

## Gastronomic identity of San Jose Occidental Mindoro as perceived by the tourists and local residents

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### ABSTRACT

Gastronomy is highly valued by tourists, who travel to discover a destination's local cuisine, explore its restaurants, taste typical products, and experience unique traditions. The current study explored gastronomic identity as a destination's strategic competency, primarily based on primitive and existing culinary resources. It aimed to determine differences between tourists and residents in their perspectives on San Jose's gastronomic identity, considering seven determinants such as geographical conditions, environmental factors, cultural elements, on-premises food service establishments, promotion, food quality and variety, and culinary style. The study employed a descriptive research design, utilizing descriptive statistics like mean, frequency, and percentage to quantify variables, along with an independent t-test. Findings suggest the establishment of San Jose's gastronomic identity, with cuisine serving as the core aspect of the destination's intangible heritage, offering tourists an authentic gastronomic experience. Both local residents and tourists showed high ratings for various determinants of San Jose's gastronomic identity, particularly in food provision and culinary techniques, reflecting a positive perception of the town's gastronomy. This positive outcome has the potential to enrich the visitor experience, establishing a direct connection to Mindoro Province's people, culture, and heritage. Recommendations include better promoting the town's gastronomic identity, identifying gaps in services and products for tourists and locals, conducting studies related to local food, and organizing culinary festivals to showcase innovative products and attract more tourists, thereby promoting the province's gastronomic identity.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Gastronomy is often a central part of the tourist experience (Vukojević et al., 2021). Thus, the cuisine and culinary products at the destination may be considered as strategic resources that constitute a differentiating factor and a source of competitive advantage for the place (Okumus & Çetin, 2018). A destination's richness in terms of cuisine increases its attractiveness and may be an important element of its branding identity where food became the logical instrument in branding and promoting a specific destination. Food and culture are closely related as they often carry important social and cultural significance in a particular destinations. Tourists are seeking more diverse destinations that support the cultural value added tourism products. As one of the elements of culture, local food and beverages become essential to market and promote the destinations tourism activities.

Gastronomic identity is determined by a number of factors. Food and other gastronomic activities have been acknowledged by governments, business, and academics as an integral part of the tourism package, and they serve as a means of differentiation for destinations. Food and tourism have a strong historical connection which joins them together as a binding force. Through a visit to a food festival, cooking class, or farm-to-table dining experience, tourists garner a better sense of local values and traditions. The roots of gastronomic tourism lie in agriculture, culture, and tourism (Dixit et al., 2021). The dominant elements include geography, food, culinary method, and cultural elements. These elements collectively contribute to the branding and positioning of a destination as a gastronomy hotspot, attracting tourists and enhancing destination satisfaction and brand equity (Basle, 2023). Also perception of tourists and local residents can be viewed in terms of service providers, price and cost, promotion, food variety and quality and distinctive style of cooking which in turn impact agricultural products and services of the community arising from increased travel. These things have a significant impact on identifiable gastronomic characteristics. All gastronomies are in constant evolution and are a fusion of unique and identifiable products, traditions and etiquette. An understanding of these concepts can be valuable when defining gastronomic identity strategies and local restaurant concepts.

San Jose is one of the towns known for its rich gastronomical elements; it also encompasses a significant historical heritage derived from the existence of ancient civilizations and different cultures within its territory. Recently, before the pandemic, there are tremendous numbers of tourists visited San Jose. According to the consolidated statistics report of the Municipal Tourism and Community Development Office, there were 26,768 tourists arrivals during 2020, that enjoyed and explored local featured cuisine and experienced memorable delicacies. According to Kovalenko et al. (2023) gastronomic experience has impact on the overall destination identity, quality cuisine is arising as an important relevant motivator that affect the destination choosing process. Tourists often seek authentic culinary experiences, driving the demand for local dishes and unique flavors. The cultural exchange between between tourists and locals through food enhances the destination's appeal, creating a symbiotic relationship between tourism and gastronomy. Furthermore, Stalmirska (2021) stated that it is useful to understand the local food's pathway to become an idea of tourists' perceptions. Gastronomic identity is often viewed from the tourist's perspective, yet local people who help create the destination's experience is also vital.

