

# Reimagining Calabanga: A Sense-Of-Place Based Approach to Destination Branding Directions

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## ABSTRACT

Tourism branding often emphasizes physical attractions while overlooking community identity embedded in a "Sense of Place" (SoP). This study examined Calabanga, Camarines Sur, focusing on community perceptions across natural, cultural, social, and economic dimensions, identifying tangible and intangible destination branding elements, assessing their relationship, and developing a promotional framework to strengthen the town's unique identity. Specifically, the study aimed to: (a) determine community perceptions of SoP attributes; (b) identify tangible and intangible branding elements; (c) assess the relationship between SoP and destination branding; and (d) develop a promotional framework reflecting Calabanga's sense-of-place identity. Using a Mixed-Methods Sequential Exploratory Design, qualitative data were gathered from 25 key informants, followed by a survey of 200 residents. Thematic analysis, correlation, and regression examined the links between SoP and branding elements. Findings show strong community attachment, with Cultural (3.65) and Social (3.62) attributes as primary identity drivers, while Economic (3.49) was least emphasized. Regression analysis revealed a weak positive relationship between SoP and destination branding ( $R = 0.236$ ;  $R^2 = 0.0558$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.0108$ ;  $F = 1.241$ ,  $p = 0.278$ ), indicating that a strong community identity does not automatically translate into effective branding. Tangible elements include Quipayo Church, coastal and maritime resources, and heritage landmarks, while intangible pillars encompass faith, festivals, and community participation, collectively forming Calabanga's "Heritage-Productive Landscape" identity. The Sustainable Agro-Maritime Resource and Old-heritage (SARO) Framework operationalizes these insights, recommending strategies to leverage cultural assets, enhance natural, social, and economic resources, and integrate local enterprises and community-based experiences. Coordinated planning, product development, and strategic promotion are essential to translate SoP into a cohesive, authentic, and marketable destination brand.

**Keywords:** sense of place, destination branding, cultural heritage, SARO framework, Calabanga, community-based tourism

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism has evolved into one of the fastest-growing economic sectors worldwide, compelling destinations to compete not only for visitors but also for investment and human capital. Traditionally, destination marketing was largely product-centric, focusing on visible and material assets such as beaches, mountains, infrastructure, and iconic landmarks. However, contemporary scholarship highlights a paradigmatic shift from emphasizing "what is there" to articulating the meanings, narratives, and emotional bonds associated with a place. A comprehensive systematic review of 553 peer-reviewed articles conducted by Hanna et al. (2021) identified seven dominant thematic clusters in destination branding research, including brand identity, image, politics, heritage, and communication. Notably, identity and image have become central in the discourse, underscoring the importance of stakeholder-driven and narrative-based branding for long-term competitiveness.

Within this evolving paradigm, the concept of sense of place (SoP) has emerged as a crucial analytical framework bridging tangible and intangible assets. Botha (2024) defines sense of place as the interrelationship between people and a place, encompassing meanings, beliefs, values, and emotional attachments. Botha distinguishes between place meanings—physical, symbolic, and cultural—and place attachments, which involve emotional bonds and social cohesion. Furthermore, Botha's (2024) operational toolkit demonstrates how community-

generated SoP themes can be translated into branding sub-brands that inform marketing communication and stewardship strategies. Complementing this perspective, Campelo (2023) emphasizes that effective destination branding must integrate community identity, heritage narratives, and lived experiences to create authentic brand positioning. Campelo argues that branding strategies grounded in local identity strengthen differentiation and long-term sustainability by aligning promotional messages with residents shared values.

In the Philippine setting, applied studies further support this perspective. Research by Loayon and Grefalde (2024) in Surigao del Sur found that sustainable and partnership-based branding strategies were strongly associated with positive brand outcomes and tourism development. These findings reinforce the argument that integrating sense of place, community collaboration, and authentic narratives into branding initiatives contributes to both cultural preservation and economic sustainability.

Despite these theoretical advances and empirical insights, rural and semi-urban municipalities in the Philippines often rely on generic and top-down promotional strategies that overlook local distinctiveness. While emerging destinations have begun integrating intangible cultural elements—such as festivals, oral traditions, and heritage narratives—with tangible resources like landscapes and infrastructure, systematic investigations into how local stakeholders perceive and operationalize these assets remain limited. This gap is particularly evident in the municipality of Calabanga. Located in Camarines Sur, Calabanga possesses abundant coastal fisheries, agricultural landscapes, historic religious structures, and vibrant community traditions, suggesting strong potential for a distinctive sense of place-based brand. However, no published study has comprehensively mapped residents' perceptions of natural, cultural, social, and economic attributes; differentiated tangible elements from intangible components; examined the statistical relationship between SoP dimensions and destination brand image; or formulated an evidence-based promotional framework grounded in these insights.

This study is significant in advancing both theory and practice in destination branding within the Philippine context. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of literature by empirically integrating sense of place dimensions with destination branding, thereby extending the SoP-branding nexus into a rural municipal setting. It provides a localized validation of existing frameworks by demonstrating how natural, cultural, social, and economic attributes shape both tangible and intangible branding elements.

Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for local government units (LGUs), tourism officers, and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Calabanga by providing an evidence-based foundation for crafting authentic and competitive branding strategies. The study also supports community empowerment by highlighting residents' perceptions and encouraging participatory branding approaches. Furthermore, it contributes to sustainable tourism development by promoting culturally grounded and identity-driven branding aligned with long-term economic growth and heritage preservation. Lastly, the study may serve as a replicable reference for other rural municipalities seeking to develop distinctive, community-centered destination brands.

## Research Objectives

This study examined the community's perception of Calabanga's sense-of-place—natural, cultural, social, and economic—identified its tangible and intangible destination branding elements, assessed their relationship, and developed a promotional framework that strengthened the town's unique identity.

To achieve this objective, the study sought to achieve the following specific objectives:

- a. To determine perception of the community on the sense-of-place attributes along with (a) natural, (b) cultural, (c) social and (d) economic.
- b. To identify the tangible and intangible elements of Calabanga's destination branding.
- c. To assess the relationship between sense-of-place attributes and the destination branding.
- d. To develop a promotional destination framework that best describes Calabanga's sense of place identity.

## Scope and Delimitation

This study adopted a sequential exploratory research design to examine the relationship between sense-of-place attributes and the destination branding of the municipality of Calabanga, Camarines Sur. The scope was defined by three distinct phases: qualitative discovery, quantitative validation, and the development of a promotional destination framework.

In the qualitative phase, the study was delimited to 25 key informants selected through purposive sampling. These participants represented diverse sectors, including MSME owners, youth leaders, tourism stakeholders, barangay officials, and cultural practitioners. The insights gathered from semi-structured interviews, along with an extensive review of related literature, served as the foundation for developing a contextually validated survey instrument. This instrument measured community perceptions across four sense-of-place dimensions: natural, cultural, social, and economic.

For the quantitative phase, the study focused on a sample of 200 respondents drawn from 12 representative barangays. These barangays were selected through cluster sampling to represent the four key geographic sectors of Calabanga: the Urban Core (Centro), the Coastal Sector (Fishing), the Upland Sector (Agricultural), and the Growth/Transition Sector (Residential expansion). This ensured that the diverse environmental and economic realities of the municipality were reflected in the data. The quantitative analysis was delimited to assessing the correlation and impact of sense-of-place attributes on both the tangible and intangible elements of Calabanga's destination brand.

While the study aimed for a holistic assessment, certain delimitations were established to maintain research feasibility. Although Calabanga comprises 48 barangays, the study focused only on 12 selected clusters. The sample size of 200 respondents provided sufficient statistical power for factor and path analysis according to established research standards (Comrey & Lee, 1992; Hair et al., 2021) but did not constitute a full census of the population. Furthermore, the study was focused on the formulation of a promotional destination framework based on empirical data; it did not include the actual implementation, budgetary monitoring, or long-term evaluation of the proposed branding strategy.

## Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The present study is anchored on three interrelated theoretical perspectives—Sense of Place Theory, Place Branding Theory, and Community-Based Tourism (CBT) Theory—which together provide a comprehensive foundation for examining Calabanga's sense-of-place attributes, destination branding elements, and the development of a promotional framework.

Sense of Place Theory emphasizes the emotional, cognitive, and functional bonds that individuals and communities develop with specific locations and the meanings they attach to those places. Early scholarship by Relph (1976), Tuan (1977), and Canter (1977) laid the groundwork for understanding how place identity, attachment, and dependence emerge through human experiences and environmental characteristics. In tourism research, sense of place has been recognized as a key foundation for destination branding because residents' meanings and connections to place influence how destination identity is constructed and experienced by both locals and visitors (Campelo et al., 2014). Studies in rural contexts have shown that cultural heritage and landscapes contribute significantly to sense of place, and these deeply held perceptions can affect how places are made meaningful and relevant for tourism development (Csurgó & Smith, 2022).

Place Branding Theory provides the conceptual framework for interpreting how sense-of-place attributes can be translated into destination branding. Where traditional destination marketing emphasizes image and promotion, place branding theory accounts for both tangible elements (e.g., physical landscapes, heritage sites) and intangible elements (e.g., culture, values, narratives) in shaping place meaning and competitive identity. Recent empirical research highlights that contemporary place branding extends beyond simple promotional messages to become a governance mechanism that supports rural development and involves diverse stakeholders in meaning-making processes (Tian & Speelman, 2025; systematic literature on rural place branding). Studies on branding co-creation further emphasize the role of internal stakeholders and local community members as

co-creators of brand identity, rather than passive audiences of externally designed branding efforts (Leal, Casais & Proença, 2022).

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) Theory underscores the importance of involving residents and community stakeholders in tourism planning and decision-making, with an eye toward sustainability, empowerment, and cultural preservation. CBT principles posit that active participation in the definition of place identity and tourism priorities leads to more socially grounded and locally meaningful destination initiatives. This aligns with broader discussions on participatory place branding, which emphasize that resident involvement not only enriches the authenticity of the brand but also strengthens community ownership and support (Rebelo, Mehmood & Marsden, 2019). Furthermore, recent literature in 2025 (MDPI) has bridged CBT with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1 and 8), framing community-led tourism as a formal mechanism for poverty reduction and "decent work." This evolution shifts the role of the resident from a passive "host" to a "brand custodian," where the community's collective agency serves as the primary safeguard against the commodification of local identity.

Together, these theories provide a strong foundation for this study. Sense of Place Theory explains why Calabanga's physical and socio-cultural characteristics are meaningful to residents; Place Branding Theory guides the identification of tangible and intangible branding elements and the formulation of a destination narrative; and CBT Theory ensures that the research process and subsequent framework are participatory and aligned with local perceptions and aspirations. By integrating these perspectives, the study anticipates that exploring how residents perceive sense-of-place attributes and identifying related branding elements supported the development of a promotional destination framework that is authentic, community-aligned, and grounded in both academic theory and practical stakeholder experience.

## METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the systematic procedures and methodological framework employed to investigate the relationship between Calabanga's sense-of-place attributes and its destination branding. Grounded in a Mixed-Methods Sequential Exploratory Design, the study progresses from an initial phase of qualitative discovery to a secondary phase of quantitative validation. This dual-layered approach ensures that the final Promotional Destination Framework: Sustainable Agro-Maritime Resource and Old-heritage (SARO) Framework is not only statistically significant but also culturally authentic—rooted in the lived experiences of the community.

### Research Design

This study utilized a Mixed-Methods Approach, specifically employing a Sequential Exploratory Strategy. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), the primary purpose of this design was to use quantitative data and results to assist in the interpretation of the initial qualitative findings. This approach was particularly advantageous as it allowed the researcher to first develop a contextual understanding of the locale before testing those findings on a broader scale.

As defined by the strategy, the research was characterized by an initial phase of qualitative data collection to explore the "lived experience" and unique identity of Calabanga. This aligned with the phenomenological perspective of Relph (1976), who argued that "Sense of Place" is a deep, multifaceted human experience that cannot be fully captured through pre-existing scales alone. This exploratory phase was followed by a quantitative phase designed to generalize these qualitative insights to a specific population of 200 stakeholders.

This design was justified because the variables of "Sense of Place" were not fully known in the local context of Calabanga; thus, they were first explored qualitatively before being refined into a testing instrument for the larger sample. As noted by Pike (2015) in his work on destination branding, successful brand identities must be "organically grown" from local perceptions to ensure authenticity. By following this sequential design, the researcher ensured that the final Sustainable Agro-Maritime Resource and Old-heritage (SARO) Framework was both statistically robust and culturally grounded.

## Respondents/Participants of the Study

This section defined the population under investigation and provided the demographic context of the sample, which was critical for assessing the generalizability of the results and ensuring the appropriateness of the sample size. In alignment with the study’s mixed-methods framework, a clear distinction was made between two groups of data providers: the “Participants,” who referred to the 25 Key Informants involved in the qualitative phase, and the “Respondents,” who referred to the 200 individuals who provided data through the quantitative survey instruments. The municipality of Calabanga, Camarines Sur, served as the primary Research Locale, chosen for its unique socio-economic features and cultural landmarks, such as the Bulungan tradition and the historical Quipayo Church, which functioned as the central "units of study" for exploring the Campelo et al. (2014) framework.

The study population was divided into the Target Population, encompassing all adult residents of Calabanga, and the Accessible Population, which consisted of residents within the 12 selected barangays where the researcher had practical access. Following the sampling principles established by Rahi (2017), a Multi-Stage Cluster Sampling method was employed for the quantitative phase to ensure a representative cross-section of the municipality. In the first stage, the town was clustered into its 48 barangays, from which 12 were selected to represent the distinct coastal, upland, and urban sectors. In the second stage, Stratified Random Sampling was applied within these clusters to ensure a proportionate representation of the community based on age and occupation. For the qualitative phase, Purposive Sampling was utilized to select 25 experts based on strict inclusion criteria, ensuring that those interviewed possessed at least 20 years of residency and specialized knowledge of the town's heritage or economy.

The determination of the sample size for this study was guided by the need for statistical power and thematic depth. For the quantitative portion, the sample of 200 respondents was justified by the requirements for Factor Analysis and Path Analysis, which are standard in destination branding research. According to Comrey and Lee (1992), a sample size of 200 is classified as "Reasonable" for identifying stable statistical clusters and ensuring the reliability of the findings. Furthermore, Hair et al. (2021) suggested that a minimum sample of 200 is necessary to achieve an acceptable "Model Fit," thereby ensuring that the resulting Sustainable Agro-Maritime Resource and Old-heritage (SARO) Framework is scientifically valid.

In the qualitative phase, the selection of 25 participants was supported by the principle of Data Saturation. Recent scholarship by Hennink and Kaiser (2022) indicated that in studies utilizing semi-structured interviews for thematic discovery, saturation—the point at which no new unique "statements of place" emerge—is typically reached between 16 and 24 interviews. By targeting 25 key informants, the researcher ensured a comprehensive discovery of the natural, cultural, social, and economic attributes of Calabanga. This sample size aligned with the guidelines for Ethnography and Grounded Theory, which recommend a range of 20 to 30 participants to achieve the depth required for identifying the "soul" of a destination’s brand (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The final unit of study was distributed across the four key sectors of the municipality, with the Urban Core providing 70 respondents, the Coastal and Upland sectors contributing 50 each, and the Growth/Transition sector providing 30, successfully reaching the target of 200 respondents (see table 1 for the distribution of the respondents in quantitative phase).

