

Exploring The Role Of Tourism Management Students In Promoting Local Tourism Culture

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Abstract: *This study explored the role of Tourism Management (TM) students in promoting local tourism culture, focusing on learners from Gordon College in Olongapo City. The research employed qualitative methods with thematic analysis to determine student perceptions of cultural promotion and their preferred cultural elements and their obstacles when executing cultural programs. Thematic Analysis identified six themes drawn from the participants' experiences and perspectives. The research results show that TM students understand their role to defend local culture in addition to their obligation to promote it. The participants identified festivals together with traditional practices and indigenous heritage and local products as an essential cultural element. It showed strong motivation despite their financial challenges, time restrictions and limited cultural resources which they propose to address through cultural immersion and workshops and improved community partnerships. The research findings will help tourism educators together with local cultural organizations and policymakers to create better opportunities for TM students to protect local culture and develop tourism industries.*

Keywords: *Tourism Management Students, Local Tourism Culture, Cultural Promotion, Olongapo City, Cultural Tourism*

I. INTRODUCTION

Local culture is essential to tourism development as it defines the distinct identity and attractiveness of destinations worldwide, with the idea of "place authenticity" emphasizing the need to preserve and present local traditions, customs, and heritage to draw visitors seeking meaningful cultural experiences, while authenticity in cultural tourism also includes the everyday lives, artistic expressions, and lived practices of local communities beyond mere historical accuracy (Machzumi, et al., 2024). Marketers and planners use cultural assets of destinations to develop distinctive identities which separate their locations from rival destinations, proper marketing of cultural attractions leads to better visitor experiences which boosts destination popularity and drives substantial tourism expansion and industry success.

Olongapo City carries a rich and multifaceted past, largely shaped by its long association with the former U.S. Naval Base in Subic Bay. For many years, the naval base played a major role in the city's economic and social development. After the U.S. military departed in 1992, Olongapo experienced a significant transition, emerging as a thriving hub for commerce, tourism, and various industries.

Today, the city stands as a dynamic urban center closely linked to the Subic Bay Freeport Zone. It features popular destinations such as Harbor Point Ayala Malls and the historic Camayan Beach Resort. Olongapo also offers a vibrant food culture and acts as a key gateway to the natural attractions of Zambales province (Wisdomlib, 2025).

The success of this development requires a deep understanding of the demographic and psychographic characteristics of local communities as a foundation for creating authentic and sustainable tourism narratives, this strategy not only fosters local economic growth through creative industries and small enterprises but also strengthens cultural identity, which is increasingly valued in the face of globalization (Trisoko, et al., 2024). TM students' roles and their local cultural promotion and their encountered obstacles will help develop better tourism education programs and protect local tourism culture, the TM students need better involvement in cultural activities while academic institutions should work more closely with local tourism businesses. This study aims to explore the role of Tourism Management (TM) students in promoting local tourism culture, with a specific

focus on the Gordon College students located in Olongapo City.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research design to gather detailed insights into the experiences and perceptions of Tourism Management (TM) students. Qualitative methods focus on understanding the “how” and “why” behind participant responses rather than numerical data (Tenny et al., 2022). The researcher used interviews with open-ended questions to allow TM students to freely express their views on their role in promoting local tourism culture. The study involved 7 Tourism Management students from Gordon College in Olongapo City. These TM students were chosen because they are actively learning skills related to “The Role of Youth In Tourism Awareness Movement In West Detusoko Tourism Village, Ende Regency”. A similar qualitative study by Adja Masa et al. (2021) supporting the suitability of this sample size.

Interviews served as the main instrument for data collection. A structured open-ended questionnaire was prepared specifically for Tourism Management students. It had three parts: (1) students’ understanding of cultural promotion, (2) factors and challenges in promoting local tourism culture, and (3) suggestions to strengthen student involvement. This structure allowed participants to give detailed and meaningful answers. Data were collected directly from the selected Tourism Management students.

Before conducting interviews, the researcher reviewed related literature to ensure that the questions aligned with the study’s objectives. Invitation letters were sent through online platforms, informing participants about the purpose and procedures of the study. Participants were briefed before each interview and assured of confidentiality. The interviews used open-ended questions to gather insights about the students’ roles in promoting local tourism culture. Afterward, the responses were organized and analyzed by the designated data analyst to ensure reliability.

