2023).

The rapid expansion of the tourism industry has brought both economic benefits and social-environmental challenges globally. Khan et al. (2021) emphasize that sustainable tourism is essential for protecting environmental and socio-cultural aspects of destinations while empowering communities and boosting local economies. Their study explored the complex relationships among sustainable tourism policy, destination management, destination social responsibility, and tourist value orientation in fostering sustainable tourism development. Using quantitative analysis of 163 Malaysian tourism companies, the authors found that sustainable tourism policies and effective destination management significantly contribute to sustainable tourism development. Additionally, destination social responsibility plays a partial mediating role between tourism policies, destination management, and sustainable development outcomes, highlighting the importance of social accountability in achieving sustainability goals.

Tourism has emerged as a key driver of economic growth globally, contributing through foreign currency earnings, attracting investments, increasing tax revenues, and creating employment opportunities (Alam, 2016). Recognized as a significant economic sector, the Travel & Tourism industry has consistently outperformed global economic growth rates in recent years (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2020). In 2019, the sector contributed approximately 9.25 trillion US dollars to the global economy, marking it as one of the fastest-growing economic activities (Jaaskelainen, 2020; Reed, 2019).

Recent research highlights the growing potential of rural areas, including Barangays Bannawag Norte, Patul, and Naggasican in Santiago City, as promising tourist destinations. These areas possess rich natural, cultural, and historical resources conducive to tourism growth. Studies on rural tourism emphasize the importance of leveraging local culture, heritage, and natural landmarks to attract visitors (Liu et al., 2021; Ostergren, 2022). Similar trends in other parts of the Philippines show successful tourism development based on unique local attractions and traditions (Paraiso et al., 2020).

Effective infrastructure development is also vital for successful tourism. Investments in transportation, accommodations, and tourist services are necessary to attract and satisfy visitors (Amboy et al., 2019). Improving roads, lodging options, and providing essential services like information centers and guided tours will enhance the tourism potential of these barangays. The authenticity and promotion of local attractions—natural, cultural, and historical—play a central role in drawing tourists (Barbieri, 2020).

Sustainable tourism development requires collaboration among local communities, businesses, government agencies, and community leaders to ensure economic benefits and environmental and cultural integrity are preserved (Dardanella et al., 2023). Engaging communities enhances visitor experience and secures long-term gains.

While tourism infrastructure development can improve local quality of life, it may also lead to socio-economic challenges such as land speculation and increased living costs (Brouder et al., 2019). Balancing these positive and negative effects is crucial to maintaining sustainable tourism growth that benefits local communities without causing undue burdens.

Community Participation

Community participation is a fundamental component in the sustainable development and management of tourism, especially in rural areas where local residents possess and safeguard the natural, cultural, and historical resources that form the foundation of tourism experiences. Their active involvement not only enhances the authenticity of tourism offerings but also strengthens the social fabric and sense of ownership over development initiatives. As tourism continues to expand, understanding how communities perceive and engage with its impacts becomes increasingly vital. They emphasize that while resident perceptions are key to tourism success, they are still insufficiently understood. Also point to the need for more research on local stakeholders' views regarding tourism structures (Liu and Ma, 2017; Guo et al., 2018).

Meanwhile, studies by Brankov et al. (2019) and Jawabreh (2021) have brought attention to the social consequences of tourism and the need for inclusive local perspectives. Importantly, a welcoming and engaged community can greatly

influence the effectiveness and sustainability of tourism development, underscoring the value of incorporating community voices and participation in tourism planning and decision-making (Harun et al., 2018; Nopiyan & Wirawan, 2021).

Esichaikul and Chansawang (2022) investigated the role of community participation in the sustainable management of cultural heritage tourism at Sukhothai Historical Park in Thailand. Using a mixed-methods approach, including in-depth interviews with key informants and surveys with local stakeholders, the study found that collaborative management between local communities and park authorities positively contributed to economic gains and cultural conservation. However, while community assistance was evident in physical site maintenance, the full potential of archaeological heritage for tourism development remained underutilized. The authors also noted that community participation was limited to a form of “tokenism,” as heritage management was largely government-led. The study recommends the establishment of more inclusive mechanisms to foster multisectoral collaboration and enhance genuine community involvement in heritage tourism planning.

The study highlights the central role of local communities in managing and distributing the benefits of tourism, leading to both social and economic impacts. Despite the increasing recognition of community participation, the authors found a lack of systematic research that deeply explores how CBRT affects the well-being of local populations. Using PRISMA guidelines and VOSviewer software, the authors analyzed 292 articles sourced from the Web of Science, observing a notable growth in publications, especially from 2017 to 2023. Key findings identified “community-based tourism” and “sustainable tourism” as dominant concepts, underscoring the value of community empowerment in sustainable tourism development. Moreover, the analysis pointed out that leading contributions to the field came primarily from institutions in the UK and that collaboration networks are expanding globally. While academic interest in CBRT continues to grow, the study emphasizes the need for more robust methodologies and comprehensive approaches to fully understand its long-term impacts on community well-being (Cordova-Buiza, Medina-Viruel, & Pérez-Gálvez, 2025).

According to Partanen, Kettunen, and Saarinen (2023) emphasize the importance of inclusive tourism development that incorporates diverse community voices, especially those with limited political or economic power. Their study highlights the often-overlooked perspectives of young people in sustainable tourism planning. Using ethnographic research and a design anthropology workshop in Kemi, northern Finland, the authors explored how young adults envision tourism’s role in local development through social innovation. The participants co-created propositions focused on improving information flow about tourism, enhancing local activities and social spaces, and attracting visitors. These social innovations promote sustainability transformations by fostering youth inclusion, creating services tailored to local needs, and supporting socially valuable, community-rooted tourism. Despite existing power dynamics, these ideas challenge conventional tourism planning and encourage more equitable, inclusive approaches.

Community engagement and sustainable tourism practices are critical factors in rural tourism development. Involving local stakeholders ensures that benefits are shared and that environmental and cultural resources are preserved (Cortez et al., 2024; Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024). This is essential for Barangays Bannawag, Patul, and Naggasican, where maintaining environmental conservation alongside economic growth is paramount. While tourism positively impacts rural economies (Holland et al., 2022), challenges such as managing cultural and social impacts require careful attention to balance growth with cultural preservation (Valencia et al., 2022).

Ekka and Kumar (2023) conducted a systematic literature review focusing on the role of government and political power in the hospitality and tourism industry (HTI), particularly regarding community development and tourist destinations. Using the PRISMA protocol to analyze 57 articles, the study highlights how governance and political dynamics shape the experiences of local communities at tourist destinations. The authors underscore that political influence is critical in managing unique tourist experiences and addressing policy challenges, especially in developing economies. Their thematic analysis offers valuable insights into the intersection of tourism, governance, and community development, identifying key research gaps and suggesting directions for future studies in tourism politics and destination management.