Table 1. Distribution of the Respondents (N=200)

Geographic Sector	Characteristics	Selected Barangay (Clusters)	Respondents
Centro (Urban Core)	Historical center, government, and commercial hub.	1. San Isidro,	18
		2. San Vicente,	18
		3. San Francisco,	17
		4. Intramuros	17

Coastal (Fishing)	Port activities and maritime heritage (Bulungan).	5. Sabang,	17
		6. Bonot-Santa Rosa, 7. Punta Tarawal	17
			16
Upland (Agri)	Isarog foothills and agricultural landscapes.	8. Binanuaanan Pequeno,	17
		9. Lugsad,	
		10. San Roque	16
			17
Growth/Transition	Residential expansion and emerging identity.	11. San Antonio,	15
		12. Manguiring	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4 Key Sectors</b>	<b>12 Representative Barangays</b>	<b>200</b>

The research was conducted in the municipality of Calabanga, a first-class municipality in the province of Camarines Sur, Philippines. Geographically, it was uniquely positioned between the rich fishing grounds of San Miguel Bay to the north and the productive agricultural slopes of Mt. Isarog to the south. This dual environmental characteristic made Calabanga a compelling locale for studying "Sense of Place," as it encompassed a diverse range of Natural, Economic, and social attributes as defined by the Campelo et al. (2014) framework.

The selection of Calabanga as the study setting was strategically justified by its "units of study"—the specific historical and cultural features that formed its local identity. The Urban Core, consisting of barangays such as Intramuros, San Francisco, San Isidro, and San Vicente, served as the historical heart of the town. This area contained significant Tangible branding elements, such as the municipal plaza and century-old structures, which reflected the town's colonial past and institutional strength. Beyond the urban center, the town's identity was defined by the Coastal Sector, particularly Sabang, which was known for its vibrant sardine industry and the unique Bulungan (whisper) auction tradition.

This tradition served as a primary Intangible branding element that distinguished Calabanga from other coastal towns in Bicol. Additionally, the Upland Sector, represented by barangays like San Roque and Binanuaanan Pequeno, provided an agricultural perspective that rounded out the town's profile.

By focusing on these 12 representative barangays, the study captured a holistic view of the municipality. This diverse setting ensured that the Sustainable Agro-Maritime Resource and Old-heritage (SARO) Framework was not merely focused on one aspect of the town, but instead integrated the maritime, agricultural, and historical identities of Calabanga into a unified brand. As noted by Pike (2015), the variety of these locales ensured the generalizability of the findings, providing a robust basis for the study's conclusions and ensuring the brand was representative of the entire community.

### Data Gathering Tools

The selection of appropriate data-gathering tools was essential to ensure the collection of accurate, reliable, and relevant data that directly addressed the research objectives. Within the context of a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, the instruments bridged the gap between initial qualitative discovery and subsequent quantitative validation. Therefore, the tools utilized in this study were specifically designed to capture the Sense of Place attributes and destination branding elements of Calabanga through a systematic and multi-phasic approach.

For the initial qualitative phase, the primary instrument was a semi-structured interview guide. This format was selected to provide a balance between topical focus and the flexibility needed to explore the lived experiences of the 25 key informants. The guide was developed following a comprehensive literature review, grounding the questions in the four pre-determined dimensions of the Sense-of-Place approach: Natural, Cultural, Social, and Economic attributes (Campelo et al., 2014). Similarly, the researcher utilized the semi-structured format to identify both tangible branding elements, such as physical landmarks and local infrastructure, and intangible elements, including communal rituals and historical narratives. The open-ended nature of the interview guide allowed for the emergence of "statements of place" that formed the linguistic and conceptual foundation for the subsequent quantitative phase.

Transitioning to the quantitative phase, the study utilized a researcher-developed survey questionnaire. This instrument was constructed by operationalizing the qualitative findings from Phase 1 into measurable survey items. The questionnaire was structured into distinct sections corresponding to the Sense-of-Place attributes of Campelo et al. (2014) and destination branding dimensions.

The instrument employed a 4-point Likert Scale (4-Strongly Agree, 3-Agree, 2-Disagree, and 1-Strongly Disagree). This specific scale was chosen based on the rationale provided by Rahi (2017), which posits that 4-point scale forces respondents to make a definitive choice by eliminating a neutral "middle-ground" option. This was particularly useful in destination branding research to avoid indecision and obtain clear evidence of community sentiment regarding the town's promotional identity.

To ensure the instrument's transparency, rigor, and reproducibility, a multi-step validation process was implemented:

**Content Validity.** The draft survey instrument was evaluated by a panel of three academic experts specializing in tourism, marketing, and social science research. Their assessment focused on the relevance, clarity, and alignment of each item with the constructs of sense of place and destination branding. Based on their evaluation, the instrument obtained an overall Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.91, indicating excellent content validity. Minor revisions were suggested, particularly in rewording ambiguous statements and improving the specificity of certain items to better capture the intended constructs. All recommended modifications were incorporated prior to pilot testing.

**Pilot Testing.** The revised instrument was pilot-tested among 30 respondents from a neighboring community who were not part of the actual study sample. The results indicated that the items were generally clear and understandable, with respondents completing the questionnaire within an average of 12–15 minutes. Feedback revealed minor issues related to wording and item redundancy, which were subsequently refined. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha demonstrated high internal consistency across the instrument, with values of  $\alpha = 0.88$  for Sense of Place (SoP),  $\alpha = 0.90$  for Destination Branding (DB), and an overall  $\alpha = 0.89$ . These results indicate that the instrument is reliable and suitable for the main data collection, confirming both the clarity and consistency of the survey items and their appropriateness for measuring the intended variables.

**Language and Translation.** Finally, recognizing that the primary languages of the target population in Calabanga are Bikol-Central and Filipino, the instrument was translated to ensure cultural and linguistic resonance. The researcher employed the back-translation method, where the English version was translated into the local dialects and then translated back into English by an independent linguist. This procedure ensured that the translated items remained equivalent to the original constructs, as recommended by Brislin (1970) for cross-cultural research.

This rigorous approach to instrumentation ensured that the findings were not only relevant to the local context but also met contemporary academic standards for measurement and psychometric properties.

To interpret the responses gathered from the 4-point Likert scale, the researcher utilized a specific scoring system. Following the recommendation of Rahi (2017), the scale was designed to force a definitive stance, and the resulting means were interpreted using the following range of values:

Table 2. Statistical Interpretation of Data

Scale	Mean Range	Verbal Interpretation	Description
4	3.26 – 4.00	Strongly Agree	The respondent identifies very strongly with the attribute/element.
3	2.51 – 3.25	Agree	The respondent identifies with the attribute/element.
2	1.76 – 2.50	Disagree	The respondent does not identify with the attribute/element.
1	1.00 – 1.75	Strongly Disagree	The respondent strongly rejects the attribute/element.

### Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering procedure served as the practical execution of the research design, providing a documented account of how the study transitioned from theoretical concepts to empirical data. This process was structured to ensure that the findings were both statistically valid and culturally grounded in the locale of Calabanga. By maintaining a rigorous protocol, the researcher ensured that the study satisfied the requirements for transparency and reproducibility, allowing future researchers to evaluate or replicate the methodology. To ensure the tools were aligned with the research objectives, the development of both the interview guide and the survey questionnaire was grounded in the Sense-of-Place approach by Campelo, Aitken, Thyne, and Gnoth (2014). This ensured that the data gathered would specifically address the natural, cultural, social, and economic attributes of the town.

Before fieldwork began, the instruments underwent a strict validation process starting with a formal request for institutional approval. Upon receiving the university's endorsement, the researcher initiated the formal authorization process by transmitting request letters to the Office of the Municipal Mayor and the Municipal Tourism Office of Calabanga. These letters detailed the study's intent to contribute to the town's promotional identity. Following the Mayor's approval, the researcher coordinated with the Barangay Chairpersons of the 12 selected clusters, presenting formal letters to request permission for localized data collection. This administrative layer was critical, as Rahi (2017) emphasizes that securing formal access to an accessible population is fundamental to reducing non-response bias and ensuring researcher safety in the field.

The administration of these tools followed a systematic, chronological plan. To ensure the instruments were academically sound, they were submitted to a panel of academic experts for content validation, followed by pilot testing with 30 individuals from a neighboring locale to refine the items for clarity. Recognizing the linguistic diversity of Calabanga, the researcher employed the back-translation method (English to Bikol-Central/Filipino and back to English), which, as noted by Brislin (1970), ensures that the translated items remain equivalent to the original constructs. For the qualitative phase, the researcher utilized purposive sampling to gather in-depth narratives from 25 key informants. For the quantitative phase, the validated surveys were administered to 200 respondents using a Multi-Stage Cluster Sampling method. The researcher personally facilitated the data collection in the 12 selected locations, ensuring that each participant was provided with a Letter of Informed Consent. This document briefed participants on the study's purpose, their right to withdraw, and the confidentiality of their responses.

