

Price Image of Siargao and Comparison of Perceptions between Tourists and Non-Visitors of Siargao, Philippines



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ABSTRACT: In tourism industry, price plays a significant role in identifying the value of a destination brand. This study seeks to compare the prices of amenities, food, other tourism services, etc. of Siargao to that of other destinations. Also, this study seeks to determine the differences in perceptions of tourists and non-visitors related to images associated with Siargao. Using the thematic analysis, the study shows that tourists consider Siargao as a middle-priced destination compared to other destinations in the country. Furthermore, the study finds that both tourists and non-visitors shared the same images associated with Siargao—specifically on tourist’s activities, beautiful sceneries, food, and relaxation. Finally, the images associated with Siargao are created mainly by the media organizations (e.g. social media, tv, etc.), as well as the word-of-mouth from their families and friends who have been to Siargao.

KEYWORDS: price image, destination branding, destination images, ecotourism, Siargao Island

INTRODUCTION

In the marketing mix, price is the only element that directly generates revenue (Eddin et al., 2013). It significantly influences purchasing decisions (Maderno and Nicolau, 2012). Goh and Han (2015) noted that higher price sensitivity among consumers leads to lower demand when prices rise. Each customer has a specific acceptable price range (Al-Mamun et al., 2014).

Price is crucial in the hospitality and tourism industries, directly impacting a company’s profitability (Moro et al., 2018; Danziger et al., 2006). Despite its importance, defining effective pricing strategies can be challenging (Hung et al., 2010). Overpricing may result in loss of market share, while underpricing can lead to revenue loss (Danziger et al., 2006). Companies can adopt various pricing approaches based on sales objectives and brand images (Rao & Kortono, 2009; Collins & Parsa, 2006). In tourism, developing ideal pricing strategies is particularly difficult due to service characteristics like perishability, intangibility, and fluctuating demand (Boz et al., 2017; Hung et al., 2010).

Aside from price comparison between Siargao and other tourism destinations, comparison of the perceptions of those who have been and those who have not been to Siargao plays a significant part in understanding the brand equity of Siargao. The study seeks to address the importance and opportunities of destination branding applied to ecotourism industry in Siargao, most specifically the price comparison of amenities and other tourism services of Siargao to other destinations in the country. Moreover, the study also seeks to determine the differences of perceptions of those who have been and those who have not been to Siargao vis-à-vis to the images associated with Siargao. Indeed, ecotourism destination branding has a significant part to play in promoting Siargao, not just as surfing capital of the Philippines and of Asia but also an ecotourism haven for adventurers, travelers and ecotourists.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main thrust of the study is to analyze the brand equity of Siargao Island as an ecotourism destination.

Specifically, the study aims:

1. To compare Siargao to other ecotourism destinations in terms of prices of amenities, food and other tourism services; and
2. To compare the perceptions on images associated with Siargao of those who have been and those who have not been to Siargao.

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RESEARCH DESIGN

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, employing personal and online in-depth interviews—common methods (Koh & Owen, 2000). The goal of qualitative research is to gain a deep understanding of specific occurrences within certain groups, rather than describing an entire population. McMillan and Schumacher (1993, in Abadiano, 2016) define it as an inductive process where data is organized into sets to identify patterns, showing that meaning emerges naturally from the context.

The qualitative research design uses thematic analysis to understand individuals' perceptions of a destination brand (Leedy, 1997, in Abadiano, 2016). Data was gathered through open-ended interview questions.

SAMPLING DESIGN

The research study focused on the alumni members of MSU-Commuters Hardcore, a semi-academic organization recognized by the Division of Student Affairs (DSA). The target population was Millennials, individuals born between 1980 and 2000. This generation, raised in a digital age, is known for being technology-savvy and for their acceptance of non-traditional family structures and values (Kaife et al., 2012; Andert, 2011).

In identifying the respondents of the study convenience sampling or availability sampling was employed. Convenience sampling, a type of non-probability sampling method, is very dependent upon the accessibility of the population sample who are available to participate in the study. This kind of method uses accessible primary data sources and not having any other data requirements.