The study used thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke to examine the interview responses. The researchers began by transcribing and reviewing the data to understand the participants’ views. Initial coding was done to identify key ideas, patterns, and recurring statements. There are 6 major themes related to students’ roles, contributions, and challenges in promoting local tourism culture.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents, analyzes, and interprets the data gathered from the participants to address the study’s research questions. The findings are organized thematically to highlight patterns, meanings, and insights. Each theme is supported by direct quotations to strengthen the interpretation,

followed by an analytical discussion that links the results to relevant literature. Through this process, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the roles, challenges, and contributions of Tourism Management students as local tourism ambassadors.

THEME 1: Tourism Management Students as Cultural Ambassadors and Stewards

The participants consistently articulated a clear understanding of their role in cultural promotion, largely describing themselves as front-line ambassadors of local culture. This identity reflects both promotional and protective duties. For instance, P1 explained, *“I see my role as a marketer of our local tourism culture to the visitors,”* demonstrating confidence in representing local heritage to outsiders. Meanwhile, P2 emphasized that their responsibility extends beyond visibility and branding, stating, *“I see my role as someone who help promotes and protects our local culture... promote responsible practices.”*

This dual understanding, marketing and safeguarding, suggests that students do not perceive cultural promotion merely as a commercial activity but as one intertwined with preservation, ethical representation, and respect for community identity. Their sentiments align with recent studies highlighting the growing expectation for tourism graduates to serve as cultural mediators who balance visitor interests with community values (Lo & Ip, 2023). Contemporary literature in sustainable tourism education also stresses the importance of fostering cultural stewardship among students to ensure that heritage promotion does not result in cultural commodification or exploitation (Adeola & Adebisi, 2022).

Students’ awareness of responsible cultural promotion indicates the internalization of sustainability frameworks embedded in their academic programs. The integration of these values demonstrates that the participants are aware of the critical role they play in shaping visitor perceptions while also contributing to long-term cultural protection.

THEME 2: Prioritized Cultural Elements for Local Tourism Promotion

A strong theme emerging from the data concerns the specific cultural elements that students believe should be prioritized in local tourism promotion. Many students highlighted festivals, traditions, local products, indigenous heritage, traditional food, and community practices as central to cultural identity.

P3 emphasized the significance of intangible heritage, stating that *“TM students should promote local festivals, traditional products, food, dances, and community*

practices.” Such elements are closely tied to community expression and identity. Meanwhile, P4 brought attention to marginalized cultural groups, *“We have a lot of indigenous groups here... I think we can focus on promoting them.”*

These responses show that students recognize both mainstream and lesser-known cultural elements as valuable tourism assets. They also reveal an understanding that cultural promotion can support inclusivity, diversity, and community empowerment. Their perspectives resonate with UNESCO’s emphasis on intangible cultural heritage as a vital driver of cultural continuity and identity-building. Similarly, recent literature suggests that destination competitiveness is increasingly shaped by the authenticity and uniqueness of cultural offerings, particularly those rooted in local traditions and indigenous knowledge (Medina, 2021; UNWTO, 2022).

The students’ focus on indigenous culture also reflects a growing awareness of the need to uplift traditionally underrepresented groups through tourism, aligning with global calls for inclusive and community-centered heritage promotion.

THEME 3: Academic Influence on Cultural Awareness and Appreciation

Academic exposure emerged as a critical factor shaping students’ cultural awareness and appreciation. Many participants attributed their understanding of cultural preservation and promotion to coursework, practical activities, cultural reports, educational tours, and immersion experiences.

According to P5, *“It made me realize how important our culture is and made me appreciate it,”* indicating that academic learning deepened their sense of cultural pride. P6 expanded on this transformation by stating, *“I learned that tourism is not just about bringing in visitors... it’s also about protecting traditions and respecting communities.”* These observations reveal that students have internalized the principles of responsible tourism and cultural ethics.

Literature consistently supports the significance of experiential learning in tourism education. According to Wang & Tsai (2023), immersion activities allow students to experience cultural contexts firsthand, resulting in more meaningful learning compared to classroom instruction alone. Dela Cruz & Ching (2022) further emphasize that exposure to community stories, local narratives, and cultural practices fosters empathy and a deeper understanding of cultural vulnerability.

Thus, the influence of academic experiences on students’ cultural values is evident, reinforcing the idea that tourism programs play a pivotal role in shaping future practitioners’ attitudes toward heritage protection.