Economic Viability

Nguyen and Vo (2020) studied tourism development in rural Vietnam and highlighted that economic viability improves when tourism initiatives are aligned with local agricultural practices and cultural heritage preservation. This alignment ensures consistent income streams and minimizes reliance on volatile external tourism flows. According to López-Guzmán et al. (2021) emphasized that rural tourism, when integrated with local traditions and agricultural landscapes, contributes to both economic resilience and cultural sustainability.

According to Aujero-Blanza (2023) explored the relationship between business potential and the sustainability of domestic tourism in the Province of Iloilo, Philippines, focusing on the role of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The study analyzed trends in tourism arrivals and income, alongside empirical data gathered from 380 respondents to assess various components of MSMEs such as products and services, human capital, finances, market reach, technology, and production capacity. Findings revealed that these business potential factors were moderately to strongly correlated with the sustainability of domestic tourism. The study underscores the importance of strengthening MSMEs to ensure long-term viability and growth in the local tourism sector.

According to Fernandez-Abila et al. (2024) investigated the sustainability of tourism development on four small islands in the Visayas region of the Philippines, highlighting the unique challenges these resource-constrained areas face. The study applied five key dimensions of sustainable tourism—governance and policy, economic viability, employment and social equity, environmental and cultural conservation, and community inclusion. Findings revealed that despite their economic contributions, these islands struggle with weak policy enforcement, limited community participation in tourism decisions (especially among the poor and marginalized), and workforce issues such as poor compensation and work-life imbalance. Tourists also identified areas needing improvement, such as safety, infrastructure, and environmental integrity. Additionally, environmental degradation and socio-cultural disruptions were noted as consequences of unregulated tourism. These insights underscore the importance of integrated, inclusive land use planning and sustainable tourism policies that involve all stakeholders in decision-making processes.

Aniqoh and Tayob (2022) explored the strategic role of halal tourism in fostering sustainable economic development in Central Java, Indonesia. As one of the pilot provinces for halal tourism, Central Java presents a valuable case for examining how this emerging sector can contribute to broader economic goals. Through qualitative research that combined stakeholder interviews and analysis of tourism records, the study identified significant growth potential in the halal tourism sector. The authors emphasized the importance of segmenting destinations into historical, natural, and cultural themes to attract diverse tourist groups. Additionally, developing regional tourist routes was recommended to enhance accessibility and improve the overall visitor experience. The study also highlighted the sector's alignment with the G20 agenda on sustainable economic growth, underscoring its value as both a cultural and economic driver. The research offers practical strategies for policymakers and stakeholders seeking to strengthen tourism infrastructure while maintaining cultural sensitivity and supporting local economies.

Cultural Preservation

Ancuța and Jucu (2023) emphasized the critical role of cultural preservation in promoting sustainable rural development through the capitalization of local heritage. In their case study of Hărman commune in Brașov County, Romania, the authors highlighted how rural areas rich in historical and cultural assets can harness cultural tourism to stimulate local development. Using a mixed-methods approach including interviews, focus groups, ethnographic observation, and logical framework analysis the research revealed that Hărman's cultural heritage, if strategically developed, holds strong potential to support sustainability objectives. The authors argue that cultural tourism not only fosters economic growth but also preserves and revitalizes local traditions, identity, and heritage. Their findings suggest that connecting cultural preservation with tourism initiatives can enrich local development agendas and serve as a model for formulating more inclusive and sustainable rural policies in post-socialist regions.

According to Luekveerawattana (2024) highlights the vital role of cultural preservation in fostering innovation within cultural heritage tourism. Focusing on a world heritage site in Udon Thani, Thailand, the study underscores how preserving cultural values alongside facility development, pricing strategies, and workforce management significantly influences the innovation of tourism experiences. The research reveals that cultural values are not merely static traditions but serve as foundational elements that inspire and guide innovative practices in heritage tourism. By reinforcing the cultural identity of a destination, these values enable stakeholders to create more meaningful, sustainable, and engaging experiences for visitors. The findings support the argument that cultural preservation is not only essential for maintaining historical significance but also serves as a catalyst for economic and social development through tourism innovation.

According to Puska et al. (2025) emphasize that cultural preservation plays a central role in enhancing rural tourism, particularly within ethnic villages that embody the historical and cultural identity of local communities. Their study employed a multi-criteria evaluation method specifically the fuzzy Logarithm Methodology of Additive Weights (LMWA) and fuzzy Additive Ratio Assessment (ARAS) to assess how effectively ethnic villages preserve and incorporate cultural heritage into tourism offerings. Among the 12 criteria examined, tourist participation in cultural traditions emerged as the

most critical factor. The Lubac Valley ethnic village stood out as a model for integrating cultural practices into tourism, providing immersive experiences that honor and sustain local heritage. The study demonstrates that prioritizing cultural heritage not only supports preservation efforts but also fosters the development of sustainable and authentic rural tourism. These findings affirm that cultural heritage should be at the core of tourism strategies to ensure both community engagement and long-term sustainability.

Zubiaga et al. (2024) emphasize the urgent need for a robust and culturally sensitive framework to guide sustainable cultural tourism, particularly in European destinations where heritage preservation plays a crucial role. Their study proposes a comparative, indicator-based framework that integrates environmental, economic, social, and especially cultural and resilience domains, co-developed with 21 tourism destinations across Europe. The cultural dimension of the framework specifically addresses the preservation and promotion of both tangible and intangible heritage, ensuring that tourism development reinforces, rather than erodes, cultural identity and authenticity. By involving stakeholders and applying real-world scenarios, the research ensures that theoretical models are grounded in practical application. The authors argue that effective cultural preservation through tourism is not only essential for maintaining a destination's identity but also for fostering a more sustainable and resilient tourism industry. Their proposed indicators serve as tools to assess the cultural impact of tourism policies, guiding decision-makers toward strategies that balance heritage conservation with economic viability and community engagement.

Experiential Engagement

Rather (2020) highlights the critical role of experiential engagement in enhancing customer experience within tourism destinations through the lens of experiential marketing. The study develops and tests a framework showing that different dimensions of customer engagement such as emotional, cognitive, and behavioral involvement distinctly influence tourists' overall experience and their sense of identification with the destination. These experiential elements subsequently shape tourists' behavioral intentions, including loyalty and advocacy. Importantly, the research reveals that first-time and repeat visitors respond differently to these engagement dimensions, suggesting that personalized strategies are essential to optimize experiential marketing efforts. This focus on active, immersive participation underscores the value of creating meaningful and memorable experiences that foster deeper connection between tourists and destinations, ultimately driving sustainable competitive advantage in tourism.