Finally, the researcher implemented a secure system for managing and storing the collected data. This involved the systematic coding of interview transcripts and the organization of survey responses to facilitate accurate retrieval for the analysis phase. Adhering to the principles of data integrity, all physical and digital records were stored in a manner that protected participant anonymity. As argued by Creswell (2014), such a structured data-gathering procedure helps minimize potential biases and ensures that the findings are credible and trustworthy. By following this multi-stage protocol, the researcher successfully integrated the "narrative heart" of the initial

interviews with the "statistical evidence" required for the final development of the Sustainable Agro-Maritime Resource and Old-heritage (SARO) Framework.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

This section outlines the systematic treatment of data collected from the distinct instruments used in the study. Accurate and unbiased reporting of these analyses was fundamental to ensuring that the connection between Calabanga's Sense of Place and its Destination Branding was grounded in empirical evidence. The analysis followed a sequential explanatory logic, where the qualitative data provided the "descriptive soul" of the study and the quantitative results provided the "statistical evidence." To ensure the findings were scientifically sound, the researcher maintained a strict alignment between the analysis techniques and the validation protocols established during the data gathering procedures.

For the qualitative phase, the 25 semi-structured interviews were analyzed using Thematic Analysis. As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), the process began with the transcription of audio recordings and the systematic coding of data based on the pre-determined dimensions of the Campelo et al. (2014) framework. To ensure qualitative validity, the researcher utilized the thematic mapping process as a constant comparative tool, verifying that the identified "statements of place" accurately reflected the participants' lived experiences. This was further strengthened by the Expert Validation phase of the interview guide, which ensured that the questions were theoretically aligned with the constructs of natural, cultural, social, and economic attributes before the analysis began.

Transitioning to the quantitative phase, the data from the 200 respondents were encoded and processed using Excel and Jamovi Statistical tool. Before the formal analysis, the researcher verified the instrument's reliability by calculating Cronbach's Alpha. According to Hair et al. (2021), a coefficient of 0.70 or higher confirms that the survey items—which were refined during the Pilot Testing phase with 30 individuals—remained internally consistent. Descriptive Statistics, specifically the Average Weighted Mean, were computed for both survey instruments and interpreted using the 4-point Likert scale range. This determined which sense-of-place attributes and branding elements were most significant to the community. The accuracy of these means was protected by the Back-Translation method (Brislin, 1970) used during the procedures, which ensured that linguistic nuances in the Bikol-Central and Filipino versions did not distort the respondents' true sentiments.

To address the core research questions regarding the relationship between the variables, Inferential Statistics were employed. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) and regression analysis were used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between the Sense of Place attributes and the Destination Branding dimensions. The use of this test was justified by the normality of the data, which was ensured through the cleaning process and the Multi-Stage Cluster Sampling design that provided a representative sample of 200. By triangulating these statistical results with the thematic findings from the interviews, the researcher achieved Construct Validity, minimizing the limitations of a single-method approach. This integrated analysis provided a robust and credible basis for the final development of the Sustainable Agro-Maritime Resource and Old-heritage (SARO) Framework, ensuring that the proposed brand for Calabanga was both statistically significant and culturally authentic.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study was conducted with strict adherence to the fundamental principles of research ethics—Respect for Persons, Beneficence, and Justice—ensuring the protection of all individuals involved. To uphold the principle of Respect, the researcher acknowledged the autonomy of every participant and respondent, particularly community elders, by ensuring their self-determination was respected throughout the process. Beneficence and non-maleficence were observed by conducting a prior risk assessment to maximize the benefits of the promotional framework while minimizing potential social or psychological harm. Finally, the principle of Justice was maintained through a fair selection process across 12 barangays, ensuring that the study's benefits are distributed equitably across the municipality without exploitation.

Practical ethical applications were integrated into every stage of the data gathering. Informed Consent was obtained by providing participants and respondents with clear, thorough information regarding the study’s purpose and procedures in accessible language (Bikol-Central and Filipino). Consent was given voluntarily, and all subjects were informed of their absolute Right to Withdraw at any time without penalty. To ensure Confidentiality, the researcher anonymized all data using alphanumeric codes and reported findings only in aggregate forms. All research materials, including interview recordings and survey forms, are stored in a secure, encrypted system and locked cabinets, ensuring that sensitive information is used exclusively for the purposes explained to the participants.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and interprets the findings of the study on Calabanga’s Sense-of-Place (SoP) and its relationship to destination branding. Quantitative data from surveys and qualitative insights from key informants are analyzed to identify community perceptions across natural, cultural, social, and economic dimensions, examine the influence of these attributes on tangible and intangible branding elements, and highlight patterns that inform the development of the Sustainable Agro-Maritime Resource and Old-heritage (SARO) Framework. Findings are discussed in relation to existing literature and the town’s unique identity, providing a basis for practical recommendations to strengthen Calabanga’s destination brand.

### Determined The Perception of The Community on The Sense-Of-Place Attributes Along With (A) Natural, (B) Cultural, (C) Social, And (D) Economic

#### A. Natural Sense-of-Place

Table 3 presents the community’s perception of Calabanga’s natural sense-of-place, with a weighted mean of 3.545 (Strongly Agree). This indicates that residents strongly recognize natural landscapes—such as coastal shorelines, wetlands, and agricultural lands—as integral to the municipality’s identity.

Table 3. Perception Of the Community on The Sense-Of-Place Attributes in Terms of Natural Attributes

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Coastal shorelines influence how the local community interacts with the sea.	3.53	Strongly Agree	3
Fertile plains in various barangays influence how the local community interacts with the land.	3.395	Strongly Agree	6
The visual presence of fish racks in various barangays contributes to Calabanga’s identity as a production area.	3.515	Strongly Agree	5
Calabanga’s character is defined by the unique coexistence of its expansive agricultural heartland.	3.59	Strongly Agree	2
Calabanga’s coastal wetlands contribute to the town’s character.	3.52	Strongly Agree	4
Preserving mangroves, fishing grounds, and fertile farmlands is essential to maintaining Calabanga’s eco-tourism and food security identity.	3.725	Strongly Agree	1
<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.545</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	
Note: 3.26 – 4.00 (Strongly Agree); 2.51 – 3.25 (Agree); 1.76 – 2.50 (Disagree); 1.00 – 1.75 (Strongly Disagree)			

The highest-ranked indicator, preservation of mangroves, fishing grounds, and farmlands ( $M = 3.725$ ), highlights the community's strong awareness of environmental conservation as essential to sustaining both livelihood and eco-tourism. This suggests that natural resources are viewed not only as physical features but as economic and identity-forming assets. In contrast, the lowest-ranked indicator, fertile plains influencing interaction with land ( $M = 3.395$ ), though still rated "Strongly Agree," implies that agricultural landscapes are less central to identity compared to coastal and marine environments. These findings align with studies emphasizing that natural environments strengthen place attachment when linked to economic and cultural value (Garanti et al., 2024).

Overall, the findings confirm that Calabanga's natural environment plays a critical role in shaping place attachment. Consistent with recent studies, strong recognition of environmental value encourages sustainable practices and reinforces community identity. From a destination branding perspective, these results support positioning Calabanga around its eco-productive landscape, particularly its "working coastline" where human activity and natural resources intersect. To strengthen this dimension, it is recommended to enhance the visibility of agricultural landscapes through initiatives such as agri-tourism trails and farm-based experiences. Integrating these with coastal attractions can provide a more holistic representation of Calabanga's natural identity.

The highest-ranked indicator, local fiestas attracting visitors ( $M = 3.72$ ), highlights the central role of festivals as expressions of faith, tradition, and community life. This is followed by old churches contributing to cultural identity ( $M = 3.70$ ), emphasizing the importance of religious heritage. Other indicators, including local delicacies and fishing traditions, further reflect a culture that is actively lived and experienced.

