



THE DESTINATION BRANDING IDENTITY OF SOCCSKSARGEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the destination branding identity of SOCCSKSARGEN local government units, emphasizing cultural preservation, linguistic diversity, and community collaboration in shaping regional tourism appeal. Using a multiple-case study approach, it examined the unique perspectives of tourism officers, stakeholders, and tourists. The data were thematically analysed, revealing four themes in the destination branding identity: cultural festivals, active community engagement, nature as a core branding element, and catalyst for economic growth and social unity. Second, it unveils three emergent themes for language features in branding identities: upholding language use and documentation, linguistic diversity towards globalization, and linguistic styles as a branding tool. Third, it highlights four significant themes in the attributes, culture, and experiences embedded in these branding identities: integrative arts, atmospheric and scenic landscapes, experiential tourism, and safety, accessibility, and infrastructure. Lastly, the branding identities perceived by tourists and stakeholders revealed three emergent themes: cultural integration with stakeholder visibility, sustainability through intergovernmental partnerships, and rising challenges in tourism industry. The five cases revealed similarities in most of the themes. However, each case emerged differently from the others in linguistic styles as a destination branding tool, experiential tourism, and rising challenges in tourism promotion. Recommendations were made to enhance institutional support for intercultural dialogue and sustainable tourism practices. This study underscores the preservation of cultural identities and language diversity, integrating them into innovative branding strategies to promote regional and global recognition.

KEYWORDS: Education, Applied Linguistics, Cultural Preservation, Destination Branding Identity, Linguistic Diversity, Higher Education Institutions, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Destination branding identity refers to the essential essence, vision, and market impression of a place shaped by various stakeholders, including local businesses, residents, and community organizations (Kah et al., 2020; Saraniemi & Komppula, 2019). Residents and local stakeholders play a vital role in shaping a place's identity, which recognizes and conveys the diverse and evolving social constructs that define the locale. (Hanna et al. 2021). However, challenges emerge when superficial branding fails to represent the core of the place, which can discourage tourists from visiting the destination (Jain, 2014), concerns about over-tourism and the commercialization of culture undermine the authenticity of the location, hence affecting the experiences of local people (Son, 2023), and maintaining multilingualism and regional flexibility in branding (Mityagina et al. 2018), presents a significant challenge since it can lead to cultural misinterpretation and misrepresentation.

For instance, Tavarez (2021) clarifies how national branding policies in Yanque, Central Peru, alienate the local population and commercialize indigenous culture, therefore undermining traditional customs and beliefs. This shows the negative effects

of superficial branding that fails to represent the destination authentically. Emphasizing the neglect of minority languages in South Tyrol, Italy, Barakos (2016) and Lonardi (2021) similarly believe that excluding these languages from marketing initiatives compromises the cultural identity of the area and limits significant visitor interaction.

Notwithstanding its efforts to build a strong identity, Zuniga (2019) emphasizes in Minalungao National Park in Nueva Ecija the value of community involvement in the preservation of sites. Especially when the search for "authentic" experiences opposes the commercialization of these civilizations, so jeopardizing the integrity of local values, this community-oriented approach exemplifies the conflict between the preservation of local cultural legacy and the demands of tourism. Similarly, Ylagan (2021) clarifies the difficulties the CALABARZON Region faces in including high-quality tourism products and services in its branding activities. Although visitors view its attractions as safe and unforgettable, this branding does not fairly depict the real nature of the area. Sieras (2024) carried out in Northern Mindanao clarifies the challenges in changing destination branding for a multilingual audience. English is used extensively, but the difficulty is



juggling the need to draw in foreign visitors with respect for real cultural representation.

Previous studies have underlined how important authentic destination branding identity is for maintaining intangible heritage and improving visitor experiences. Moreover, there is a significant knowledge gap about how these identities affect the reputation and competitiveness of a place, especially in different regional settings. Studies on the effect of the SOCCSKSARGEN Local Government Units (LGUs) of Southern Philippines on tourism branding have not especially focused on destination branding identity, language features, attributes, culture, and experiences defining these identities. Without this knowledge, tourism initiatives can unintentionally misrepresent local cultures, which would cause visitor disappointment, cultural damage, and lost chances for local economic growth.

Purpose of the Study

This multiple case study explored the destination branding identities of SOCCSKSARGEN Local Government Units in the Southern Philippines, focusing on their language features, embedded attributes, culture, and experiences. It also investigated how these branding identities contribute to the destination's reputation and competitiveness and the perceptions of tourists and stakeholders regarding these identities.