Parilla (2023) investigates the influence of various dimensions of tourist engagement namely enthusiasm, attention, absorption, interaction, and identification on destination loyalty among local visitors in Ilocos Norte, Philippines. Using structural equation modeling and data from 1,400 respondents, the study finds that interaction, attention, and identification significantly contribute to fostering destination loyalty, with interaction having the strongest effect. This highlights the importance of immersive and meaningful engagement experiences that enable tourists to connect deeply with a destination, thereby increasing their likelihood of returning or recommending it to others. The research underscores the need for tourism stakeholders, especially local governments, to enhance interactive experiences and tailor engagement strategies, possibly considering gender differences, to strengthen visitor loyalty and sustain local tourism growth.

According to Perez et al. (2023) the experiential engagement of motor vehicle club (MVC) members within the context of drive tourism in the Philippines, highlighting the significance of social interaction and group identity in shaping travel experiences. Through qualitative methods including in-depth interviews, focus groups, and field observations, the study identifies four key themes: immersion with the vehicle, active engagement with fellow MVC members, a strong sense of belonging, and strategic considerations in route selection. The findings emphasize that the social dimension of MVC membership profoundly motivates travel behavior, influencing both destination choices and overall attitudes toward driving tourism. By applying the PERMA model—which accounts for positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment—the study provides fresh insights into how experiential engagement fosters deep emotional and social connections in niche tourism segments. This research not only fills a gap in drive tourism literature in the Philippine context but also underscores the pivotal role of MVCs in enhancing experiential engagement and community-building among drive tourists.

Ling, Shin, and Brown (2024) investigate experiential engagement by examining how tourism destination selection attributes influence tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions among multicultural families in South Korea, with a focus on the mediating role of self-efficacy. The study reveals that behavioral preferences vary by country of origin and are strongly shaped by destination selection factors. Importantly, self-efficacy emerges as a critical psychological factor that enhances the relationship between destination attributes, satisfaction, and loyalty behaviors, highlighting how personal confidence influences the quality of tourism experiences. The authors recommend fostering cultural exchange programs

and community support to enhance social participation and independence among multicultural families, thereby enriching their engagement and satisfaction in tourism contexts. This research contributes uniquely by integrating psychological constructs like self-efficacy into the understanding of diverse tourism experiences among multicultural populations, addressing a previously underexplored dimension of experiential engagement in tourism studies.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, utilizing a semi-structured interview guide as the primary data collection tool. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for this inquiry, as they enable an in-depth exploration of the complex, multifaceted issues surrounding tourism development in Santiago City. The interview guide was carefully developed to elicit rich, detailed narratives from participants, encouraging them to share their experiences, perceptions, and insights regarding the tourism potential of their barangays. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of local values, priorities, and concerns related to tourism development, providing deeper insights than quantitative surveys typically allow (Creswell, 2014). Data collection involved in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including local government officials, business owners, and community members, complemented by field observations to document physical attributes, cultural heritage sites, and tourism-related infrastructure relevant to the city's tourism appeal (Kumar, 2011). The qualitative approach facilitated the gathering of authentic, subjective perspectives that form a comprehensive picture of the community's tourism potential. This methodology aligns with previous research, such as Azizah et al. (2022), which used interviews effectively to identify tourism opportunity.

Study Site and Participants

The study was conducted in Santiago City, Isabela—an urban center known for its rich cultural heritage, historical landmarks, and agricultural landscapes, making it a promising site for tourism development. The city's accessibility and growing infrastructure further enhance its appeal as a tourist destination. Participants were selected from diverse sectors within Santiago City, including cultural, historical, and agricultural domains. Respondents included residents and stakeholders such as landowners, business owners, local government officials, community leaders, and representatives from the tourism and hospitality industries. This diverse participant pool provided a well-rounded understanding of the city's tourism assets and development prospects.

Population, Sampling Size, and Sampling Method

A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select participants who possess specialized knowledge and experience relevant to tourism development in the barangays of Bannawag Norte, Naggasican, and Patul. A total of 15 respondents were chosen, comprising six government officials, two visitors, and seven local residents. The selection criteria ensured participants had an intimate understanding of local attractions, cultural heritage, and tourism potential. The sample included long-time residents, business owners familiar with market dynamics, government officials involved in community planning, community leaders, and tourism industry stakeholders. This intentional sampling guaranteed diverse perspectives, enabling a thorough assessment of each barangay's tourism potential and providing actionable insights for sustainable tourism planning.

Instrument

Data were collected through a guided interview divided into four main sections: Barangay Selection, Awareness and Perception of Attractions, Tourism Potential Assessment, and Economic and Social Impacts.

The Barangay Selection section focused on respondents' identification of their barangay and its key tourism assets, including natural, cultural, and historical sites. The Awareness and Perception section gathered participants' views on the significance and appeal of local attractions. The Tourism Potential Assessment explored community perceptions of tourism development, highlighting existing strengths, challenges, and infrastructure needs to transform the barangays into viable tourist destinations. Lastly, the Economic and Social Impacts section examined potential benefits of tourism development, such as job creation, income generation, community development, and cultural preservation.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researchers obtained official consent from relevant authorities through formal letters addressed to barangay officials and community members. The interview guide was reviewed by subject matter experts to ensure clarity, reliability, and relevance. The purposive sampling method facilitated the selection of participants with pertinent knowledge,

and interviews were conducted face-to-face. The researchers ensured that respondents understood the purpose of the study and emphasized the importance of honest and thoughtful responses. Ambiguous terms were clarified during interviews to minimize misinterpretations. Strict confidentiality protocols were observed to protect participants' identities and responses. Completed interview data were promptly checked for completeness and accuracy before analysis.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilized to systematically examine and interpret the qualitative data, enabling the identification of recurring patterns, concepts, and overarching themes. The process began with thorough familiarization with the data through repeated readings of interview transcripts and field notes. Initial codes were then generated to capture meaningful units of information, which were subsequently organized into coherent categories reflecting shared ideas and divergent viewpoints among participants.

This iterative coding and categorization process facilitated the extraction of rich, nuanced insights into stakeholders' perceptions and experiences regarding tourism potential in Santiago City. Thematic analysis allowed for both inductive discovery of emergent themes and deductive examination based on the study's research objectives. The findings were synthesized into a structured framework that highlights critical factors influencing tourism development, providing a solid basis for informed conclusions and actionable recommendations.