THE RESPONDENTS

The respondents of the study are the alumni members (the young millennial professionals) of MSU-Commuters Hardcore, a semi-academic organization of the MSU-Main Campus, registered and recognized by the Division of Students Affairs (DSA) through the Association of Registered Campus Student Organizations (ARCSO). There are 323 members of MSU-Commuters Hardcore from 2000 to 2019. Approximately, 50% of the members are millennial professionals. Specifically, the research chooses only to examine 50 members who have been to Siargao and 10 members who have not been to Siargao, thus, a total of 60 respondents. Majority of the respondents are female (55%) and commonly are single (95%). Table 1 shows the demographic profiles of those who have been and those who have not been to Siargao.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Tourists and Non-visitors

Those who have been to Siargao			
Category	Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	25	50
	Female	25	50
Age	b/w 21 and 25 years old	30	60
	b/w 26 and 30 years old	20	40
Civil Status	Single	46	92
	Married	4	8
Those who have not been to Siargao			
Category	Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	2	20
	Female	8	80
Category	Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	b/w 21 and 25 years old	7	70
	b/w 26 and 30 years old	3	30
Civil Status	Single	10	100
	Married	-	-

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

A semi-structured interview guide was developed, pilot tested and adopted. In order to validate test responses, the interview guide was pilot tested to selected young millennial Marketing students of MSU-Main campus. The data from the pilot

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interview were not included in the analysis. An interview guide was used to collect, measure, and analyze data related to the study.

DATA COLLECTION

The study was conducted in October to December 2019. The researcher interviewed 60 respondents. The researcher experienced geographical challenges interviewing the participants of the study. In order to overcome such challenges the researcher employed personal interviews and in-depth online interviews to some respondents from distant places. The data collection was guided by the semi-structured interview guide to emphasize and encourage the participants to provide a narrative account of the visiting experiences of those who have been to Siargao as well as the non-visiting experiences of those who have not been to Siargao.

RESEARCH ETHICS

Prior to the conduct of the study a letter was sent to the current President of MSU-CHC asking permission to allow the researcher to use the alumni members as participants of the study and get their personal details. Prior to the conduct of the interview to the respondents, a letter was sent online (thru the social media platform, the messenger) to seek their permissions to be part of the research study. It was done due to availability and location considerations.

DATA ANALYSIS

To identify themes that address the study's objectives, thematic analysis was utilized. This method focuses on recognizing patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and is essential for various types of analysis. Additionally, it serves as a method rather than a complete methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). In this study, the researcher follows Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, which effectively outlines the necessary methods for thematic analysis. Thematic analysis identifies key themes in the data, including essential codes and patterns. These themes help address the study's objectives and provide insight into participants' perceptions. It goes beyond summarizing the data, focusing on interpretation and understanding of the gathered information.

The analysis in this study classifies themes at the semantic level of respondents' perception on ecotourism destination branding. The data used in this study is an extract from the 60 respondents, those who have been to Siargao and those who have not been to Siargao. The responses were then transcribed verbatim. Discussions focused on the brand equity of Siargao as perceived by tourists. A useful framework for conducting thematic analysis is the six-phase guide thematic analysis formulated by Braun and Clarke (2006):

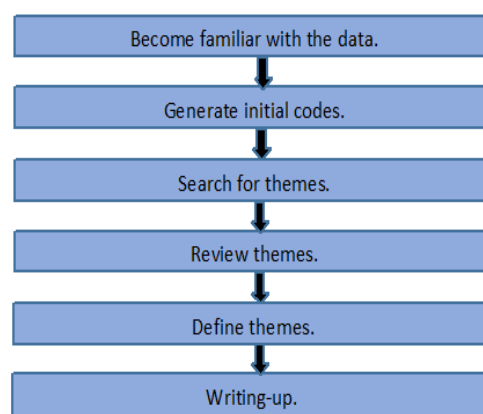


Figure 1. Six-Phase of Thematic Analysis

Source: Braun and Clarke (2006)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparison of Siargao to Other Ecotourism Destinations in Terms of Prices of Tourism Amenities and Services

Price is the amount of money charged for a product or service, but it also represents the total value consumers exchange for the benefits received (Armstrong & Kotler, 2003). Tourists incur costs for accommodation, tours, food, transportation, and souvenirs when visiting a destination. They often compare these expenses to those of other places they have been. As travelers become more experienced, they become more value-conscious, making it crucial to understand their travel behavior. To stay competitive, tourism operators should offer high-quality packages that are better than those of other ecotourism destinations,

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while ensuring the price is attractive and reasonable. Understanding how price influences tourist behavior is essential for creating effective tourism offerings.