This paper seeks to identify the gastronomic identity of San Jose based from different aspects and determinants. In this paper, the role of residents in the creation of gastronomic identity is considered important, since local people are a part of the destination's experience for providing good accommodation, food and experience. The current study aims to explore the concept of gastronomic identity as a destination's strategic competency primarily based on primitive and existing culinary resources. It also attempts to determine the differences between tourists and residents in terms of their perspective of the gastronomic identity of San Jose. This was also conducted to describe the profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, education level and marital status, identify the determinants of gastronomic identity in terms of geographical condition, environmental factors, cultural elements, on-premise food service establishment, promotion, food quality and variety and culinary style and to determine the significant difference on the perception between tourists and local residents in terms of the different determinants of gastronomic identity.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHOD**

### **2.1. Research design**

The study employed descriptive research design to analyze and draw conclusion. This approach involves data collection methods allowing for statistical analysis to identify patterns and correlations. Enabling researchers to measure and quantify relations between variables.

### **2.2. Respondents**

The population of the research consists of local people and visitors of San Jose, Occidental Mindoro. Local people and domestic tourists was administered an online questionnaire, which was shared through social media accounts using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. The tourists that were selected in the research include only domestic tourists, who have visited San Jose for the last 2 years. These respondents have been asked to fill in a paper-based format of the questionnaire. The researchers had experienced different engagement levels, some respondents were actively engaged by providing detailed and thoughtful responses while others offered a more concise feedback. Also, some participants encountered technical difficulties with the survey platform, impacting their experience and ability to complete the survey smoothly.

The respondents were identified with the use of local intermediaries such as barangay captain and department of tourism to facilitate communication between researchers and residents. The researchers also conducted survey online and sent individual and personally messages to gather viewpoints that allows for a comprehensive exploration of perspectives.

### 2.3. Research instrument

A total of 60 questionnaires were sent to prospective tourists and residents online. A sample size of 60 is often considered a reasonable balance between obtaining meaningful data and practical constraints. Thirty domestic tourists and 30 residents were chosen as respondents. Researchers aimed to achieve statistically reliable results without conducting an excessively large or resource-intensive survey.

The questionnaire is the principal research instrument to be used in this study, composed of three parts. Part I captures the demographics of the respondents, aiding in reaching specific age, sex, and educational attainment of respondents more effectively, aligning efforts with the preferences of the intended respondents. Part II focuses on identifying the determinants of gastronomic identity in terms of geographical conditions, environmental factors, cultural elements, on-premises food service establishments, promotion, food quality and variety, and culinary style. Lastly, Part III assesses the perception between tourists and residents in terms of the different determinants of gastronomic identity. The items in the questionnaire were contextualized and piloted before being distributed to the target group. The measure of gastronomic identity used consists of 7 determinants and is based on Lai et al. (2018), with 6 dimensions: geographic environment, food culture, food as lifestyle, food quality, dining places/restaurants, and food activities. Authors reviewed existing literature to identify gaps or areas with limited understanding, helping in framing questions that contribute to the existing research questions.

### 2.4. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted throughout the entire month of March 2020 by administering the questionnaire online. Data were collected via emails, private messages, or text. The advantage of online data collection is its timeliness, particularly during the pandemic. Respondents were given ample time to respond to the questionnaire, leading to more accurate results. Online data collection is a systematic process that involves clear distinctions in the way data are collected, allowing for immediate capture and easy and quick data analysis. By utilizing email or the web for surveys, geographical limitations in data collection can be overcome cost-effectively. Advancements in technology also enable the compilation of sophisticated and user-friendly surveys.