The results were presented in a clear, organized manner to effectively communicate the depth and complexity of community perspectives, supporting a comprehensive understanding of the city's tourism opportunities and challenges.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the highest ethical standards to protect the rights and welfare of all participants. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained, ensuring that participants were fully informed about the purpose, scope, and procedures of the research, as well as their rights to confidentiality, voluntary participation, and withdrawal at any time without penalty. To safeguard privacy, all data were anonymized and securely stored, preventing unauthorized access and ensuring that individual identities could not be traced.

Participants were clearly informed about the exploratory nature of the study to set realistic expectations regarding the outcomes and potential impacts. The research process was conducted with cultural sensitivity and respect, taking into account local customs and social norms to maintain the dignity, comfort, and well-being of all respondents. Careful attention was given to phrasing questions in a non-intrusive manner to minimize discomfort or distress. While this study aims to contribute positively to sustainable tourism development and community advancement, it acknowledges potential risks, including concerns about privacy and hesitancy to disclose personal information.

Ultimately, the anticipated benefits of this study such as promoting economic development, enhancing infrastructure, and encouraging inclusive community participation are expected to outweigh any potential ethical challenges, supporting the responsible and respectful advancement of tourism initiatives in Santiago City.

4. RESULTS

This study presents the findings on the identification and development of potential tourist destinations in Santiago City based on insights from local stakeholders and field observations. The results highlight key attractions, community perceptions, and opportunities for sustainable tourism growth.

Research Questions 1. What are the most notable attractions in Santiago City that have the potential to become major tourist destinations?

The common responses of the informants, the best overarching theme for the thematic analysis of the qualitative research question "What are the most notable attractions in Santiago City that have the potential to become major tourist destinations?" is "Emerging and Underrecognized Local Attractions".

Informants 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 10 show a lack of knowledge or awareness of tourist spots in their own barangays. The best theme could be Limited awareness of Local Attractions while informants 4, 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 mention the Mulberry Farm, Eco-parks (San Isidro, Naggasican, Buro), Rabbit industry (Ar's Rabbitry), Bandera Española, and Hugot-Line Bridge that are concluded as Potential of Agri-Tourism and Eco-Tourism Sites. Even Informants 7 and 8 state the Creek and muscovado/patupat stores in Bannawag Norte and Sugarcane Farmers Cooperative building and local food production generate the theme Commercial and Cultural Spots with Tourism Potential. Many information (ex. 4, 5, & 8) state that while the areas have potential, they are not yet well-known or fully developed generating the theme Need for Development and Promotion.

The responses highlight that while Santiago City does have hidden or emerging attractions, many residents either lack awareness or acknowledge that these spots are underdeveloped or not yet promoted as tourist destinations. The thematic label “Emerging and Underrecognized Local Attractions” captures both the potential and the current limitations perceived by the informants.

The study shows limited tourism awareness and promotion in Santiago City, resulting in low recognition of local attractions. However, several eco-parks, farms, cultural sites, and food-based attractions have strong potential. Community interest in tourism is evident, but development is hindered by lack of support, funding, and strategic planning. With proper infrastructure, marketing, and local government involvement, these underrecognized assets could become key tourist destinations.

Research Question 2. How do locals and visitors perceive the uniqueness of these attractions?

According to the responses to Research Question 2, How do locals and visitors perceive the uniqueness of these attractions? Informants state that the overarching theme that emerged from the thematic analysis is "Tradition-Based Uniqueness and Cultural Identity." This theme encapsulates the dominant ideas expressed in the responses, highlighting how various attractions are deeply rooted in tradition and local culture. Informants emphasized that features, such as the lechon festival, patupat, muscovado, and fossilized roses, reflect longstanding cultural practices and heritage. Additionally, many participants pointed out the economic and social importance of these attractions, noting how they contribute to local livelihood and foster community pride. The attractions were also seen as distinct, with several identified as unique to specific barangays or to Santiago City as a whole. Examples include the rabbit industry and the hugot-line bridge. Some informants appreciated how these attractions blend nature with immersive or experiential tourism. Supporting sub-themes that emerged include cultural heritage and community identity, local livelihood and pride, nature-connected experiences, and innovation within tradition, such as the creation of the hugot bridge and mulberry wine.

The responses of the informants reveal several key themes regarding the uniqueness of local attractions. A significant number, including Informants 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 11, emphasized that events like the lechon festival and traditional delicacies such as patupat are deeply rooted in their community's long-standing traditions and cultural celebrations. Informants 6, 7, and 8 further highlighted that local food products like patupat and muscovado are not only unique but also serve as cultural symbols representing community identity and pride. The economic value of these attractions was also noted by Informants 8, 10, and 11, who pointed out that the sale of local delicacies and crafts contributes to the livelihood of residents. Informants 4 and 5 drew attention to nature-based and experiential attractions, such as mulberry picking, which appeal to visitors seeking hands-on experiences and a deeper connection with nature. Meanwhile, Informants 12 and 13 saw local attractions as a fusion of cultural heritage and modern development, illustrating a balance between tradition and progress. Informants 14 and 15 expressed pride in the distinctiveness of features like the rabbit industry, the hugot-line bridge, and fossilized roses, which they believe make their barangay stand out. However, Informant 3 offered a contrasting view, expressing that there were no notable attractions, indicating a possible lack of awareness or promotional efforts in some areas.

Research Question 3. What cultural, historical, or natural features make these attractions appealing to tourists?

Based on the above responses of the different informants it shows that the theme is “Local Flavor and Cultural-Natural Appeal”, which emerged from the common responses of the informants, highlighting Santiago City's unique blend of tradition, nature, and creativity. Informants 1, 2, and 3 pointed to the Lechon Festival as a culturally significant event that defines the identity of Patul. Similarly, Informants 6 to 10 emphasized the importance of local delicacies, such as patupat, muscovado, and suka basi, which they described as both culturally rooted and popular among tourists. Nature-based attractions also stood out, with Informants 4 and 5 highlighting rivers, gardens, and farms like the Mulberry Farm where visitors can engage in fruit picking and enjoy the tranquil rural environment. Community warmth was also noted, as Informant 6 emphasized that the hospitality of locals enhances the overall tourist experience. Informants 13 and 15 highlighted the appeal of unique and themed landmarks, such as the Hugot-Lines Bridge and the Eco-Park, which attract younger visitors through their novelty and photo-worthy charm. Informants 11, 14 and 15 also discussed agricultural and craft-based attractions, including rabbit farming and fossilized flowers, which showcase how tourism is blended with local livelihood. Finally, Informant 12 noted that the city's historical and cultural richness add to its overall allure. In summary, Santiago City captivates tourists through its combination of food traditions, natural beauty, cultural identity, and innovative attractions creating experiences that are both meaningful and memorable.