Respondents provided varied answers when comparing Siargao to other ecotourism destinations in terms of tourism prices. A coding analysis identified several themes that highlight Siargao's pricing for amenities and services. These themes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Themes about Siargao as Ecotourism Destination in Terms of Prices of Tourism Amenities and Services

Themes	Supporting Codes
Low Price	Affordable, cheaper, just fine, not expensive
Middle Price	Middle-range, neither expensive nor cheap, not too expensive, not too cheap, not cheap but not too expensive, at the center
High Price	Expensive, costly

The analysis identified three price themes for comparing Siargao to other ecotourism destinations: low, middle, and high price. Respondents generally viewed Siargao as a mid-range priced ecotourism destination, as shown in Figure 2.

Low Price

Low price is a kind of pricing strategy to attract customers to buy or consume products and services. In ecotourism industry, price refers to the amount of money tourists pay to avail ecotourism packages and services. Some respondents considered Siargao as a low-priced ecotourism destination as this was indicated 8 times among the respondents (see Figure 2). However, this price-range is relative and it depends on the capability and willingness of tourists to spend for the ecotourism packages offered by tourism operators and providers. It can be noted that only few respondents viewed Siargao as a low-priced ecotourism destination brand.

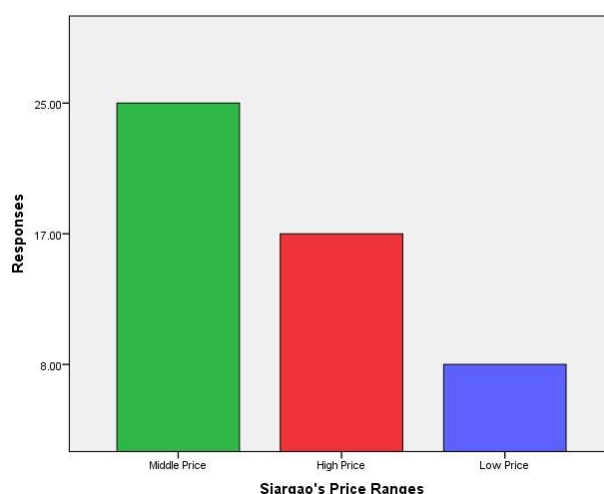


Figure 2. Tourists' Price Ranges toward Siargao

Middle Price

Most respondents regarded Siargao as a mid-range ecotourism destination, with 25 mentions (see Figure 2). This suggests that its products and services are priced between low and high compared to other destinations like Boracay and Palawan.

High Price

Siargao is viewed by some respondents as a high-priced ecotourism destination, with 17 mentions indicating its expensive products and services (see Figure 2). When costs are high, tourists often carefully consider their options. Thus, while some see Siargao as costly, there are numerous alternative ecotourism destinations available to travelers.

Accommodations

Siargao is an ecotourism destination offering a variety of accommodations. Budget travelers can find hostels starting at under \$10 per night, but prices vary based on location and preferences. Basic hostel beds range from \$10 to \$15, while basic

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private rooms cost between \$20 and \$40. Mid-range private rooms are generally priced from \$40 to \$100, and luxury resorts start at over \$100 (Jackson, 2019).

In Coron, Palawan, accommodations start at \$6 per night for transient rooms and hostels, with mid-range options priced between \$30 and \$70. Luxurious accommodations are limited, but notable options include Huma Island Resort, Sangat Island Dive Resort, Coron Soleil Garden Resort, and Two Seasons Coron Island Resort and Spa. Among these, Two Seasons is the only true 5-star resort and is comparable to those in El Nido. In contrast, hotels in El Nido tend to be more expensive, even for basic options. El Nido offers a variety of accommodations, including hostels, hotels, resorts, and luxurious private vacation homes, with prices ranging from \$15 to \$600 per night. It's an ideal destination for those looking to indulge, featuring more upscale options than Boracay. Some exclusive resorts in El Nido include Cauayan Island Resort, Matinloc Resort, and El Nido Resorts Miniloc, Pangulasian, and Lagen Islands (Gonzalez, 2018). In comparison, a double-occupancy room in Boracay costs between Php1,042 and Php2,083 (Bryan & Laurie, 2019).