THEME 4: Influencing Factors in Student Engagement Several enabling factors were identified as contributing to students’ active involvement in cultural promotion, including hands-on activities, project-

based learning, institutional support, peer collaboration, and personal motivation. P7 expressed how practical projects strengthened their engagement, *“Projects and events helped me become more engaged... by making our own products and marketing it ourselves to the visitors.”* This reflects how applied learning deepens understanding and encourages creativity. Other participants noted the importance of teacher guidance, community partnerships, and recognition programs in enhancing student enthusiasm. Consistent with this, existing literature highlights the importance of active learning, mentorship, and community involvement in increasing student engagement in cultural initiatives (Goh & Sigala, 2022). Motivation theories in educational tourism also state that recognition, whether academic, social, or professional, plays an important role in sustaining student participation (Li & Chen, 2023). These findings demonstrate that student engagement is not solely interest-driven but is also shaped by the support systems and opportunities provided by their academic institutions.

THEME 5: Challenges and Barriers in Cultural Promotion

Despite their willingness to promote local culture, participants encountered multiple challenges that limited their ability to engage meaningfully. These included financial constraints, time management issues, academic workload, lack of community involvement, limited access to cultural information, and coordination problems. P8 was particularly vocal about financial difficulties, stating, *“One of the main difficulties... is the financial aspect... sometimes it becomes challenging to keep up.”* P9 also explained how academic responsibilities posed a barrier: *“It’s hard to manage time with school requirements and events.”* Other participants highlighted issues such as lack of accurate cultural information or inconsistent communication with stakeholders. These concerns reflect broader challenges identified in tourism research. Studies on community-based tourism and cultural preservation outline similar obstacles, including limited funding, insufficient documentation of cultural practices, and weak stakeholder collaboration (Santiago & Roldan, 2022; Lopez & Ferreira, 2021). These barriers can restrict students from fully participating in cultural promotion efforts, despite their interest and motivation.

THEME 6: Strategies for Strengthening Student Roles in Cultural Preservation

Finally, participants suggested a variety of strategies to enhance their capacity to promote local culture more effectively. These included cultural immersion programs, specialized workshops on heritage interpretation, destination branding, cultural mapping, more field trips, enhanced community partnerships, and collaboration with local government units. P10 recommended an immersion-based approach, *“Cultural immersion programs where TM students can directly learn from local communities and traditions.”* Participants believe that hands-on cultural engagement creates a stronger connection between students and local heritage. These suggestions align with recent literature advocating for skills-

focused training, such as cultural mapping and interpretation workshops, which equip students with the technical competencies needed for cultural promotion (Park & Kim, 2022). Additionally, research underscores that partnerships between universities, local governments, and cultural communities are essential for sustainable heritage promotion and more meaningful student involvement (Hammad & Alshammari, 2023). Overall, these recommended strategies highlight the students' proactive mindset and desire for deeper, more meaningful engagement with local culture.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study explored the role of Tourism Management (TM) students in promoting local tourism culture, focusing on learners from Gordon College in Olongapo City. The research findings show that Gordon College Tourism Management students actively support local tourism culture through their diverse activities. TM students see themselves as promoters and cultural ambassadors of local culture because they understand how to protect traditional practices while backing neighborhood populations and handling cultural promotion respectfully. Their academic experience at school determines their level of cultural heritage appreciation through direct involvement and institutional backing. The complete involvement of students remains restricted because they face multiple obstacles which include insufficient funding and insufficient knowledge about different cultures and problems with time organization and poor coordination between the institutions and organizations. TM Students show great enthusiasm to help despite these obstacles which they propose to address through cultural immersion programs and specialized workshops and field-based learning experiences and better connections between the school and local government units and cultural communities. TM students have the potential to become future cultural ambassadors when they get proper backing to actively participate in cultural tourism programs.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the cultural promotion of TM students through participation and community-based initiatives.

1. **Participation in local festivals and tourism events:** TM students should be actively involved in local community festivals, and cultural activities to gain hands-on experience in cultural promotion and interacting with various cultural groups.
2. **Expand Cultural Immersion and Field Exposure:** Gordon College should provide more cultural immersion activities, heritage site visits, and field exposures to help TM students deepen their understanding and appreciation of local culture and strengthen their ability to promote it effectively.

3. **Strengthen School – Local Government Partnerships:** Collaboration between Gordon College and the Olongapo City Tourism Office should work together to create more opportunities for students' involvement in local cultural events, and community-based tourism initiatives.

4. **Support Students in Overcoming Barriers:** Gordon College and local stakeholders should address challenges faced by students such as limited budget, lack of cultural information, or time constraints to ensure they can participate actively and confidently in cultural promotion efforts.

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