Research Question 4. What is the existing tourism-related infrastructures and services in Santiago City?

The informants believed that the suited theme is “Emerging Tourism Infrastructure and Community-Based Development” or in other words it is the development that reflects the collective perspectives of the informants on the dynamic and evolving tourism landscape of Santiago City. Informants 1 to 5 underscored the significance of key venues such as Casa Hardin, local event halls, and Mulberry Farm, which function as central hubs for tourism-related activities and community gatherings. Informants 6 to 10 highlighted the vital role of community-driven production facilities—such as the muscovado sugar plant—and small-scale enterprises that promote product-based tourism through locally made goods, like patupat, suka, and muscovado. Eco-tourism development also emerged as a prominent theme, with Informants 11 to 14 citing initiatives like the Dariuk Hills Ecotourism Park and other eco-parks aimed at offering nature-based recreational experiences, such as sightseeing and swimming. While Informant 13 acknowledged the presence of basic infrastructure, like roads, hotels, and transportation, she/he also emphasized the need for modernization to support future tourism growth. Informant 15 drew attention to the newly established Santiago Sports Complex, which positions the city as a host for large-scale events, such as the CAVRAA. Collectively, these insights present Santiago City as a community undergoing meaningful transformation—where local initiatives, infrastructure investments, and natural attractions are working in tandem to establish a strong and sustainable foundation for future tourism development.

Research Question 5. What improvements or developments are needed to enhance the tourism appeal of Santiago City?

The informant’s responses focus on sustainability with the theme “Strategic Promotion and Sustainable Development for Tourism Growth”, which encapsulates the collective insights of the informants regarding the future of tourism in Santiago City. Informants 1 to 6 emphasized the critical need for stronger promotion of local attractions and products, particularly through digital platforms, like Facebook and other online media. Events, such as fiestas and SK-led initiatives, were also highlighted by Informants 2, 3, 4, 6, and 9 as effective ways to showcase local specialties, including lechon, to a wider audience. Infrastructure development was a major concern for Informants 7 and 11 to 14, who called for improvements in roads, event spaces, and eco-tourism facilities like Dariuk Hills, artificial lakes, ziplines, and tourism boats. Cleanliness and orderliness were also seen as essential to enhancing the city’s appeal to tourists. Meanwhile, Informants 8, 12, and 14 stressed the importance of capacity building and training for local workers and producers to ensure high-quality service and sustainable tourism practices. Informant 14 also pointed to the potential benefits of public-private partnerships in driving investment, promotion, and training efforts. Lastly, Informant 15 emphasized the development of eco-tourism destinations, such as Darling Heights and Rancho Domingo, to attract nature lovers and adventure seekers. Overall, the informants share a unified vision for Santiago City’s tourism growth, one that integrates effective promotion, infrastructure upgrades, skills development, and eco-tourism initiatives balancing cultural heritage and community pride with modern, sustainable tourism strategies.

Research Question 6. How can the local government and private sector collaborate to improve development?

The informants believed that collaborative partnerships are essential for inclusive and sustainable development in Santiago City as the best theme based on the analysis of the researchers. They emphasized the importance of strengthening linkages between the local government and the private sector, as highlighted by Informants 1 to 3, 12, 13, and 15, who noted that clear communication, joint planning, and coordinated programs are key to successful collaboration. Informants 13 and 14 also stressed the value of engaging stakeholders such as tourism councils and private business owners to ensure broad participation in tourism initiatives. Government support was seen as vital, with Informants 2 and 5 to 10 citing how agencies, like the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Department of Agriculture (DA), have recognized and supported local products, such as muscovado sugar and the Mulberry Farm, boosting their visibility and growth. Informants 12 and 15 further pointed out the need for joint investments, training opportunities, and coordinated promotional efforts to elevate tourism and economic development. Community engagement was another crucial element; Informant 1 shared a program involving SK youth in sustainable livelihood projects, like gardening, fostering both environmental awareness and local cooperation. Informant 14 underscored the importance of involving communities in tourism planning and management, allowing them to showcase their culture, traditions, and stewardship of natural resources. Lastly, Informant 11 mentioned a Department of Tourism-funded project as a clear example of how infrastructure and financial support can catalyze development. Altogether, the responses reflect a unified belief that inclusive progress in Santiago City relies on active collaboration among government entities, private partners, and community members, all working together toward culturally rooted and sustainable tourism growth.

Research Question 7. How do local communities perceive tourism development in Santiago City?

The researchers assessed and analyzed the informants' responses and identified the theme “Diverse Community Perspectives on Sustainable Tourism Development” as most reflective of the overall sentiment. Informants 1, 2, and 3 expressed skepticism and concern, questioning the feasibility of tourism initiatives due to what they perceived as a lack of compelling attractions, inadequate planning, and the risk of misallocated resources. They suggested that tourism development might be premature or overly ambitious without a solid foundation. In contrast, Informants 5, 6, 7, 9, and 13 recognized tourism as a potential source of livelihood and economic growth, especially if supported by well-structured and inclusive programs. Informant 6, in particular, highlighted the need to strike a balance between economic benefits, cultural preservation, and environmental protection. Informants 8, 9, and 10 emphasized the necessity of community involvement and transparent processes, warning against the risks of exclusion and corruption in tourism-related projects. Meanwhile, Informants 11, 12, and 15 observed that community opinions are mixed—while some residents are optimistic about tourism's potential, others are concerned about environmental degradation and the loss of cultural values. Despite differing views, Informants 6, 10, and 14 expressed a shared commitment to sustainability, calling for the preservation of natural and cultural resources to ensure long-term success. Overall, the responses reveal a community that is cautiously optimistic but deeply aware of the need for inclusive, transparent, and sustainable approaches to tourism development in Santiago City.

Research Question 8. What are the potential socio-economic benefits of developing Santiago City as a tourist destination?