Research Questions

1. What are the destination branding identities of SOCCSKSARGEN local government units in the Southern Philippines?
2. What are the language features of these branding identities?
3. What attributes, culture, and experiences are embedded in these branding identities in enhancing the reputation and competitiveness of the destination?
4. How are these branding identities perceived by tourists and stakeholders?
5. What are the similarities and differences of each case?

Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach and a multiple-case study research design because it deals with different local government units in the SOCCSKSARGEN region. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is an investigative procedure that focuses on social or human issues and is based on specific methodological approaches. Correspondingly, a multiple case study was the most accurate and optimal approach in this study. It permits a comprehensive exploration of the destination branding identities of SOCCSKSARGEN LGUs. Thus, utilizing multiple case studies provides a wide range and comprehensive findings of the tourism officers' crafted destination branding identities of the SOCCSKSARGEN LGUs in the Southern Philippines, focusing on language features, attributes, and cultures instead of merely examining a single case study. Furthermore, it will evaluate the impact of these branding identities on the reputation and competitiveness of the destination, as well as the perceptions of tourists and stakeholders towards these identities.

Participants in the Case Unit

The selection of destination branding identity cases was based on criteria to ensure diversity and precise representation among local government units from various provinces. Each local government unit must have developed and promoted a destination branding identity officially recognized by the LGU. The selected Local Government Units come from four provinces and one Highly Urbanized City, representing diverse geographic and cultural contexts. Participants in each case include the head of the tourism office, tourism professionals, key stakeholders, and local tourists. This approach, grounded in maximum variation sampling (Douglas, 2022), aims to gather a wide range of branding experiences from local government units, ensuring diverse insights into how destination branding identities are crafted and promoted. This study selected five examples based on the predetermined inclusion criteria:

Case 1 focuses on Lake Sebu, a renowned ecotourism destination in South Cotabato. Lake Sebu is predominantly inhabited by the T'boli, Ovu Manobo, and Tasaday people. The informants include the Tourism Officer, stakeholders, and local tourists.

Case 2 centers on Alamada, a municipality in Cotabato famous for its natural attractions. The area is culturally diverse, with predominant tribes including Ilonggo, Maguindanaon, Teduray, and Iranon. The informants in this case consist of the Tourism Officer, stakeholder, and local tourist.

Case 3 highlights Columbio, a town in Sultan Kudarat known for its rich biodiversity and cultural significance. The B'laan tribe, Ilonggo, and Maguindaoan are the predominant cultural groups in the area. The study draws insights from the Tourism Officer, stakeholder, and local tourist.

Case 4 features Glan, a coastal municipality in Sarangani that boasts pristine beaches. The area is predominantly home to the B'laan and Bisaya communities. The informants for this case include the Tourism Officer, stakeholders, and local tourists.

Case 5 examines General Santos City, a highly urbanized area known for its economic and cultural significance. The city is shaped by predominant groups, including the B'laan, Moro, and Bisaya. The study gathers insights from the Tourism Officer, stakeholders, and local tourists.

Data Analysis

Six phases of approach were followed in analyzing the data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which includes Phase 1, Familiarizing with the data; Phase 2, Generating initial codes; Phase 3, Searching for themes; Phase 4, Reviewing potential themes; Phase 5, Defining and naming themes; and Phase 6, Producing the report.

In the initial stage, I generated it by listening to the audio in the different locations. Upon the second reading, the transcripts were analyzed as data on the five local government units' destination branding identities.

The second stage involved producing the initial codes. Codes were identified and provided as labels for features of my data.



The third stage involved exploring recurring patterns and features of destination branding identity. The analysis began to form as I transitioned from codes to themes.

In the fourth phase, I examined the themes concerning the compiled data extracts and assessed their compatibility with the data.

In the fifth stage, a cross-case analysis was conducted to identify the similarities and differences among each instance. The method of cross-case analysis was employed to examine the similarities and differences among the destination branding identities of the five LGU's in the SOCCSKSARGEN region.

The final stage involved discussing and interpreting the results obtained. I presented the analysis and explanation of my study results, which several authors substantiated.

Results and Discussion

This qualitative study examined the branding identities of the five cases of local government units in SOCCSKSARGEN, Southern Philippines, focusing on cultural, natural, language features and community-driven elements.