## B. Cultural Sense-of-Place

Table 4 shows that Calabanga's cultural sense-of-place obtained a weighted mean of 3.65 (Strongly Agree), indicating strong recognition of cultural elements in shaping local identity.

Table 4. Perception Of the Community on The Sense-Of-Place Attributes in Terms of Cultural Attributes

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Fishing-related traditions help residents understand Calabanga's local heritage.	<b>3.64</b>	Strongly Agree	4
Bayanihan practices in farming communities reflect cooperation among residents.	<b>3.565</b>	Strongly Agree	6
Showcasing local delicacies strengthens the community's engagement in local culture.	<b>3.645</b>	Strongly Agree	3
Old churches contribute to the cultural identity of Calabanga as experienced by residents.	<b>3.7</b>	Strongly Agree	2
Local fiestas in various barangays attract visitors interested in local culture.	<b>3.72</b>	Strongly Agree	1
Festive municipal displays strengthen community pride in Calabanga.	<b>3.625</b>	Strongly Agree	5
Weighted Mean	<b>3.65</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	

Note: 3.26 – 4.00 (Strongly Agree); 2.51 – 3.25 (Agree); 1.76 – 2.50 (Disagree); 1.00 – 1.75 (Strongly Disagree)

The lowest-ranked indicator, bayanihan practices in farming communities ( $M = 3.565$ ), while still strongly agreed upon, suggests that traditional cooperation is less visible compared to festivals and heritage landmarks.

The result supports literature indicating that cultural traditions and heritage sites are key drivers of place identity and tourism appeal (Ramkissoon, 2023).

Overall, the findings suggest that Calabanga embodies a “living heritage” identity, where culture is expressed through both tangible and intangible practices. In line with recent studies, strong cultural attachment supports community participation and sustainable tourism. For destination branding, these results support positioning Calabanga as a faith- and festival-oriented destination. It is recommended to strengthen the visibility of bayanihan and agricultural traditions through heritage tours, cultural demonstrations, and storytelling activities to present a more comprehensive cultural identity.

### C. Social Sense-of-Place

Table 5 reveals a weighted mean of 3.62 (Strongly Agree), indicating that social relationships strongly shape Calabanga’s sense of place.

Table 5. Perception of the Community on the Sense-Of-Place Attributes in Terms of Social Attributes

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Social interactions in festive celebration in various barangays help residents feel deeply connected to their local community.	3.635	Strongly Agree	3
Community relationships built through cooperative in various barangays shape a strong local attachment to the town of Calabanga.	3.59	Strongly Agree	5
Strong social ties from neighbors helping each other during local harvests in various barangays influence how residents value their shared hometown environment.	3.52	Strongly Agree	6
Community cooperation in events like Holy Week preparations, coastal clean-ups, communal rice harvests, and festive lighting at the municipal office contributes to Calabanga’s positive image as a destination.	3.67	Strongly Agree	2
The way residents host guests during traditional fiestas influences their connection to Calabanga.	3.625	Strongly Agree	4
Residents’ friendly behavior strengthens the sense of community in Calabanga.	3.685	Strongly Agree	1
Weighted Mean	3.62	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	
Note: 3.26 – 4.00 (Strongly Agree); 2.51 – 3.25 (Agree); 1.76 – 2.50 (Disagree); 1.00 – 1.75 (Strongly Disagree)			

The highest-ranked indicator, residents’ friendly behavior (M = 3.685), underscores hospitality as the community’s most defining social trait. This is supported by high ratings for community cooperation in events (M = 3.67) and festive social interactions (M = 3.635), reflecting active civic engagement. The lowest-ranked indicator, neighborly cooperation during harvests (M = 3.52), though still strongly agreed upon, suggests that traditional cooperative practices are less prominent in everyday perception.

These results indicate that Calabanga has a relational identity, where social connections, hospitality, and collective activities define community life. This is consistent with findings that social interactions significantly

influence community attachment and cohesion (Kavaratzis et al., 2018). For destination branding, the social dimension can be positioned as the “human element” of the municipality. It is recommended to enhance visibility of cooperative traditions through community-based events, such as harvest festivals and participatory tourism activities, to strengthen both social cohesion and visitor experience.

#### D. Economic Sense-of-Place

Table 6 presents the community’s perception of Calabanga’s Economic Sense-of-Place attributes.

Table 6. Perception of the Community on the Sense-Of-Place Attributes in Terms of Economic Sense-Of-Place

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Dried Abo as a product strengthens connection to identity.	3.545	Strongly Agree	2
2. Weekly night market activities influence community engagement.	3.515	Strongly Agree	3
3. Small-scale enterprises affect attachment to the town.	3.47	Strongly Agree	4
4. Nighttime street food activities strengthen community sense.	3.44	Strongly Agree	5
5. Tourism accommodations influence connection to the town.	3.39	Strongly Agree	6
6. Integrated farms for agri-tourism shape economic life.	<b>3.60</b>	Strongly Agree	1
Weighted Mean	<b>3.49</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	
Note: 3.26 – 4.00 (Strongly Agree); 2.51 – 3.25 (Agree); 1.76 – 2.50 (Disagree); 1.00 – 1.75 (Strongly Disagree)			

The highest-ranked indicator, integrated farms shaping economic life (M = 3.60), highlights the importance of agri-tourism and the integration of livelihood and tourism. Dried Abo as a local product (M = 3.545) further reflects the role of local commodities in reinforcing identity. The lowest-ranked indicator, tourism accommodations influencing connection to the town (M = 3.39), suggests that formal infrastructure is less central compared to community-based economic activities such as markets and small enterprises.

Overall, the findings suggest that Calabanga exhibits a micro-entrepreneurial identity, where economic life is driven by local production and community-level trade. This aligns with studies highlighting the role of local economies and symbolic products in shaping regional identity (Hankinson, 2020). For destination branding, emphasis should be placed on agri-tourism and local products. It is recommended to strengthen accommodation offerings through homestays and farm stays, ensuring that tourism infrastructure aligns with the community’s grassroots economic character.

### Identified The Tangible and Intangible Elements of Calabanga’s Destination Branding

#### A. Tangible Destination Branding

Table 7 presents the community’s perception of Calabanga’s tangible destination branding, with a weighted mean of 3.52 (Strongly Agree), indicating high recognition of physical assets.

Table 7. Perception of the Community on the Tangible Elements of Destination Branding

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
The shallow coastal shelf of San Miguel Bay contributes to the town’s visual landscape.	3.375	Strongly Agree	11
Flat, fertile alluvial plains in various barangays shape residents’ perception of Calabanga’s terrain.	3.41	Strongly Agree	10
The dense green canopy of mangrove plantations in various barangays forms a natural boundary along the coastline.	3.49	Strongly Agree	9
The large-scale solar PV project in one of the barangays represents Calabanga’s transition toward a green energy identity.	3.31	Strongly Agree	12
Fish ports in various barangays are key visual indicators of the local economy.	3.535	Strongly Agree	6
Sun-dried abo (croaker) represents local flavors in various barangays.	3.525	Strongly Agree	7
Fresh daily catches in fish ports and central markets in various barangays create a high-energy visual identity for the town’s commercial core.	3.65	Strongly Agree	3
Tourism facilities in various barangays provide a staycation aesthetic with landscaped gardens, swimming pools, and event spaces.	3.505	Strongly Agree	8
Bridges in some barangays shape how residents experience transportation and connectivity in Calabanga.	3.565	Strongly Agree	5
Thick red brick and coral stone walls of the Quipayo Church represent Calabanga’s Spanish-colonial heritage.	3.66	Strongly Agree	2
The 16th-century Quipayo Church, featuring thick walls made of "ladrillo" (red bricks) and coral stone, stands as a tangible link to the town’s Spanish-colonial heritage.	3.675	Strongly Agree	1
Public Market facilities, including designated areas for seafood and agricultural products, visually represent Calabanga’s identity as an active trading town.	3.585	Strongly Agree	4
<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.52</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	
Note: 3.26 – 4.00 (Strongly Agree); 2.51 – 3.25 (Agree); 1.76 – 2.50 (Disagree); 1.00 – 1.75 (Strongly Disagree)			

The highest-ranked indicators are the 16th-century Quipayo Church (M = 3.675) and its red brick and coral stone structure (M = 3.66), highlighting its role as the primary historical landmark. This is followed by fresh daily catches in fish ports and markets (M = 3.65), reflecting the town’s vibrant commercial activity. In contrast, the solar PV project (M = 3.31) ranked lowest, suggesting that modern infrastructure holds less symbolic value in the community’s perception. Overall, the findings indicate that Calabanga’s tangible identity is shaped by a heritage-productive landscape, where historical landmarks and everyday economic spaces coexist. The Quipayo Church functions as a key brand anchor, while markets and fish ports represent a dynamic “visual landscape of trade.”