The researchers assessed and analyzed the informants' responses and identified the theme “Perceived Socio-Economic and Cultural Tradeoffs of Tourism Development” as reflective of the community's mixed perceptions. This theme captures both the anticipated benefits and the concerns raised by the participants. On the positive side, many informants pointed to the economic opportunities that tourism could bring. Informants 6, 11, and 13 expressed optimism about increased employment, higher income, and the emergence of new businesses. Similarly, infrastructure and urban development were viewed as likely outcomes, with Informants 8 and 14 highlighting the potential for improved roads and better public facilities. Cultural recognition and exchange also emerged as a common expectation; Informants 9, 12, and 15 believed that tourism would boost the city's visibility and help locals gain recognition on platforms, like TikTok and Instagram. Furthermore, Informants 7 and 14 noted that these changes could lead to a more vibrant and progressive community. However, the researchers also noted significant reservations. Informants 1 and 2 expressed concern that tourism might disrupt the peace in quieter areas or benefit only the city center, leaving rural communities behind. Informant 3 added that such development might result in unnecessary expenses without clear gains. Overall, this theme underscores the nuanced and often divided views among residents of Santiago City balancing hopes for growth with the fear of inequity and disruption making it a critical lens for understanding tourism's broader socio-economic and cultural implications.

The analysis revealed five key themes in community responses to tourism development. Opportunities highlight hopes for economic growth, jobs, and new businesses. Infrastructure refers to improved roads and facilities. Recognition reflects increased cultural visibility through tourism and social media. Vibrancy points to a more dynamic and progressive community. However, concerns about Disruption include potential loss of peace, inequality, and negative impacts if development is not well-managed the conclude to a trade-off.

Research Question 9. How can tourism development be balanced with environmental and cultural preservation?

The researchers' analysis shows that the responses to Research Question 9 on “How can tourism development be balanced with environmental and cultural preservation?” is best captured under the theme “Sustainable Tourism Through Community Engagement and Environmental Governance.” This theme reflects a shared vision among informants: tourism should grow in a way that respects local culture and protects the environment, while actively involving the community and ensuring support from institutions.

Many informants emphasized the promotion of underutilized cultural and agricultural assets, such as Mulberry Farm and muscovado production, which are seen as potential attractions if supported by organizations, like CICATO and DA. Others pointed to the importance of government and institutional support, noting efforts from agencies, like DTI and barangay officials, in providing training and maintaining cleanliness. Several responses also stressed environmental preservation through rules and discipline, with suggestions to install waste bins, enforce local regulations, and ensure tourists follow community guidelines. The need to protect cultural heritage—including Santiago City's rich history, traditions, and natural beauty—was another key point raised. However, some informants noted constraints to development, such as overcrowding and lack of available space due to urban expansion.

Altogether, the analysis highlights that sustainable tourism in Santiago City depends on inclusive planning, disciplined environmental governance, and respect for cultural identity.

The researchers' analysis highlights sustainable tourism as rooted in key areas, such as community engagement, institutional support, and cultural preservation. It also emphasizes environmental governance through rule enforcement and waste management, along with agri-tourism promotion of sites, like muscovado farms. Maintaining cleanliness and order is seen as vital for tourist appeal, while urban constraints and the need for eco-cultural integration reflect the balance required between development and preservation.

Research Question 10. What strategies can be used to effectively promote Santiago City as a tourist destination?

The analysis of the researchers shows that the most effective strategy identified for promoting Santiago City as a tourist destination is captured in the theme "Leveraging Social Media and Community Participation for Tourism Promotion." This theme emerged from the responses of various informants who emphasized the growing influence of digital platforms, especially Facebook and TikTok, as primary tools for showcasing local attractions and engaging both residents and potential tourists.

Informant 12 remarked, "Mostly naman puro social media diba. Like Facebook or TikTok," affirming the dominance of digital platforms in tourism visibility. Likewise, Informant 4 shared, "Na-feature na rin ang Mulberry Farm noon kaya maganda gamitin ang social media," highlighting how online exposure helped a local destination gain attention. Informant 14 added, "Doon din naman kami naghahanap ng pwedeng mapuntahan," noting that they also use social media to discover new places.

Several informants suggested the promotion of barangay-specific features. Informant 10 stated, "Yung uniqueness siguro per barangay ang i-promote," while Informant 7 emphasized the simplicity and reach of online sharing with, "Sa pag-share sa Facebook na lang talaga."

The vital role of the youth, particularly SK officials, was evident. Informant 1 noted, "Ang mga SK officials namin nagpo-promote," and Informant 2 supported this with, "May page ang SK officials namin na nagpo-promote." These responses underscore the proactive involvement of local youth leaders in tourism marketing.

Meanwhile, Informants 5 and 6 highlighted the need for official and localized digital content. Informant 6 mentioned, "Wala pang official na Facebook page ang Bannawag," and Informant 5 proposed, "Pwedeng gawan ng page sa social media like Facebook," indicating untapped opportunities in structured online presence.

The importance of grassroots support also surfaced. Informant 11 stated, "Hikayatin ang mga locals," calling for community engagement, while Informant 13 added, "Word of mouth din," acknowledging the traditional yet effective means of promotion.

Informants 15 and 8 emphasized showcasing local charm. Informant 15 shared, "If they will post kung anong meron sa isang lugar... they will visit," and Informant 8 said, "Pwede pang makilala yung ibang barangay," promoting awareness of lesser-known areas.

The researchers' analysis highlights the significance of digital engagement and grassroots promotion in advancing Santiago City as a tourist destination. A key strategy identified is the utilization of social media platforms, such as Facebook and TikTok, which serve as powerful tools for marketing local attractions. Equally important is community involvement, particularly the active role of residents and youth leaders like SK officials, in sharing content and promoting their areas online. This ties into barangay-based branding, which emphasizes highlighting the unique identity and offerings of each locality. The strategy also acknowledges the impact of youth participation in managing pages and producing digital content, as well as the need for an official digital presence to ensure consistent and organized promotion. Traditional methods like word-of-mouth marketing continue to be valued, reinforcing the importance of local support. Additionally, tourists today rely heavily on content-driven discovery, where shared media inspires them to explore new places. Overall, promoting local charm through digital platforms offers a dynamic and inclusive way to boost tourism in Santiago City.

Research Question 11. How do visitors currently learn about tourism opportunities in Santiago City?

The researchers' analysis shows that tourism information in Santiago City is primarily disseminated through digital platforms and community networks. Informants consistently pointed to social media, particularly Facebook and TikTok, as the main source of awareness. As Informants 3, 8, and 14 noted, "Nakikita siguro nila sa social media like Facebook," while

Informant 14 added, “Through social media like Facebook and TikTok...” This digital promotion is actively supported by local youth leaders, as Informants 1 and 5 shared, “Nagpo-promote at nagsha-share ang SK officials sa page nila.”

Word of mouth also plays a critical role in spreading awareness. Informant 4 mentioned, “Nakikilala... dahil sa mga kwento ng kaibigan o pamilya,” and Informants 13 and 15 echoed this by saying, “Word of mouth din siguro kaya mas nakikilala ang Santiago City...” Similarly, Informant 7 emphasized, “Nai-rerecommend ng mga kaibigan o pamilya...”