In adherence to ethical standards, confidentiality in research was rigorously upheld to safeguard the privacy and rights of all participants. Prior to the collection of any confidential information, the researchers diligently communicated the study's objectives to participants and obtained their explicit consent.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Demographic characteristics

Most respondents were female, constituting 63.3% of the respondents. Regarding age distribution, the highest proportion of participants belonged to the 26-33 age group (26.7%), followed by the 36-41 age group (21.7%), with the smallest representation observed in the 42-49 age group (11.6%). In terms of educational attainment, most respondents held undergraduate degrees, comprising 61.7% of the sample, while 33.3% had completed secondary education [Table 1].

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants (n=60).

Demographic characteristics	f	%
Sex		
Female	38	63.3
Male	22	36.7
Age		
18-25	12	20.0
26-33	16	26.7
34-41	13	21.7
42-49	7	11.6
50 and above	12	20.0
Education		
Secondary school	20	33.3
Undergraduate education	37	61.7
Post graduate education	3	5.0

### 3.2. Gastronomic identity

Upon examining the determinants of gastronomic identity in San Jose, Mindoro, it's evident that respondents generally perceive a strong influence across various factors. Specifically, geographic conditions (mean=4.19), indicate a very high level of influence on gastronomic identity. Environmental factors (mean=4.17) and cultural elements (mean=4.13), also received high ratings, suggesting a high level of agreement. On-premises food establishments (mean=4.30) were highly regarded as well. However,

promotion efforts (mean=3.44), received a more neutral rating, suggesting a moderate level of influence. Overall, these findings underscore the multifaceted nature of factors that contribute to San Jose's gastronomic identity, highlighting the significance of geographic, cultural, and culinary elements in shaping the region's culinary landscape [Table 2].

Table 2. Determinants of gastronomic identities.

Determinants of Gastronomic Identity	Mean
<b>Geographic Condition</b>	
a. San Jose has a mountainous location and farmland suitable for vegetation and animal production.	4.00
b. San Jose promotes the cultivation of fresh ingredients for culinary purposes.	4.20
c. San Jose's primary food sources include seafoods because of its surrounding bodies of water.	4.23
d. The region is home to Mindoro's serene tropical beauty.	4.05
e. San Jose comprises some of the most varied and scenic landscape and tourist spot.	4.47
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.19</b>
<b>Environmental Factors</b>	
a. There are central markets that provide farm-direct fresh produce.	3.88
b. Fusion cooking emerged largely from primitive to urban centres, which led to a distinct cuisine.	4.12
c. San Jose promotes good practices relating to green and blue economy, such as the rational use of plastic and energy, food waste reduction, etc.	4.50
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.17</b>
<b>Cultural Elements</b>	
a. San Jose offers an attractive local food culture through its food and distinct form of cooking.	4.33
b. San Jose utilizes specific ingredients and spices in most of their dishes to evoke unique flavor.	3.88
c. The people use food to celebrate religious and community events.	3.83
d. The food preparation reflects a deep respect for nature using natural, locally sourced ingredients abundant in this province like rice, fish, and vegetables.	4.60
e. Taboo foods are avoided to offer due to religious and cultural reasons.	4.00
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.13</b>
<b>On-Premises Food Establishments</b>	
a. The quality of food is excellent with varied selection of dishes to satisfy every preference.	4.40
b. There is a selection of gourmet classis version and menu trends in every restaurants.	4.35
c. San Jose offers friendly service personnel in its restaurants.	3.90
d. San Jose offers easy access to restaurants.	4.30
e. Offering Menus at affordable prices.	4.50
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.30</b>
<b>Promotion</b>	
a. The Tourism office foster projects for gastronomic excellence.	3.98
b. Restaurants are adding specials to menu.	3.20
c. San Jose uses technology to interpret and disseminate elements of the gastronomic culture.	3.00
d. San Jose is showcasing special food events like food expo, cooking competitions and gastronomic meetings.	4.25
e. Videos and platforms are a great way of presenting specialty dishes of San Jose.	2.75
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.44</b>
<b>Food Quality and Variety</b>	
a. San Jose offers a wide assortment of menus.	4.30
b. San Jose produces high-quality food and drinks with quality labels.	3.88
c. Menus featuring organic options and fresh produced.	4.72
d. Restaurant owners and menu planner consider the dietary restrictions of a customer.	4.10
e. Foods are prepared in consonance with food safety requirements and standards.	4.38
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.28</b>
<b>Culinary Style</b>	
a. San Jose offers sumptuous food associated with the province unique ingredients and food preparation traditions.	4.12
b. San Jose's cuisine expresses the intricate art of cooking suitable of all people.	3.72
c. San Jose has its own unique dishes that is traditionally serves in all restaurants.	4.38
d. Chefs whip up menu of diverse meals that showcase San Jose flavours.	4.27
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.30</b>
<b>GRAND MEAN</b>	<b>4.08</b>