The Destination Branding Identity of Local Government Units in SOCCSKSARGEN

The four themes identified through the cross-analysis were *Cultural Festivals*, *Active Community Engagement*, *nature as a core branding element*, and *catalyst for economic growth and social unity*. Ideas across cases served as the primary recognition technique for these themes.

Table 1.
The Destination Branding Identity of Local Government Units in the SOCCSKSARGEN Region in the Philippines

Essential Theme	Core Ideas
Cultural Festivals	<i>Reflection of local traditions</i> <i>Preservation of arts and crafts</i> <i>Celebration of cultural identity</i> <i>Recognition of cultural icons</i> <i>Establishment of Living tradition</i> <i>Intergenerational transmission</i>
Active Community Engagement	<i>Participation of local communities</i> <i>Maintaining Community-led Initiatives</i> <i>Collaboration of different stakeholders</i> <i>Creation of livelihood opportunities</i> <i>Involvement in ethnolinguistic identity</i>
Nature as a Core Branding Element	<i>Promotion and protection of natural landmarks</i> <i>Efforts to preserve natural environments</i> <i>Integration of green practices for development</i> <i>Use of eco-tourism for environmental conservation</i> <i>Retention of the natural appeal of destinations</i>
Catalyst for Economic Growth and Social Unity	<i>Tourism drives and branding initiatives</i> <i>Integration of local products for branding</i> <i>Creation of employment opportunities</i> <i>Empowerment of indigenous communities</i> <i>Culture as a core economic asset</i> <i>Emphasis on sustainability and inclusivity</i>

Cultural Festivals. This theme reflects the statement's focus on the role of cultural heritage, traditions, and festivals in defining and sustaining the identity of destinations. Each case highlights unique aspects, such as Lake Sebu's National Living Treasures, Alamada's respect for Indigenous Peoples, Columbio's B'laan dances, Glan's Lubi Lubi Festival, and General Santos' Kalilangan Festival. These cultural elements serve as the foundation for their branding strategies, celebrating their history and diversity while creating a distinct and authentic appeal for visitors.

Active Community Engagement. For this theme, community involvement builds loyalty and trust and helps the business to remain relevant. Audience participation strengthens the emotional link between the brand and its consumers, therefore ensuring their long-term viability.

Nature as a Core Branding Element. For this theme, each local government unit strategically harnesses its unique environmental features, ensuring their preservation while enhancing its tourism identity. These efforts reflect a harmonious balance between ecological stewardship and branding innovation. This theme highlights five core ideas that were gathered, emphasizing natural resources and landscapes.

Catalyst for Economic Growth and Social Unity. For this theme, branding emerged as a driving force that fosters economic prosperity and strengthens social development. Local government units create sustainable economic opportunities by leveraging tourism and local products while promoting community pride and cohesion. This theme emphasizes five core ideas of how branding initiatives contribute to economic growth and enhance the social fabric of communities.



Language Features in Branding Identities of Local Government Units in SOCCSKSARGEN

The thematic analysis of language features in the branding identities of local government units in SOCCSKSARGEN reveals three central themes: *Upholding Language Use and*

Documentation, Linguistic Diversity towards Globalization, and Linguistic Styles as a Branding Tool. These themes encapsulate the strategies LGUs employ to articulate their distinct identities while fostering engagement with local and international audiences.

Table 2.

Language Features in Branding Identities of Local Government Units in SOCCSKSARGEN

Essential Theme	Core Ideas
Upholding Language Use and Documentation	<i>Integration of Indigenous languages Creation of unique cultural markings Preservation of heritage through local terms Promotion of tribal vocabulary Use of tribal accents in conversation</i>
Linguistic Diversity towards Globalization	<i>Utilizing multiple dialects Strategic use of national or regional languages Bridging language barriers for communication Translanguaging for internationalization Ensuring equal linguistic representation Blending cultural pride with modern promotional tools</i>
Linguistic Styles as a Branding Tool	<i>Connecting emotions through narration Incorporating cultural rituals for brand storytelling Utilizing anecdotes and testimonials from locals Building vivid images of sensory experiences Showcasing cultural expressions Captivating emotive words</i>

Upholding Language Use and Documentation. This theme is a cornerstone of the strategies employed by local government units (LGUs) in SOCCSKSARGEN. This theme underscores the importance of maintaining and promoting local culture, traditions, and linguistic heritage as integral components of destination branding. Embedding indigenous languages, symbols, and cultural narratives, LGUs ensure the preservation of heritage, foster community pride, and enhance visitor engagement.