Transportation

In Siargao, tourists can rent a moped or motorbike for \$7 to \$8 per day, plus gas. A budget of around \$10 is recommended for both rental and fuel. Tricycle rides within the town cost about \$1 to \$2 for 15 minutes (Jackson, 2019). In El Nido, local transportation averages Php 851 per person per day, with taxis being significantly more expensive than public transport. In Boracay, transportation costs average Php 1,257 (\$25) per person, per day (Bryan & Laurie, 2019). For Coron, shuttle or van fares from the airport are about \$3 per person, while tricycle rides in town are around \$0.20 (Lukaszewicz, 2020).

Food and Restaurants

In Siargao, tourists can expect to spend about \$5 on budget meals, \$10-\$15 for mid-range meals with drinks, and over \$20 for higher-end dining, with daily food costs possibly under \$15 (Jackson, 2019). In El Nido, average meal prices are around Php211 per person, while in Boracay, they are approximately Php258. Breakfast in Boracay is usually cheaper than lunch or dinner, and sit-down restaurant prices are higher than fast food (Bryan & Laurie, 2019). Coron offers meal prices ranging from \$3 to \$8, with pasta at \$5, grilled dishes at \$4, and fruit shakes between \$2 and \$2.40 (Lukaszewicz, 2020).

Tourist Attractions & Other Expenses

For Siargao's tourist attractions and other expenses, tourists can expect a budget of \$6 per hour for Surfboard rental, from \$15 to \$20 per person (including the lunch) for Island hopping tours, \$20 for internet data budget, from \$1 to \$2 per person for entrance to Magpupungko Rock Pools or Tayangan Cave, and from \$1 to \$2 for beers at a bar (Jackson, 2019).

In El Nido, entrance tickets and entertainment cost about Php 243, with tips around Php 35 and alcoholic drinks around Php 379 for a day. In Coron, group boat tours range from \$30 to \$36 per person. For private boats, prices start at \$54 for 2-4 people and go up to \$76 for 9-15 people (Lukaszewicz, 2020). In Boracay, entrance tickets and entertainment are around Php 694, while alcoholic drinks cost Php 727 per day (Bryan & Laurie, 2019). Boat trips last 2 hours and range from \$7.81 to \$14.65, with many companies offering snorkeling, fishing, and island-hopping excursions (Wade, 2019).

Traveling to Siargao typically requires a minimum budget of \$40 per day, depending on activities, accommodation, and food preferences. For El Nido, Palawan, the average budget is about \$35 per day. A week's stay in El Nido would cost approximately \$245 per person, totaling around \$490 for two people. For two weeks, this would be about \$980. Families of three or four can save more since children's tickets are cheaper and accommodation costs can be shared. Additionally, two travelers often have a lower daily budget than a single traveler over the same period. A one-week vacation to Boracay costs about \$347 for one person, while two people would spend around \$695. For a two-week trip for two, the cost is approximately \$1,389. Families of three or four can save money since children's tickets are cheaper and accommodations can be shared. Additionally, when visiting El Nido for a week, two travelers can often maintain a lower daily budget compared to one traveler (Wade, 2019). Indeed, Siargao's prices are a little bit cheaper compared to that of Boracay and Palawan.

Images Associated with Siargao: Tourists versus Non-visitors

The general characteristics of destination images that were assessed in some previous studies pointed out that destination images can also be applied to the destination images of non-visitors. For instance, Echter and Brent Ritchie (2003) suggested that destination image components can move from perceiving a destination's common feature to a destination's unique feature. Moreover, they suggested that tourist destinations have common features that can be compared to other tourist destinations, like the climate, accommodations, icons, or its special events and festivals.

Asking the question, "*What comes to mind when you hear about Siargao?*" gave light to the images the non-visitors have toward Siargao.