Legend: 0.50-1.50=very low y;1.51-2.50= low ;2.51-3.50= neutral; 3.51-4.50=high; 4.51-5.50= very high

### 3.3. Difference between tourist and residents

Among the determinants of gastronomic identity, there is no significant difference between the perceptions of the residents and tourists in terms of geographic conditions (t-value = .153, p-value = .057) and culinary style (t-value = .127, p-value = .069). On the other hand, there is a significant difference between the perceptions of the local residents and tourists in terms of environmental factors (t-value = .294, p-value = .004), cultural elements (t-value = .038, p-value = .000), on-premise (t-value = .218, p-value = .000), promotion (t-value = .111, p-value = .016), and food quality (t-value = .055, p-value = .006) [Table 3].

Table 3. Difference between tourists and residents.

Gastronomic identity	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
Geographic condition	.167	.153	.057
Environmental factors	.433	.294	.004**
Cultural elements	.367	.038	.000**
On-premises	.300	.218	.000**
Promotion	.260	.111	.016*
Food quality	.260	.055	.006**
Culinary style	.208	.127	.069

\*\*p-value is significant at 1% level of significance

\*p-value is significant at 5% level of significance

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The study reveals strong agreement among respondents regarding the determinants of gastronomic identity in San Jose, Mindoro. Geographic conditions, environmental factors, cultural elements, and on-premise food establishments are perceived to have a significant influence, indicating high to very high levels of agreement. However, promotion efforts received a more neutral rating, suggesting a moderate level of influence. These findings emphasize the importance of geographic, cultural, and culinary elements in shaping the region's gastronomic identity.

The study delves into the determinants of gastronomic identity in San Jose, Mindoro, considering a range of influential factors. Environmental considerations, as highlighted by Harrington (2005), play a pivotal role in shaping gastronomic identity. Similarly, Nebioğlu (2017) emphasizes the significance of cultural factors in defining the unique characteristics of a destination's cuisine, contributing to its gastronomic identity. Okumus and Çetin (2018) further underscore the strategic importance of cuisine and culinary products as competitive advantages for a destination, reflecting its distinctive features. Oosterveer (2006), Smith and Xiao (2008) noted the close relationship between food preparation techniques and cultural traditions, emphasizing how these practices contribute to a region's identity.

Gastronomy, as noted by Beltrán et al. (2016), is intricately linked to a destination's culture, serving as a component of its regional heritage, and contributing to its cultural profile. This sentiment is echoed by Hernandez-Rojas and Huete Alcocer (2015), who emphasize gastronomy's role in shaping a destination's identity and reflecting its historical narrative, customs, and traditions. The importance of gastronomy in tourism destinations is further highlighted by UN World Tourism Organization (2017), with tourism accounting for a significant portion of revenue generated by gastronomy. Gastronomy is increasingly recognized as a fundamental aspect of a destination's image and brand, driving tourism development.