Linguistic Diversity towards Globalization. This theme showcases how LGUs leverage multiple languages to foster inclusivity, bridge cultural differences, and enhance relatability

The Attributes, Culture, and Experiences Embedded in these Branding Identities in Enhancing the Reputation and Competitiveness of the Destination

The analysis of branding identities in local government units (LGUs) reveals four central themes: *Integrative Arts,*

for both local and diverse audiences. Employing diverse languages ensures that its branding resonates with a diverse audience, reflecting the region’s rich multicultural identity.

Linguistic Styles as a Branding Tool. Across cases, cultural narratives emerge as a cornerstone for branding, allowing local government units to weave their unique heritage into compelling styles of language that captivate local pride and global curiosity. Each case demonstrates how linguistic styles amplify the connection between destinations and their audience.

Atmospheric and Scenic Landscapes, Experiential Tourism and Safety, Accessibility, and Infrastructure. These themes, derived through a systematic cross-case analysis, reflect how LGUs integrate their unique attributes, cultural elements, and tourism experiences to enhance their reputation and competitiveness.

Table 3.

The Attributes, Culture, and Experiences embedded in these Branding Identities in Enhancing the Reputation and Competitiveness of the Destination

Essential Theme	Core Ideas
Integrative Arts	<i>Incorporation of performing arts Local handicrafts empowerment Inclusivity of diverse Indigenous peoples Presentation of local experts' Unique Choreographies Integration of cultural heritage with industrial identity</i>
Atmospheric and Scenic Landscapes	<i>Combination of serenity and adventure Offering panoramic views for a refreshing escape</i>



	<i>Raw and authentic connections to nature</i> <i>Showcasing the region's most visited destination</i>
Experiential Tourism	<i>Immersive Cultural Experiences</i> <i>Creating meaningful and memorable experiences</i> <i>Deep connections with the place's authentic Identity</i> <i>Positive reviews and visitor feedback</i> <i>Reputation for hospitality and warmth</i>
Safety, Accessibility, and Infrastructure	<i>Enhancing accessibility viable for hosting events</i> <i>Tourist-friendly safety initiatives</i> <i>Maintaining integrity and infrastructure through strict guidelines and policies</i> <i>Ensuring long-term sustainability and relevance</i> <i>Consistent upkeep of tourist sites</i>

Integrative Arts. This theme emphasizes the different forms of art's role in shaping a destination's identity. Local government units (LGUs) in SOCCSKSARGEN integrate arts, traditions, and indigenous practices into their branding to create authentic, compelling narratives that celebrate their uniqueness while promoting tourism and fostering community pride.

Atmospheric and Scenic Landscapes. This theme emphasizes the integral role of natural beauty and scenic landscapes in creating compelling and competitive destination branding identities. Across the cases, the atmosphere and nature are portrayed as a visual asset and a cultural and experiential anchor that draws visitors and fosters pride among locals.

Branding Identities Perceived by Tourists and Stakeholders of Local Government Units in SOCCSKSARGEN

The cross-analysis identified three themes: Cultural Integration with Stakeholders' Visibility, Sustainability through Public-

Experiential Tourism. This underscores the importance of immersive and authentic experiences in enhancing the appeal of destinations. Across the five cases, unique cultural, natural, and festival-driven activities were highlighted, demonstrating how these initiatives create memorable moments for visitors while fostering deep connections to the destinations.

Safety, Accessibility, and Infrastructure. This theme highlights the importance of safety measures, accessibility improvements, and robust infrastructure in enhancing a destination's appeal and ensuring a positive visitor experience. Across the cases, these factors are shown to bolster tourism growth and reinforce the trust and confidence of both tourists and stakeholder

Private Partnerships, and Rising Challenges in Tourism Promotion. As shown in Table 4, core ideas are underscoring each theme.