Another form of promotion comes through product exposure and local events. Informant 2 shared, “Nagsu-supply kami ng mulberry sa ibang bayan,” and Informants 6 and 9 mentioned, “Dahil sa mga produkto ng Bannawag...” These include regional favorites, like patupat, muscovado, and basi, as highlighted by Informant 9. Cultural events, such as fiestas, also serve as platforms for visibility, with Informant 10 stating, “Nakikita rin nila... kapag fiesta ng Santiago.”

Lastly, influencers and travel agencies contribute to Santiago City’s visibility. Informant 12 noted, “Nakikilala... dahil sa travel bloggers at influencers,” while Informant 11 mentioned, “Social media, word of mouth, at travel agencies.” These insights illustrate a multi-channel strategy of digital promotion, grassroots sharing, and product-based exposure that effectively informs visitors about tourism opportunities in the city.

The researchers' analysis shows that tourism awareness in Santiago City is largely driven by digital platforms and grassroots networks. Informants emphasized that social media, platforms like Facebook and TikTok, serve as the primary channels for discovering attractions, with SK officials and local youth actively promoting content online. Personal referrals through friends and family remain powerful in influencing tourist interest, while local products like mulberry, patupat, muscovado, and basi, as well as cultural events such as fiestas, help raise visibility. Additionally, travel bloggers, influencers, and agencies contribute by sharing content to wider audiences. Even small-scale promotions from barangays and individuals effectively spread awareness, highlighting the strong role of community-driven efforts in tourism promotion.

Research Question 12. What roles does social media and digital marketing play in attracting tourists to the city?

The researchers' analysis shows that social media and digital marketing play a vital role in attracting tourists to Santiago City by amplifying visibility and encouraging engagement. Informants emphasized that platforms, like Facebook and TikTok, are effective in showcasing local attractions, festivals, and cultural practices, such as lechon roasting, muscovado and patupat production, and visits to the mulberry farm. Digital content allows communities to highlight their unique products, with one noting, “Mas makikilala ang mga produkto ng aming barangay” (Informant 3). Others pointed out the value of real-time interaction, like responding to comments or messages from curious visitors (Informants 5, 10). Posting live videos and creative content was seen to spark interest and broaden reach, as noted by Informant 8: “Magli-live sa Facebook para ma-experience ng taga ibang barangay.” Informants also acknowledged the impact of user-generated content, such as travel blogs and online reviews, in boosting tourist curiosity and visibility. Overall, digital platforms serve as powerful tools for storytelling, communication, and discovery, helping Santiago City stand out to a wider audience.

The theme “Amplifying Visibility and Engagement Through Social Media and Digital Platforms” is reflected through showcasing attractions and culture, and promotion of local products are central. Engagement and connectivity allow real-time interaction with tourists, while curiosity and discovery are sparked through shared content. Visibility increases awareness, influence comes from bloggers and personalities, creativity enhances appeal, and authenticity ensures genuine local experiences.

5. DISCUSSION

This discussion aims to explore and identify the key attractions and development opportunities in Santiago City as a potential tourist destination. By examining the city through the lenses of Tourism Attractions, Tourism Development, Sustainability and Community Involvement, and Marketing and Promotion, we seek to uncover its strengths, untapped potentials, and strategic areas for growth. Emphasizing a balanced approach that values both environmental sustainability and community participation, this discussion highlights how Santiago City can position itself competitively in the tourism landscape while preserving its cultural heritage and natural assets.

The findings of the study revealed two overarching themes regarding tourism in Santiago City: Emerging and Underrecognized Local Attractions and Tradition-Based Uniqueness and Cultural Identity. The first theme, Emerging and Underrecognized Local Attractions, emerged from the common response among several informants who showed limited knowledge or awareness of the tourist attractions in their own barangays. This lack of awareness suggests a deeper issue in tourism education and promotional efforts at the local level. Turcinovic et al. (2025) emphasized that increasing community

awareness is essential for developing sustainable tourism, particularly in rural and underdeveloped areas. Despite this, a number of informants identified sites, such as the Mulberry Farm, various eco-parks, the rabbit industry, Bandera Española, and the Hugot-Line Bridge, as locations with untapped tourism potential. These places indicate that Santiago City has the capacity to develop in the fields of agri-tourism and eco-tourism, aligning with Kothari & Perwej (2021), who highlighted how nature-based tourism can drive economic development and community involvement in rural areas. Additionally, other respondents noted culturally rooted commercial spots such as patupat and muscovado stores, local food production, and the Sugarcane Farmers Cooperative, which have the potential to become valuable tourism assets. However, these attractions are not yet fully developed or promoted. This situation reflects the barriers noted by Chanthawong & Choibamroong (2020), who stated that the absence of infrastructure and strategic promotion can prevent second-tier cities from becoming recognized tourism destinations.

Tradition-Based Uniqueness and Cultural Identity, highlights how local attractions reflect the identity, heritage, and cultural pride of the community. Informants emphasized the significance of traditional events, such as the Lechon Festival and native delicacies like patupat and muscovado, which are seen as integral to Santiago City's cultural fabric. These results align with Ramkissoon (2023), who argued that authentic cultural experiences are key to building place attachment and emotional connection among both locals and tourists. The study also found that these traditions not only preserve cultural heritage but also contribute to local livelihoods, particularly through the production and sale of traditional foods and crafts. Kallmuenzer et al. (2021) supported this by stating that culinary and cultural tourism, when properly harnessed, can boost local economic development. Other informants described nature-connected attractions, such as mulberry picking and eco-park visits, as experiences that allow tourists to engage meaningfully with local life. Attractions like the Hugot-Line Bridge and fossilized roses were also recognized for their creative and innovative appeal, particularly among younger generations seeking unique and photo-worthy experiences. Gaffar et al. (2023) noted that such experiential and themed tourism attractions are increasingly influencing tourist behavior in the post-pandemic era. Lastly, the combination of food heritage, natural scenery, and innovative local products contributed to the emergence of the theme Local Flavor and Cultural-Natural Appeal, reinforcing that Santiago City possesses a blend of tradition, creativity, and environmental charm that could define its tourism identity.

The study revealed that while Santiago City has numerous promising but underrecognized attractions, its tourism potential remains largely untapped due to limited awareness, lack of infrastructure, and insufficient promotional efforts. However, the richness of its cultural traditions, local crafts, natural attractions, and community interest presents a solid foundation for tourism development. With proper support, marketing, and strategic planning, these emerging and tradition-based attractions could transform Santiago City into a meaningful and memorable destination for domestic and international tourists alike (Platania, 2023; Zeng et al., 2022; Zhou & Chen, 2023).