These findings indicate that Calabanga’s tangible brand reflects a “Heritage-Productive Landscape”, with historical architecture anchoring its identity and markets and ports showcasing economic vitality. This supports Vengesayi (2003) and Pike (2015) on the importance of heritage and physical evidence in branding. Branding

should prioritize heritage sites and commercial hubs while integrating modern developments, like renewable energy projects, to reflect the town’s evolving identity.

### B. Intangible Destination Branding

Table 8 shows that Calabanga’s intangible destination branding is strongly recognized, with all indicators interpreted as “Strongly Agree.”

Table 8. Perception of the Community on the Intangible Elements of Destination Branding

B. Intangible Destination Branding	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Sun-drying of specialty abo in various barangays reinforces Calabanga’s brand as a premier agri-fishery destination.	3.515	Strongly Agree	11
Residents’ adaptive capacity during seasonal typhoons highlights Calabanga’s brand as a resilient and resourceful community.	3.53	Strongly Agree	8
Religious devotion centered on the Hinulid and Our Lady of La Porteria strengthens Calabanga’s brand as a faith-centered destination.	3.705	Strongly Agree	2
Quipayo Church, one of the oldest brick churches in the region, reinforces Calabanga’s historical and heritage tourism brand.	3.76	Strongly Agree	1
Calabanga’s location as a gateway to San Miguel Bay reinforces its brand as a vital maritime hub in Camarines Sur.	3.5	Strongly Agree	12
Local dishes like Kinalas and traditional kakanin strengthen Calabanga’s culinary destination brand.	3.555	Strongly Agree	7
Mangrove conservation efforts showcase Calabanga as a community-driven eco-tourism site.	3.53	Strongly Agree	8
The Town Fiesta strengthens Calabanga’s brand as a culturally vibrant destination.	3.695	Strongly Agree	3
Community service during the Lenten season strengthens the town’s brand as generous and service-oriented.	3.595	Strongly Agree	5
The harmony between local farming and fishing industries tells the story of "Land and Sea" together to sustain the Bicolano people.	3.625	Strongly Agree	4
The presence of resorts in various barangays shapes residents’ perception of Calabanga as a wellness and relaxation destination.	3.53	Strongly Agree	8
The cooperative practices of Bulungan reinforce Calabanga’s brand as a socially cohesive and economically resourceful destination.	3.565	Strongly Agree	6
<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.59</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	
Note: 3.26 – 4.00 (Strongly Agree); 2.51 – 3.25 (Agree); 1.76 – 2.50 (Disagree); 1.00 – 1.75 (Strongly Disagree)			

The highest-ranked indicators are Quipayo Church as a heritage symbol ( $M = 3.76$ ) and religious devotion (Hinulid and Our Lady of La Porteria) ( $M = 3.705$ ), indicating that the town’s identity is primarily rooted in faith-based heritage. The town fiesta ( $M = 3.695$ ) and the “Land and Sea” narrative ( $M = 3.625$ ) further reflect a culture that blends tradition, livelihood, and community life. The lowest-ranked indicator, gateway location to San Miguel Bay ( $M = 3.50$ ), suggests that spatial or functional roles are less central to identity compared to cultural and religious meanings.

The results reveal a “Sacred-Secular Synergy”, where spiritual and cultural narratives blend with secular elements like local gastronomy and livelihood practices. This supports Ramkissoon (2023), who emphasized that public perceptions of traditions and events shape destination image, and Pike (2015), who highlighted historical authenticity as an intangible asset.

For destination branding, a heritage-first approach is recommended, positioning Calabanga as a faith and heritage destination. Strengthening secondary narratives—such as maritime identity and local industries—through storytelling and tourism experiences can create a more integrated and compelling brand.

### The Relationship Between Sense-Of-Place Attributes and The Destination Branding

The following results present the relationships between the community’s Sense-of-Place (SoP) dimensions—natural, cultural, social, and economic—and the various types of Destination Branding (DB), both tangible and intangible. Using Pearson’s correlation analysis, the study examines the strength, direction, and statistical significance of each SoP attribute in influencing different branding elements. These findings highlight which aspects of the community are most effectively represented in its overall destination brand and provide a basis for refining the conceptual framework for destination branding.

Table 9 presents the relationship between Calabanga’s Sense-of-Place (SoP) dimensions and the first six tangible and intangible destination branding indicators. The results show weak and statistically non-significant correlations across all dimensions ( $r$  ranging from  $-0.27$  to  $0.274$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ).

Table 9. Relationship Between SoP Dimensions and the First Six Tangible and Intangible Destination Branding Indicators

SoP Dimension	Tangible Destination Branding		Verbal Interpretation (SoP and Tangible)	Intangible Destination Branding		Verbal Interpretation (SoP and Intangible)
	r	p-value		r	p-value	
Natural	0.226	0.67	Weak positive correlation; not significant	0.172	0.74	Weak positive correlation; not significant
Cultural	0.039	0.94	Very weak positive correlation; not significant	0.274	0.60	Weak positive correlation; not significant
Social	-0.21	0.69	Weak negative correlation; not significant	-0.15	0.77	Very weak negative correlation; not significant
Economic	0.03	0.96	Very weak positive correlation; not significant	-0.27	0.60	Weak negative correlation; not significant

The Natural and Cultural dimensions exhibit weak positive relationships with both tangible and intangible branding, while Social and Economic dimensions show weak to very weak negative or negligible associations. These findings suggest that although residents strongly recognize natural, cultural, social, and economic attributes, these are not yet reflected in the initial branding elements.

Overall, the results indicate a disconnect between community perception and early brand representation, implying that foundational branding elements have not fully integrated the municipality’s core sense-of-place. This supports the argument of Zenker and Erfgen (2021) and Pike (2020) that place identity must be intentionally translated into branding strategies to become visible and meaningful. Strengthening the alignment between local identity and branding components is therefore necessary.

Table 9 shows the relationship between SoP dimensions and the last six tangible and intangible destination branding indicators. Unlike Table 10, the results reveal a very strong and statistically significant positive correlation between Cultural SoP and tangible branding ( $r = 0.894$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ).

Table 10. Relationship Between SoP Dimensions and the Last Six Tangible and Intangible Destination Branding Indicators

SoP Dimension	Tangible Destination Branding		Verbal Interpretation (SoP and Tangible)	Intangible Destination Branding		Verbal Interpretation (SoP and Intangible)
	r	p-value		r	p-value	
Natural	0.352	0.49	Weak positive correlation; not significant	-0.478	0.48	Moderate negative correlation; not significant
Cultural	0.894	0.02	Very strong positive; significant	-0.579	0.41	Moderate negative correlation; not significant
Social	0.478	0.34	Moderate positive correlation; not significant	-0.25	0.68	Weak negative correlation; not significant
Economic	-0.448	0.37	Moderate negative correlation; not significant	0.03	0.95	Very weak positive correlation; not significant

This finding highlights that cultural attachment—particularly heritage sites and festivals—strongly influences the municipality’s physical brand identity. In contrast, Natural, Social, and Economic dimensions exhibit weak to moderate but non-significant relationships with tangible branding. For intangible branding, all dimensions show weak to moderate and non-significant (mostly negative) correlations, indicating limited alignment with symbolic or experiential brand elements.