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Based on the coding analysis, the responses coming from those who have not been to Siargao produced several codes. After grouping the codes, the analysis produced themes (see Table 3 below) that are relevant to analyze the non-visitors' images associated with Siargao.

Table 3. Themes Generated from the Coding Process of Non-visitors' Images Associated with Siargao

Themes	Supporting Codes
Tourist's Activities	Surfing, Island hopping, swimming
Beautiful Sceneries	Beaches, Islands, sunset, big waves, nice view, sand
Food	Seafood
Relaxation	Unwind, fresh air, paradise

Non-visitors' Images Associated with Siargao

The analysis identified four key themes related to non-visitors' perceptions of Siargao: (1) tourist activities (e.g., surfing, island hopping), (2) beautiful scenery (e.g., beaches, sunsets), (3) food (e.g., seafood), and (4) relaxation (e.g., unwinding and fresh air).

Tourist's Activities

Tourist activities in Siargao are mainly associated with sea-related experiences such as surfing, swimming, and island hopping, particularly among non-visitors. These activities were mentioned frequently: surfing 8 times, island hopping 4 times, and swimming 2 times (see Figure 3). This indicates that these experiences define Siargao for those who haven't visited. Such activities are vital for generating interest among potential tourists, showcasing the unique offerings of the destination. Thus, engaging tourist activities are key elements of the tourism industry, especially in ecotourism.

Beautiful Sceneries

Siargao is known for its stunning natural scenery, including beaches, islands, sunsets, and breathtaking views. Non-visitors often associate the destination with these elements, mentioning them frequently (see Figure 3). Siargao was recognized as one of the world's 20 best holiday destinations in 2020 (Adel, 2019). It clearly offers a beautiful landscape and a safe haven for nature lovers.

Food

Food in Siargao is primarily linked to seafood, as highlighted in Figure 3 through non-visitors' responses. Altomonte (2020) notes that Siargao is not only a tourism hotspot but also features a vibrant food scene that emphasizes local dishes and a culture of sharing. Thus, food significantly shapes the image of Siargao for those who haven't yet visited.

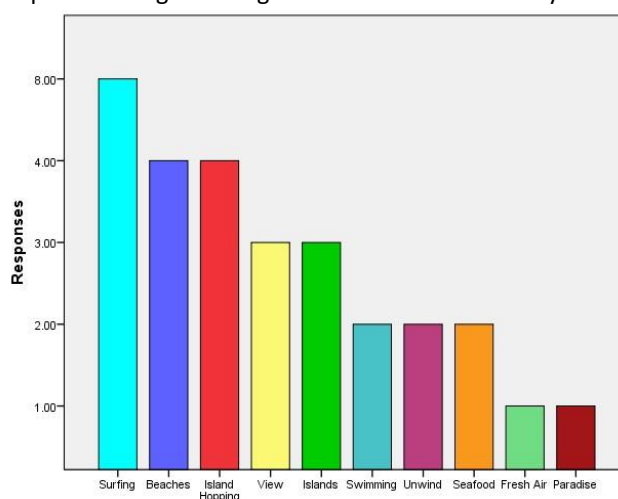


Figure 3. Non-visitors' Images Associated with Siargao

Relaxation

Relaxation in Siargao is associated with things related to experiences with nature like unwinding, getting fresh air and the paradise-experience. This image associated with Siargao among the non-visitors implies that relaxation is one of the things that non-visitors consider when it comes to Siargao as ecotourism destination. Relaxation as a theme in images associated with Siargao

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connotes that Siargao, as an ecotourism destination, has a tranquil environment that makes a person calm and relax. Relaxation is considered as image associated with Siargao among the non-visitors.

Comparative Images Associated with Siargao

Non-visitors' perceptions of Siargao remain vivid and often resemble those of actual visitors. These perceptions are mainly shaped by media representations, like social media and television, as well as recommendations from friends and family who have been there (see Figure 6). Both visitors and non-visitors to Siargao share similar perceptions of the island. They associate it mainly with tourist activities like surfing, island hopping, and swimming, as well as its beautiful scenery, including beaches, sunsets, and big waves. Common themes also include delicious seafood and a sense of relaxation, evoking feelings of unwinding in a paradise-like setting. Both visitors and non-visitors share similar images of Siargao. To attract non-visitors, local governments and tourism operators should create appealing tourism packages. Table 4 summarizes the images associated with Siargao from both groups.