Table 4
Branding Identities Perceived by Tourists and Stakeholders of Local Government Units in SOCCSKSARGEN

Essential Theme	Core Ideas
Cultural Integration with Stakeholder Visibility	<i>Active involvement in multicultural heritage</i> <i>Inculcating traditional workshops</i> <i>Support local economies for development</i> <i>Offering visitors genuine connections</i> <i>Respect for various Indigenous Peoples</i>
Sustainability Through Intergovernmental Partnerships	<i>Stakeholder involvement in policy-making and environmental management.</i> <i>Keeping destinations relevant and competitive.</i> <i>Balancing attention in all tourist destinations</i> <i>Inclusion of environmental agencies</i> <i>Cross-industry collaboration</i> <i>Ensuring a consultative and bottom-up approach.</i>
Rising Challenges in Tourism Industry	<i>Limited local and financial resources</i> <i>Full support from local communities</i> <i>Degradation of tourist destination</i> <i>Environmental responsibilities of tourists</i> <i>Authenticity of the destination</i> <i>Meeting tourists expectations</i>



Cultural Integration with Stakeholders Visibility. This theme reflects cultural identity, heritage integration, and preservation in destination branding. It highlights the efforts of stakeholders and local government units in maintaining cultural practices, traditions, and unique identities, which serve as the foundation of their branding strategies.

Sustainability through Intergovernmental Partnerships. This theme focuses on integrating sustainable practices and environmental awareness in the branding and development of tourism destinations. Public-private partnerships are crucial drivers in shaping the municipalities' tourism landscape and branding strategies, ensuring sustainable development and shared responsibility.

Rising Challenges in Tourism Industry. Focusing on the difficulties localities face in effectively marketing their destinations while dealing with various constraints. Across the five cases, stakeholders face limited local and financial resources, which hinder the implementation of comprehensive promotional strategies. Full support from local communities to overcome these challenges, as does addressing the degradation of tourist destinations. Additionally, the need for environmental responsibility among tourists and the lack of promotional websites further complicate efforts.

Cross-case Analysis

Table 5

Similarities and Differences of The Destination Branding Identity in SOCCSKSARGEN Local Government Units in Southern Philippines

The Destination Branding Identity	Case Unit		Remarks
	Similarities	Differences	
The Destination Branding Identity			
Cultural Festivals	2, 4, 5	1	Case 1 emphasizes National Living Treasures, T'nalak weaving, and Living Tradition Centers
		3	Case 3 celebrates Bla'an exclusivity with the Kasik Contest and unique dances
Active Community Engagement	1,2, 3	4	Case 4 uniquely engages locals as ambassadors for tourism, actively involving them in promoting and maintaining white sand beaches.
		5	Meanwhile, Case 5 incorporated the community representation in its logo.
Nature as a Core Branding Element	1, 2, 3, 4	5	Cases 1, 2, 3, and 4 focus on untouched natural beauty. In contrast, Only Case 5 diverges with urban projects and sustainable development.
Catalyst for Economic Growth	1, 2, 3, 4	5	Only Case 5 integrates industrial might and eco-tourism through the Tuna Festival and ICT/BPO ventures.
Language Features Branding Identities			
Upholding Language Use and Documentation	1, 2, 3, 4	5	Cases 1, 2, 3 and 4 emphasize embedding local dialects and indigenous terms into branding efforts. Only Case 5 uses the Filipino fostering a unifying cultural identity across various groups.
Linguistic Diversity towards Globalization	1, 3, 5	2	Case 2 promotes Hligaynon for local audiences, only.
		4	Case 4 emphasizes the use of the English language for international connections
Linguistics Styles as a Branding Tool		1	Case 1 combines conversational and Persuasive tones
		2	Case 2 focuses on persuasive language
		3	Case 3 employs narrative, and descriptive language, and uses cultural expressions.
		4	Case 4 integrates informative, conversational, descriptive, and invitational language
		5	Case 5 highlights the formal and informal language (collocquial)
The Attributes, Culture, and Experiences embedded in these Branding Identities in Enhancing the Reputation and Competitiveness of the Destination			
Integrative Arts	1, 2, 3, 4	5	Only General Santos City merges its cultural pride with its industrial identity.
Atmospheric and Scenic Landscapes	1, 2, 5	3	All cases emphasize natural beauty in their branding. However, Case 3 maintains minimal development in natural sites.