Table 11 shows the presents the results of the regression analysis conducted to examine the relationship between Sense-of-Place (SoP) attributes and Destination Branding (DB). It highlights the strength, significance, and predictive value of SoP in influencing the perception of the community’s destination branding.

Table 11. Regression Analysis Between Sense-of-Place and Destination Branding

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	p-value	Interpretation
SoP → DB	0.236	0.0558	0.0108	1.241	0.278	Not Significant

The regression analysis reveals a weak positive relationship between Sense-of-Place (SoP) and Destination Branding (DB) ( $R = 0.236$ ). The model explains only 5.58% of the variance in DB ( $R^2 = 0.0558$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.0108$ ), and the F-value (1.241,  $p = 0.278$ ) indicates the relationship is not statistically significant. This suggests that although respondents perceive both SoP and DB positively, a strong community identity does not automatically translate into an effective destination brand. The findings align with prior correlation results, showing mostly weak and non-significant associations, except for select cultural-tangible dimensions. This indicates that while certain cultural aspects are reflected in branding, natural, social, and economic dimensions remain underrepresented. These results imply that SoP serves as a foundational element for branding but requires strategic alignment to have a tangible impact. It is recommended that local government and stakeholders develop deliberate strategies to translate SoP into both tangible and intangible branding initiatives. Emphasis should be placed on leveraging cultural assets as primary branding drivers while enhancing the visibility of natural, social, and economic elements through targeted tourism programs, community-based experiences, and marketing campaigns. Strengthening external factors such as promotion, infrastructure, and institutional support is also critical to improve overall branding outcomes.

### The Promotional Destination Framework That Best Describes Calabanga’s Sense-of-Place Identity

The Sustainable Agro-Maritime Resource and Old-Heritage (SARO) Framework positions Calabanga as an active, strategically branded destination by aligning the community’s strongest Sense-of-Place (SoP) attributes with Destination Branding (DB) pillars. The framework addresses alignment gaps revealed in correlation analyses, ensuring high-impact attributes are prioritized while weaker connections are strengthened. The tagline “Calabanga: One Legacy, One Spirit” conveys the town’s heritage and communal identity. “One Legacy” highlights historical landmarks, faith-based traditions, and cultural practices, while “One Spirit” emphasizes warmth, hospitality, and cooperative values, portraying a socially engaging and visitor-friendly destination.

The Branding Bridge transforms SoP attributes into a cohesive, authentic destination brand. Cultural SoP drives tangible DB ( $r = 0.894$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ), confirming that heritage, festivals, and traditions are central to the brand. Natural and Social SoP show moderate correlations, while Economic SoP shows weak or negative correlations, indicating the need to integrate local products and agri-tourism into the brand. Together, the bridge ensures all four pillars operate harmoniously, translating community strengths into a marketable destination identity.

Figure 1. The Sustainable Agro-Maritime Resource and Old-heritage (SARO) Framework



## The Four Pillars of Identity

**Pillar 1: Natural (Eco-Maritime Bounty).** The Natural Pillar, or “Eco-Maritime Bounty,” underscores Calabanga’s coastal wetlands, mangroves, agricultural lands, and fish racks. The correlation analysis shows weak positive relationships with the last six Tangible DB indicators ( $r = 0.352$ ) and moderate negative relationships with the last six Intangible DB indicators ( $r = -0.478$ ), suggesting that while residents recognize and value natural features visually, these assets are not yet fully reflected in visitor experiences or intangible branding elements. To address this, the municipality’s initiatives should focus on promoting ecological stewardship alongside economic productivity. Programs such as mangrove conservation, agri-aqua tourism circuits, and sustainable farming demonstrations transform these natural resources into tangible, interactive experiences that reinforce environmental awareness among visitors. By embedding ecological assets into both the physical and experiential dimensions of tourism, Calabanga strengthens the visibility of its natural heritage while promoting sustainable practices, ensuring that its environmental identity becomes an integral component of the destination brand.

Table 12. Action Plan Summary for Natural Pillar

Activity	Objective	Target Beneficiaries	Timeline	Responsible Party
Mangrove Conservation Programs	Preserve coastal ecosystems and support biodiversity	Local communities, tourists	Year-round	LGU Environment Office, Barangay councils
Agri-Aqua Tourism Circuits	Demonstrate integration of farming/fishing with tourism	Tourists, local entrepreneurs	Quarterly	LGU Tourism Office, Farmers’ Associations
Sustainable Farming Demonstrations	Showcase eco-friendly agricultural practices	Students, farmers, visitors	Bi-annually	LGU Agriculture Office, NGO partners
Eco-Education Workshops	Raise awareness on environmental stewardship	Residents, schoolchildren	Monthly	Local schools, LGU Environment Office

Table 12 presents the action plan for the Natural Pillar, addresses the moderate correlations by transforming natural features into both observable and experiential tourism assets. Mangrove conservation and sustainable farming programs increase visitor engagement with Calabanga’s environmental resources, while the agri-aqua circuits make natural features accessible and educational. These activities aim to reinforce natural assets in the intangible branding domain, bridging the current gap between visual recognition and visitor experience.

**Pillar 2: Cultural (Living Faith & Festive Rituals).** Calabanga’s Cultural Pillar, characterized as “Living Faith & Festive Rituals,” demonstrates a very strong positive correlation with the last six Tangible DB indicators ( $r = 0.894$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ), confirming that residents’ attachment to cultural heritage strongly aligns with the town’s physical cultural assets. However, the moderate negative correlation with the last six Intangible DB indicators ( $r = -0.579$ ) suggests that cultural features are not yet fully translated into visitor experiences or symbolic narratives. To bridge this gap, the municipality has developed initiatives including heritage tours, festival-based experiences, and cultural storytelling programs. These activities provide structured engagement with local landmarks, historical sites, and communal traditions, enabling visitors to experience Calabanga’s heritage not only visually but emotionally and experientially. By translating cultural recognition into tangible and intangible experiences, these initiatives enhance the town’s marketable identity and ensure that its rich traditions and historical landmarks are communicated effectively to both residents and visitors.

Table 13. Action Plan Summary for Cultural Pillar

Activity	Objective	Description	Timeline	Responsible Party
Heritage Tours	Strengthen tangible brand recognition	Curated visits to Quipayo Church and other historical sites	Q2-Q4 2026	Tourism Office, Cultural Heritage Office
Festival-Based Experiences	Enhance cultural immersion	Interactive participation in local fiestas	Annually	LGU, Community Groups
Cultural Storytelling Programs	Translate heritage into experiential attractions	Workshops and performances highlighting traditions	Q3 2026 onwards	Schools, Local Storytellers

Table 13 shows the action plan summary for the cultural pillar that leverages the strong correlation of Cultural SoP with tangible DB indicators to enhance physical site engagement. Heritage tours and festival-based experiences provide structured ways for visitors to experience Calabanga’s culture, while storytelling programs translate heritage into memorable narratives. These initiatives are intended to strengthen intangible branding by making cultural assets not only seen but also felt and experienced by visitors.

**Pillar 3: Social (The Culture of Welcome).** The Social Pillar, or “Culture of Welcome,” reflects Calabanga’s human and relational dimension. Moderate positive correlations with tangible DB indicators ( $r = 0.478$ ) and weak negative correlations with intangible DB indicators ( $r = -0.25$ ) indicate that while social cohesion and community friendliness are recognized within the community, they are not yet fully leveraged as part of the visitor experience. To strengthen the translation of social capital into branding outcomes, the municipality implements community-led tourism training, Bayanihan hospitality initiatives, and a local ambassador program. These programs formalize community interactions into structured visitor experiences, ensuring that residents’ cooperative practices, friendliness, and hospitality are consistently visible and impactful. Through these initiatives, the social fabric of Calabanga becomes an experiential asset, reinforcing relational identity, fostering visitor engagement, and transforming community pride into a recognizable component of the destination brand.