Table 4. Summary of Tourists and Non-visitors Comparative Images Associated with Siargao

	Those who have been to Siargao	Those who have not been to Siargao
Codes	Islets Waves Islands Surfing Joy-ride Seafood Beaches Coconuts Swimming Unwinding Islander life Island hopping	Sand View Relax Sunset Islands Surfing Unwind Beaches Seafood Paradise Fresh air Big waves Swimming Island hopping Surfing
Themes	Food Relaxation Tourist's Activities Beautiful Sceneries	Food Relaxation Tourist's Activities Beautiful Sceneries

Non-visitors' Reasons for Not Visiting Siargao

When people think about traveling, they often consider the benefits and challenges associated with visiting a specific tourist destination. While many individuals dream of exploring ideal spots, there are important realities that potential tourists should keep in mind when visiting an ecotourism destination.

When non-visitors were asked, "Why did you not go to Siargao?", several common responses emerged. A coding analysis of their replies revealed various reasons for not visiting Siargao. After categorizing these responses, the analysis identified several themes (see Table 5) that help explain the non-visitors' reasons for their choice.

Table 5. Themes Generated from the Coding Process of Non-visitors' Reasons for Not Visiting Siargao

Themes	Supporting Codes
Financial Aspect	No budget, no money, poor, no resources
Time Conflict	Busy, no time, travel preparation, no travel companion, hard to invite companions
Distance	Travel time, too far, takes time

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Based on the analysis, the codes produced three themes for the non-visitors' reasons for not visiting Siargao. These themes are: (1) financial aspect (e.g. no budget, no money, poor, no resources), (2) time conflict (e.g. busy, no time, travel preparation) and (3) the distance (e.g. travel time, too far, takes time).

Financial Aspect

Planning for a vacation is exciting and fun. However, it needs financial consideration. Some are fortunate enough to have an extra budget for visiting places and destinations. But for others the plan will just be a drawing without a color. The main reason why non-visitors did not go to Siargao because of financial difficulties as it appeared 9 times (see Figure 4). Planning a travel entails a significant financial consideration to budget the available resources the tourist has. Indeed, financial capability is a major influencer in the decision making process of setting a travel goal to certain ecotourism destination like Siargao.

Time Conflict

Time conflict is also one of the reasons why non-visitors did not go to Siargao. Moreover, Non-visitor shared that aside from money related concern, the travel preparation is also a sort of burden. Time conflict really affects the decision of non-visitors for not visiting Siargao as this was indicated 4 times as shown in Figure 4. Thus, availability of time is one of the things to be considered in planning a travel especially the needed preparations before the travelling period.

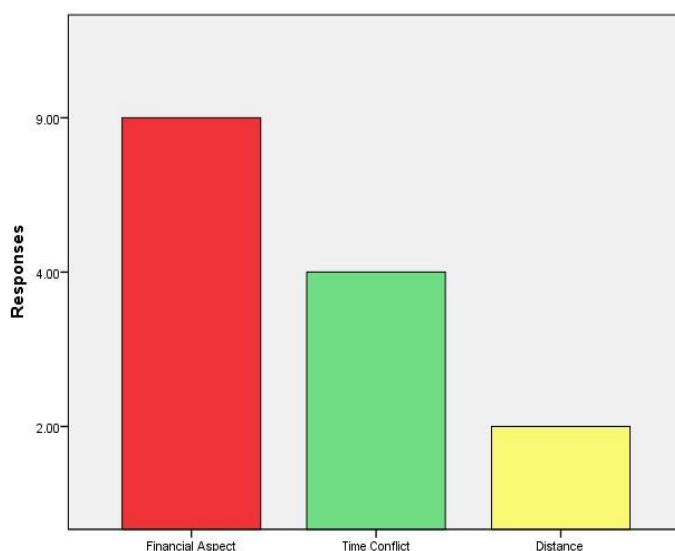


Figure 4. Non-visitors' Reasons for Not Visiting Siargao

Distance

Based on the non-visitors' responses, distance is also considered a reason for not visiting Siargao as it appeared 2 times as shown in Figure 4. Non-visitors consider the distance of the destination from their current locations as a reason for not being able to visit Siargao. Hence, distance is also an influential factor to consider when planning a vacation goal especially to distant places.