		4	Case 4 highlights its pristine white beaches garnering recognition.
Experiential Tourism		1	Lake Sebu gives immersive cultural experiences.
		2	Case 2 offers a memorable and international vibe experience.
		3	Case 3 integrates authentic connections from untouched nature.
		4	Case 4 leverages pristine beaches and lively festivals for immersive, and meaningful experiences
		5	Only Case 5 highlights the Filipino warmth.
Safety, Accessibility, and Infrastructure	1, 2, 4	3	Only Case 3 focuses on community-driven safety in unspoiled natural areas.
		5	Case 5 imposes strict guidelines and policies on brand integrity and infrastructure.
Perceptions of Tourists and Stakeholders in the Branding Identities			
Cultural Integration with Stakeholder Visibility	1, 2, 3, 4	5	Cases 1, 2, 3 and 4 integrate local traditions. However, Case 5 ties cultural identity to industrial growth.
Sustainability Through inter-governmental partnerships	1, 2, 3, 5	4	Cases 1, 2, 3, and 5 highlight strong collaboration between public and private entities to sustain tourism efforts. However, Case 4 focuses on associations like GLATIA for stakeholder representation.
Rising Challenges in Tourism Industry		1	Case 1 highlights limitations in social media promotions and conducting events
		2	Case 2 emphasizes preservation to avoid degradation of the area
		3	Case 3 pointed out the idea of expectation versus reality issue
		4	Case 4 shares challenges in providing tourists with satisfaction
		5	Case 5 faces a challenge in balancing industrial perception with tourist expectations

The Destination Branding Identity of Local Government Units

Cultural Festivals: Cases 2, 4, and 5 use festivals as major elements of destination branding to create pride and celebrate diversity. Examples include the Lubi-Lubi Festival in Glan and the Kalilangan Festival in General Santos City, which celebrate togetherness and highlight culture.

The study by Richards (2020) pointed out that festivals are crucial to destination branding, stating that such events help present cultures and create pride, which in turn attracts tourists. However, Case 1 is different, focusing on National Living Treasures and Living Tradition Centers, a destination emphasizing cultural heritage beyond festivals. Also, Case 3 highlighted its difference celebrating B’laan exclusivity with the Kasik Contest. These differences are acknowledged in Smith and Brennan’s (2020) study on how cultural and heritage-based strategies can enhance a destination's appeal beyond traditional festivals.

Active Community Engagement: Cases 1, 2, and 3 demonstrate how communities are integrated into tourism. However, Case 4 sparked a difference as it uniquely engages locals as tourism

ambassadors and stewards of the destination. Galla (2020) studied local ambassadors as key influencers in tourism and how community involvement fosters pride and ownership, thereby improving tourism experiences. Glan actively involves itself in promoting and maintaining the region’s pristine white sand beaches. Locals promote the tourism destination, not just simply posting on social media but inviting the locals and also international connections to visit the place.

Moreover, Case 5 highlighted how the unique inclusivity of the nature of branding fosters pride among residents in its brand logo. A study by Mugobo (2021) assessed local stakeholders' perceptions following the introduction of the new logo and found that the lack of stakeholder involvement negatively impacted their reception of the rebranding efforts.

Nature as a Core Branding Element. Cases 1, 2, 3, and 4 utilize natural resources as key brand identifiers. Lake Sebu promotes its Seven Waterfalls, Alamada highlights Asik-Asik Falls, Columbio protects the La Palmera Mountain Ridges, and Glan emphasizes its beautiful beaches. Case 5, General Santos City, however, diverges by combining industrial identity and sustainability with its "Tuna Capital City" branding. The study



by Buckley (2020) found that natural landmarks are critical components of destination branding. Through breathtaking natural wonders, the community fortifies the region's image as a pristine eco-tourism haven.

Catalyst for Economic Growth and Social Unity, Cases 1, 3, and 4 rely on eco-tourism and community-sustained economic development, using natural and cultural resources to support growth. In contrast, Case 2 ties economic development to local crafts and food products, while Case 5 integrates industrial strength with eco-tourism through the Tuna Festival and ICT/BPO industries, combining culture and industry.

Research by Hampton and Jeyacheya (2019) studied the role in economic development and equality. The study by Mason and Lam (2021) highlighted how industrialization, as seen in General Santos City, combines to enhance economic growth and competitiveness. This supports Case 5 as different from other cases because it integrates its industrial might with eco-tourism, leveraging the Tuna Festival and ICT/BPO ventures to connect its economic identity.

Language Features in Branding Identities of Local Government Units

Upholding Language Use and Documentation: The four cases, Lake Sebu, Alamada, Columbio, and Glan, ensure that they include the local dialect and indigenous terms in their branding strategies. According to Harrison and Hughes (2020), the application of Indigenous languages and cultural narratives in destination branding enhances cultural identity while establishing a distinct brand identity.