Table 14. Action Plan Summary for Social I Pillar

Activity	Objective	Description	Timeline	Responsible Party
Community-Led Tourism Training	Enhance quality of visitor engagement	Workshops on visitor management and hospitality	Q2-Q3 2026	LGU, Local NGOs
Bayanihan Hospitality Initiatives	Embed social cohesion in branding	Promote cooperative events and volunteerism during festivals	Annually	Community Organizations
Local Ambassador Program	Strengthen relational identity	Train residents to guide visitors and share local narratives	Q3 2026 onwards	LGU, Tourism Office

The activities in table 14 aim to strengthen the intangible aspects of the Social Pillar by formalizing hospitality and cooperative community practices. By translating resident friendliness and communal participation into structured visitor experiences, Calabanga can convert social SoP into a visible and marketable brand asset that enhances relational and experiential identity for tourists.

**Pillar 4: Economic (Product-Led Tourism).** Economic activities, represented in the Product-Led Tourism Pillar, exhibit moderate negative to very weak correlations with Tangible and Intangible DB indicators ( $r = -$

0.448 to 0.03), indicating that local products, entrepreneurship, and livelihood-based attractions are not yet effectively integrated into the town’s branding. To enhance the visibility and experiential value of these economic assets, initiatives such as branded local markets, integrated farm and agri-tourism tours, and signature product branding have been implemented. These activities allow visitors to directly engage with local products, understand production processes, and participate in micro-entrepreneurship experiences, thereby embedding economic activity into both tangible and intangible aspects of the destination. This approach not only supports sustainable economic development for the community but also enriches the holistic visitor experience, ensuring that economic identity becomes an integral part of Calabanga’s SARO brand.

The action plan in table 15 addresses the weak correlations by directly integrating economic activities into both tangible and intangible branding. By creating visitor experiences around local products and micro-entrepreneurship, Calabanga can enhance recognition of its economic assets and convert them into experiential elements that contribute to the overall destination brand.

Table 15. Action Plan Summary for Social I Pillar

Activity	Objective	Description	Timeline	Responsible Party
Branded Local Markets	Increase economic visibility	Showcase Dried Abo, crafts, and agricultural products	Q3 2026 onwards	LGU, Farmers’ Associations
Integrated Farm & Agri-Tourism Tours	Connect economic activity to visitor experiences	Include farm visits and production demonstrations	Q3-Q4 2026	LGU, Local Entrepreneurs
Signature Product Branding	Enhance product-based destination identity	Standardize packaging and storytelling for local products	Q4 2026	LGU, Tourism Office

Overall, the SARO Framework operationalizes a multidimensional strategy that leverages the municipality’s natural, cultural, social, and economic assets to create a cohesive and marketable destination brand. The correlation analyses indicate a “branding gap,” where residents’ strong Sense-of-Place does not always translate into tangible or intangible branding elements. The implementation of targeted initiatives across all four pillars addresses this gap by converting visual and community recognition into visitor experiences, structured engagement, and marketable assets. This approach ensures that Calabanga’s destination identity is authentic, sustainable, and aligned with both community values and visitor expectations, promoting a holistic, culturally grounded, and environmentally responsible tourism model.

### Implementation Roadmap: The SARO Framework 3-Phase Strategy

The SARO Framework is implemented through a structured, three-phase roadmap designed to bridge the existing gap between residents’ Sense-of-Place and Calabanga’s destination brand, ensuring that community identity is effectively translated into tangible and intangible tourism assets.

The first phase, Institutional Alignment, establishes the foundation for the framework by integrating it into the Local Tourism Development Plan (LTDP). This involves formal recognition of the four SARO pillars—Natural, Cultural, Social, and Economic—as the town’s official branding anchors. Policy development during this stage ensures that municipal initiatives are aligned with community values. Concurrently, participatory workshops are conducted with residents and local stakeholders to translate the “Strongly Agree” sentiments identified in the study into a shared vision for the municipality’s destination identity. This phase prioritizes cohesion between local governance and community perspectives, creating the structural and organizational support necessary for sustainable branding initiatives.

The second phase, Product and Experience Development, focuses on activating the town's Sense-of-Place attributes into tangible and experiential tourism offerings. Key initiatives include the restoration and curated interpretation of heritage sites, such as the Quipayo Church, representing the Cultural Pillar, as well as the establishment of Agri-Aqua Circuits that integrate the Natural and Economic Pillars. In addition, community capacity-building programs, such as hospitality and "Bayanihan" training, formalize the Social Pillar by transforming Calabanga's communal spirit into consistent, high-quality visitor experiences. This phase operationalizes the SARO Framework by linking community identity with visible, marketable tourism products and experiences.

The final phase, Strategic Promotion and Scaling, aims to project Calabanga's unique identity to external markets. This phase emphasizes the promotion of local commodities, such as Dried Abo, as tourism "Brand Ambassadors" through standardized packaging, storytelling, and experiential marketing. Digital platforms and social media campaigns highlight the town's positioning as a "Working Landscape," effectively combining internal community pride with external market competitiveness. By integrating product promotion, cultural heritage, ecological experiences, and social engagement into a unified marketing strategy, this phase ensures that Calabanga's SARO brand reaches a broader audience while maintaining authenticity and sustainability.

Collectively, the three-phase roadmap operationalizes the SARO Framework, translating the municipality's natural, cultural, social, and economic assets into a cohesive, community-driven, and marketable destination identity. It provides a strategic pathway for Calabanga to strengthen its tourism brand while preserving local heritage, fostering community engagement, and promoting sustainable economic development.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the community of Calabanga's Sense-of-Place (SoP) across natural, cultural, social, and economic dimensions and their relationship to both tangible and intangible destination branding. Using surveys, weighted means, and correlation analysis, the research identified which SoP attributes are most recognized by residents and how these translate into the municipality's tourism identity. Findings reveal that cultural heritage and social cohesion are the strongest drivers of branding, while natural and economic elements offer additional support. The SARO Framework was applied to operationalize these insights, providing a structured approach to align community identity with tourism planning, product development, and promotional strategies.

1. The community of Calabanga strongly recognizes the importance of natural, cultural, social, and economic attributes in shaping their sense of place, with cultural and social dimensions being the most influential. Coastal and marine environments, heritage landmarks, festivals, and community participation were particularly valued, reflecting a well-defined local identity.
2. Calabanga's tangible and intangible destination branding is anchored in heritage landmarks, religious practices, festivals, and community activities, while natural landscapes and local economic products provide supporting elements. These branding elements collectively convey the town's historical, spiritual, and community-centered identity.
3. Cultural and social sense-of-place attributes have the strongest influence on both tangible and intangible destination branding, whereas natural and economic attributes show moderate to weak correlations. This indicates gaps in translating environmental and livelihood assets into the town's current tourism identity.
4. The SARO Framework effectively integrates natural, cultural, social, and economic pillars into a cohesive promotional destination model. Through institutional alignment, product and experience development, and strategic promotion, it provides a structured pathway to strengthen Calabanga's identity as an eco-maritime and heritage destination.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following practical recommendations are proposed to strengthen Calabanga's destination branding, promote sustainable tourism, and engage the community:

1. Enhance community perception of Sense-of-Place attributes by developing programs that highlight natural, cultural, social, and economic assets. This includes environmental conservation initiatives (mangrove planting, coastal clean-ups), heritage preservation, and participatory community events that reinforce local identity and pride.
2. Strengthen tangible and intangible destination branding by prioritizing heritage landmarks, festivals, religious practices, and community activities in tourism marketing and promotional campaigns. Incorporate educational tours, guided experiences, and storytelling initiatives to reinforce both physical and experiential brand elements.
3. Bridge gaps between Sense-of-Place and branding by translating natural and economic assets into visitor experiences. Develop Agri-Aqua circuits, farm and fishery tours, local product showcases, and eco-friendly infrastructure to integrate environmental and livelihood features into tourism offerings.
4. Operationalize the SARO Framework for sustainable tourism development through institutional alignment, product and experience development, and strategic promotion. Use coordinated planning, marketing, and community engagement to ensure all pillars—cultural, social, natural, and economic—are systematically represented, fostering an authentic, balanced, and marketable destination brand.

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