Preferred Ecotourism Activities: Tourists versus Non-visitors

Ecotourism preferences vary among tourists, including those who have never visited Siargao. When asked about activities they'd like to try in Siargao, non-visitors provided diverse responses. Coding analysis of these answers revealed key themes that highlight their ecotourism interests (see Table 6 below).

Table 6. Themes Generated from the Coding Process of Non-visitors' Preferred Ecotourism Activities

Themes	Supporting Codes
Water Activities	Surfing, Island hopping, swimming, snorkeling, diving
Land Activities	Caving, joy-ride, playing with sand

Non-visitors' Preferred Ecotourism Activities

Based on the analysis, the codes produced two themes for the non-visitors' ecotourism activities preferences in Siargao. These themes are: (1) water activities (e.g. surfing, Island hopping, swimming, snorkeling, and diving), (2) land activities (e.g. caving, joy-ride and playing with sand).

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Water Activities

Water activities in Siargao include surfing, island hopping, swimming, snorkeling, and diving. According to feedback from non-visitors, surfing is the most popular choice, mentioned 10 times (see Figure 5). Island hopping is also favored, with 6 mentions, followed by swimming (3 mentions) and snorkeling and diving (1 mention each). These activities are key considerations for potential visitors to Siargao.

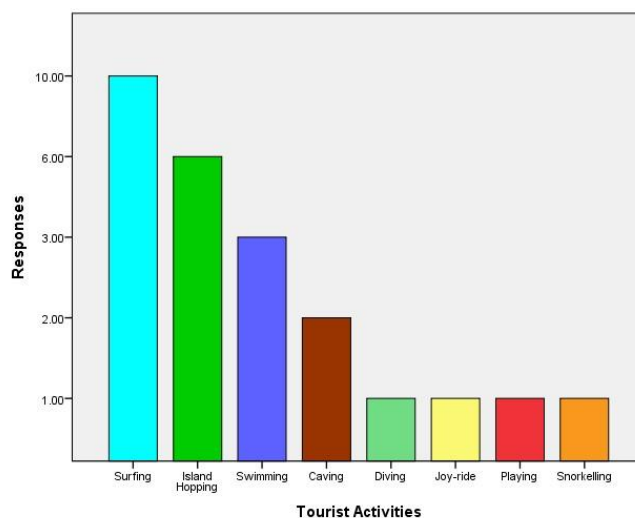


Figure 5. Non-visitors' Preferred Ecotourism Activities

Land Activities

Land activities in Siargao for non-visitors are associated with activities related to adventure like caving, playing and joy-ride escapade. Land activities specifically the joy-ride and caving adventure are also part of the non-visitors' preferences as these were indicated 1 time and 2 times, respectively, among the non-visiting respondents (see Figure 5). Clearly, Siargao has a lot of tourist spots and activities to deal with. Hence, Siargao as an ecotourism destination has a lot to offer more than what it is known for as the 'Surfing Capital of the Philippines'.

Comparative Ecotourism Activities Preferences

Non-visitors preferred surfing activities if given the chance to be in Siargao. This preference is quite different from those who have been to Siargao, who preferred island hopping and swimming more than surfing.

Non-visitors would like to try water activities - specifically the surfing-experience. However, those who have been to Siargao preferred water activities other than surfing. Despite of the variances in tourists' and non-visitors' preferences, there are still similarities with regard to ecotourism activities like both of the respondents prefer island hopping, swimming and visiting other tourist attractions in the island. Table 7 presents the summary of the tourists and non-visitors' ecotourism activities preferences in Siargao.

Table 7. Summary of Tourists and Non-visitors' Preferred Ecotourism Activities

	Those who have been to Siargao	Those who have not been to Siargao
Codes	Caving Surfing Joy-ride Swimming Island hopping	Caving Surfing Diving Playing Joy-ride Swimming Snorkelling Island hopping
Themes	Water Activities Land Activities	Water Activities Land Activities

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Comparison of Sources of Images Associated with Siargao: Tourists versus Non-visitors

The credibility of image sources related to Siargao is essential for understanding its brand. Brand images reflect how respondents perceive the destination based on their awareness of it, derived from various sources (Cherifi et al., 2014). Notably, both non-visitors and tourists share similar image sources, including social media, media platforms (like TV and movies), and word-of-mouth from friends and family (see Figure 6).