Linguistic Diversity towards Globalization. The first three cases, 1, 3, and 5, use language to make their messages more understandable and relevant to their audiences. Anderson and Smith (2021) found that using multiple languages in destination branding makes destinations more welcoming and relatable. Chiu and Tan (2020) examined how linguistically diverse destinations use language to target specific market segments. Their study focused on destinations incorporating international languages, such as Glan, which employs English, Cebuano, and Tagalog to broaden its accessibility including international audiences.

Linguistics Styles as a Branding Tool. Across cases, different language tones emerge as a cornerstone for branding, allowing local government units to weave their unique heritage into compelling stories that captivate local pride and global curiosity.

The Attributes, Culture, and Experiences Embedded in these Branding Identities in Enhancing the Reputation and Competitiveness of the Destination

Integrative Arts. To improve their branding, Cases 1, 2, 4, and 5 illustrate how cultural heritage integrates inclusivity and diverse narratives in destination branding efforts. One study by Richards (2019) highlights the positive impact of interactive arts in destination branding, showcasing how cultural elements can enhance the attractiveness of a place.

Atmospheric and Scenic Landscapes. The inherent beauty of SOCCSKSARGEN is emphasized in each case. Cases 1, 2, and 5 concentrate on increasing adventure tourism and scenic attractions. While, case 3 stresses protecting natural landscapes to preserve their authenticity, and Case 4 is highlighted as different because it secures a seat on the table of most visited destinations in the region. Hall, C. M., & Weiler, B. (2020) discusses how integrating scenic landscapes with adventure tourism can enhance a destination's competitiveness, leveraging natural and scenic beauty in adventure tourism tends to attract more visitors, as they combine the appeal of nature with adventure activities.

Experiential Tourism. Adventure and engaging experiences are highlighted in all cases. Pine and Gilmore's (2020) seminal work on the "Experience Economy" suggested that in order for firms to have a competitive edge, they must create memorable experiences.

Infrastructure, safety, and accessibility. To improve tourism, Cases 1, 2, and 4 highlight proactive safety measures and easily accessible infrastructure. Cases 3 and 5 are different; General Santos City incorporates safety into contemporary infrastructure and urban branding, while Columbio concentrates on community-driven safety in natural settings. Gossling and Hall (2006) looked at how infrastructure development balances accessibility and environmental concerns to promote sustainable tourism.

Branding Identities Perceived by Tourists and Stakeholders of Local Government Units

Cultural Integration with Stakeholder Visibility. The branding strategies of Cases 1, 2, 3, and 4 stress the need to include local customs, handicrafts, and eco-tourism into their branding to protect the cultural legacy and advance sustainability. Additionally, UNESCO (2020) investigated how local identities are strengthened by cultural preservation programs, such as those that highlight indigenous crafts like T'nalak weaving.

Sustainability through Public-Private Partnerships. To protect natural resources like lakes, waterfalls, and beaches, sustainable practices and environmental awareness must be integrated into the branding and development of tourism destinations. Gössling et al. (2019) examined the function of sustainable urban design in tourism, emphasizing how places like General Santos City combine ecological and industrial objectives to strike a balance between environmental responsibility and growth.

Rising Challenges in Tourism Industry. This theme focuses on the difficulties localities face in effectively marketing their destinations while dealing with various constraints. The rising challenges in tourism promotion highlight the difficulties localities face in effectively marketing their destinations amid various constraints. This observation aligns with the findings of the World Tourism Organization, which identified several critical challenges in sustainable tourism development, including limited financial resources, insufficient infrastructure, and the need for community engagement to ensure successful tourism promotion (UNWTO, 2018).



Recommendations for Future Research

The Long-term effects of destination branding strategies on economic growth, cultural preservation, linguistic diversity, and community development should be studied in future studies of regions like SOCCSKSARGEN. Comparative research across different regions or nations would give further insight into the effectiveness and adaptability of different branding strategies to local culture and language. Moreover, studies may also consider the perspectives of marginalized groups in the branding process to ensure diversity and equitable representation. Also, future research may investigate adaptive strategies that address financial limitations, expectation-versus-reality issues, community support, environmental responsibility, and the constraints in social media promotions and event management to achieve a balance between tourism promotion and sustainability. Lastly, there is a need for longitudinal studies on whether these branding initiatives work and if they have an impact on regional identity and tourism competitiveness for policymakers and practitioners.