It is revealed that Santiago City is undergoing gradual tourism development driven by local infrastructure, cultural identity, and community involvement. Key venues, like Casa Hardin, Mulberry Farm, and Dariuk Hills, along with local products, such as muscovado and patupat, reflect a growing focus on community-based and agri-tourism. This aligns with Ghasemi et al. (2024), who emphasize the value of local identity in rural tourism.

Informants also stressed the need for *strategic promotion and sustainability*, highlighting digital platforms and local events as tools to increase visibility. Infrastructure improvement and capacity-building were seen as essential, supporting Ivona (2021) findings that tourism growth in small cities depends on both human capital and modern facilities. The theme of collaborative partnerships emerged strongly, as informants recognized the importance of government support, private sector engagement, and community participation. De Matteis et al. (2021) and Graci (2020) found out that inclusive planning and public-private coordination are key to successful and sustainable tourism. Santiago City shows strong tourism potential, with cultural heritage, eco-tourism, and community-driven efforts laying the foundation for future growth.

The study reveals that while perspectives on tourism development in Santiago City vary, there is a strong consensus on the importance of sustainability and community engagement. Many informants acknowledged the socio-economic potential of tourism particularly its capacity to generate livelihoods and revitalize local enterprises such as muscovado sugar production and eco-agricultural sites like Mulberry Farm. However, others expressed skepticism about its feasibility without adequate infrastructure, careful planning, and inclusive participation.

Community involvement emerged as a central theme, with informants emphasizing the need for transparency, equitable benefits, and integration of local voices in tourism initiatives. This aligns with Ghasemi et al. (2024) assertion that sustainable tourism thrives when communities actively participate in decision-making and management. Candra et al.

(2025) and De Matteis et al., (2021) stressed that tourism should not merely be a top-down development strategy but must involve grassroots stakeholders to ensure long-term success.

Environmental and cultural preservation were also key concerns, with respondents calling for the enforcement of local policies, proper waste management, and promotion of Santiago City's natural and historical assets. This mirrors the findings of Thi et al. (2024) and Mena et al. (2024), who emphasized the role of disciplined environmental governance and cultural heritage conservation in achieving sustainable tourism outcomes in emerging cities. It suggests that sustainable tourism in Santiago City depends on a delicate balance leveraging economic growth while preserving cultural identity and ecological integrity. The city's success hinges on fostering collaborative planning among government agencies, local communities, and private actors to ensure inclusive and responsible tourism development.

The findings highlight that social media and digital platforms are the most effective tools for promoting Santiago City's tourism. Informants repeatedly emphasized the importance of platforms like Facebook and TikTok in raising awareness and attracting both local and external visitors. These platforms enable communities to showcase local attractions such as the Mulberry Farm, traditional products like patupat, muscovado, and basi, and events like local fiestas, often through live videos, short clips, and creative posts. According to Marbella (2025), social media is an essential tool for storytelling and destination branding, allowing real-time engagement and wide audience reach. In Santiago City, SK officials and youth leaders actively manage content, reinforcing the idea that community-led digital campaigns can significantly influence travel decisions.

Furthermore, the promotion of barangay-specific identities featuring the unique charm and culture of each locality was cited as a powerful grassroots strategy. Informants also pointed to the role of user-generated content, influencers, and word of mouth as trusted channels in enhancing tourism visibility. This supports the study of De Cano & Endrighi (2024) and Gasparik et al. (2022), who noted that localized digital promotion combined with community narratives fosters authentic tourist experiences and sustainable interest. The importance of community involvement is evident, not only in managing digital content but also in encouraging residents to engage in product and cultural promotion. This grassroots engagement reflects the findings of Kangana et al. (2024) and Moreno & Sulasula (2024), who emphasized that when local stakeholders actively participate in marketing initiatives, the authenticity and sustainability of tourism development are enhanced. Ultimately, the study shows that Santiago City's tourism promotion thrives on multi-channel strategies from social media and influencer partnerships to local festivals and product-based storytelling. The synergy of digital innovation and community participation forms a sustainable model for tourism growth.

6. CONCLUSION

The following conclusion were drawn from the results and discussion of the study:

Santiago City holds great potential as a tourism destination due to its rich cultural heritage, unique local products, and natural attractions. However, many of these remain underrecognized due to limited awareness, infrastructure, and promotion. Despite these challenges, the city's festivals, traditional foods, and eco-tourism sites reflect a strong cultural identity and community pride. With improved tourism education, strategic marketing, and local support, Santiago City can transform into a meaningful and memorable destination for tourists.

Santiago City is experiencing gradual tourism development rooted in cultural identity, local products, and community-based efforts. Key attractions and traditional goods reflect a shift toward agri-tourism and eco-tourism. Informants emphasized the importance of digital promotion, improved infrastructure, and strategic planning. Collaborative partnerships among the government, private sector, and community were seen as vital for sustainable growth. Santiago City shows strong potential for tourism expansion through inclusive, locally driven development.

The study highlights that sustainable tourism in Santiago City relies heavily on active community involvement and responsible planning. While tourism offers economic opportunities, its success depends on inclusive participation, transparent governance, and the equitable distribution of benefits. Environmental protection, cultural preservation, and grassroots engagement were seen as essential by informants. Santiago City's long-term tourism development must strike a balance between growth, heritage conservation, and ecological integrity through collaborative efforts among government, communities, and private stakeholders.

The study concludes that effective marketing and promotion of Santiago City's tourism are driven by the strategic use of social media and active community involvement. Platforms like Facebook and TikTok play a vital role in showcasing local attractions, cultural events, and traditional products. Community-led digital campaigns, especially those managed by youth

and local leaders, enhance visibility and attract visitors. The integration of grassroots storytelling, influencer engagement, and localized branding strengthens the city's tourism identity, making digital marketing and community participation key pillars of sustainable tourism growth.



Tourism
Tourism

This study explores Santiago City's tourism potential by identifying key attractions and assessing development needs. It highlights the roles of heritage, sustainability, promotion, and community involvement in creating a competitive tourist destination.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendation were drawn from the conclusion of the study:

Conduct tourism education and orientation programs in barangays to highlight local attractions and the benefits of tourism.

Invest in accessible roads, clean facilities, clear signage, and eco-friendly amenities to support and attract more visitors.

Provide training on content creation and digital marketing for youth leaders and community members to boost social media engagement.

Establish partnerships between local government, private sectors, and communities to ensure shared planning, support, and benefit-sharing.

Conduct similar research in other cities or barangays to identify unique attractions and develop region-wide tourism strategies.

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