Moreover, the establishment of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) in 2004, incorporating gastronomy as part of its intangible heritage elements, underscores the cultural significance of culinary traditions in destination development (Xiaomin, 2017). This recognition highlights the importance of environmental and cultural factors in shaping a destination's gastronomic identity. Additionally, drawing upon concepts such as gastronomic identity, tourist behaviors, sense of place, and food image, the current study seeks to understand how tourists experience local gastronomy and perceive destinations through their culinary assets (Beltrán et al., 2020). By examining the connections between these concepts, the study aims to elucidate the role of gastronomy in shaping destination experiences.

The study reveals that among the determinants shaping gastronomic identity, there is a notable alignment between the perceptions of residents and tourists regarding geographic conditions and culinary style, with no significant differences observed. However, distinct perceptions emerge between the two groups in various other aspects. Notably, there are significant differences concerning environmental factors, cultural elements, on-premises experience, promotion strategies, and food quality. These findings suggest that while certain elements of gastronomic identity are shared between residents and tourists, divergent perspectives exist on factors related to the environment, culture, dining experience, promotion, and food quality, indicating the multifaceted nature of gastronomic perceptions within a given destination. This is supported by the study conducted by Suna et al. (2019) stating that perceptions of respondents may be due to the residents being more aware of the city's gastronomic activities and to the availability of several restaurants that cater mainly to the tourists, and which may not reflect well food quality. Further, Horng et al. (2012) imply that the perceptions of residents and tourists in gastronomic identity do not vary in terms of environmental factors, cultural elements, on-premises, promotion, and food quality. The gastronomy and unique food-related aspects of the place may become important resources that are used in the creation of a unique value proposition for the destination.

Undoubtedly, advertising is important for any business as it plays a key role in enticing tourists. Promotional campaign using technology is essential in order to promote cuisine of a particular destination, this trend is compounded using social media, since tourists share the pictures of the food they taste while on

vacation, influencing other individuals' destination choices (Mengjia et al., 2023). Therefore, people who visit without visiting the destination acquire knowledge in the media, and they learn the names of foods and drinks in the comments (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2019).

While the study provides valuable insights into the determinants of gastronomic identity in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, several limitations should be acknowledged. The research design, relying on a descriptive approach, may have restricted the depth of analysis, potentially overlooking causal relationships between variables. The sample composition, comprising mainly residents and domestic tourists, might not fully capture the diversity of perspectives within these groups, particularly excluding international tourists and long-term residents. Additionally, the questionnaire-based data collection method, while practical, may have constrained respondents' ability to express nuanced views, and technical difficulties encountered during data collection may have affected response quality. Finally, the reliance on statistical analyses to identify differences between groups may overlook shared perceptions and underlying similarities in gastronomic identity.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The highlighted the multifaceted nature of gastronomic identity in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, revealing the significant influence of geographic, environmental, cultural, and culinary factors. While both residents and tourists perceive geographic conditions and culinary style similarly, distinct differences emerge in their perceptions of environmental factors, cultural elements, on-premises experiences, promotion strategies, and food quality. These findings underscore the complexity of gastronomic perceptions within a destination and highlight the importance of considering diverse perspectives.

Through its positive result, this bears the natural potential to enrich the visitor experience, establishing a direct connection to the region, its people, culture, and heritage. It also emphasizes the cultural value and quality of local cuisine that enhances pride and appreciation for the gastronomic identity of San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, contributing to a positive and enduring perception.

According to results, the research provides the following recommendations such as to better promote the town's gastronomic identity, further research may investigate identifying gaps between the services and products provided both to the tourists and local people; there is a need to achieve a series of studies and researches that related to local food in general; culinary festivals and other activities can be planned by the local sectors to link regional gastronomy to innovative food products attract more tourists as a way to promote the gastronomic identity of the province.

The result can be a useful tool for gastronomy enthusiast and tourism sector of the province to create new local dishes or integrate the existing culinary heritage to food business and tourism to support the destination's gastronomy competitiveness.

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