When asked, "*Where did you hear about Siargao?*", we recorded responses from non-visitors. Coding analysis revealed various sources of information, which led to the development of themes (see Table 8) for understanding their perceptions of images associated with Siargao.

Table 8. Themes Generated from the Coding Process of Non-visitors' Sources of Images Associated with Siargao

Themes	Supporting Codes
Media Organizations	Social Media , TV/Movie, Vlog
Word-of-Mouth	Friends

Non-visitors' Sources of Images Associated with Siargao

Based on the analysis, the codes produced two themes for the sources of images associated with Siargao among the non-visiting respondents. These themes are: (1) media organizations (e.g. TV/Movie, Social Media and Vlog) and (2) word-of-mouth (e.g. friends).

Media Organizations

According to O'Guinn et al. (2012), media organizations are crucial for connecting companies with target audiences by delivering advertising exposure. These include traditional media like television and radio, as well as interactive media such as social media and vlogs. For Siargao's brand awareness, social media is the main source for those who haven't visited, mentioned seven times by respondents. Other sources like TV and movies were cited three and two times, respectively. Thus, media organizations play a vital role in promoting Siargao as an ecotourism destination.

Siargao has become a well-recognized ecotourism destination, largely due to social media and its feature in the 2017 Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF) film "Siargao," directed by Paul Soriano (Escobar, 2017). The movie resonates with millennials through its focus on surfing and the performances of leads Erich Gonzales and Jericho Rosales. At the MMFF Gabi ng Parangal in December 2017, "Siargao" won several awards, including Best Picture and Best Director. It effectively showcased the island's attractions, local culture, and stunning scenery. This promotion significantly improved Siargao's brand image among potential visitors.

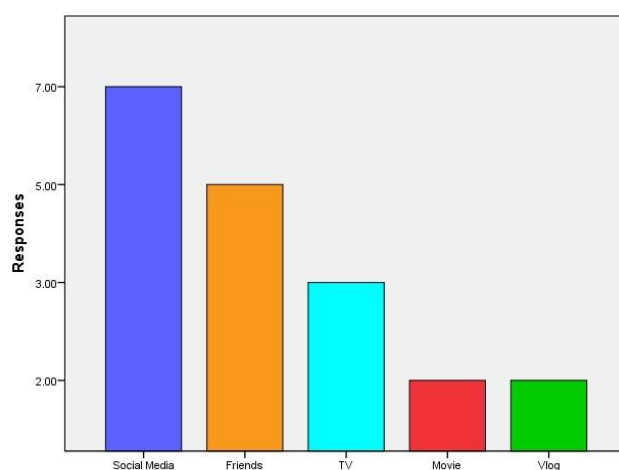


Figure 6. Non-visitors' Sources of Images Associated with Siargao

Word-of-Mouth

Word-of-mouth is associated with activity related to personal communication between the non-visitors and their friends. Aside from the media organizations, word-of-mouth specifically from friends are also considered to be the source of brand images as it appeared 5 times among the non-visitors (see Figure 6). People who have been to any destination have the tendency to share their experiences to their friends and families, especially if they are satisfied with the ecotourism package in a specific destination. Hence, word-of-mouth plays a vital role in spreading good news about the destination, however, it could also be a source of negative information regarding a destination.

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Sources of Images Associated with Siargao: Tourists versus Non-visitors

Sources of images associated with Siargao varied between visitors and non-visitors. Both groups primarily relied on media organizations, such as social media, television, and movies. Additionally, word-of-mouth from family and friends was significant for both. Notably, social media was the most mentioned source for images of Siargao. Table 9 summarizes these findings.

Table 9. Summary of Tourists and Non-visitors' Sources of Images Associated with Siargao

	Those who have been to Siargao	Those who have not been to Siargao
Codes	TV Movie Family Mother Friends Print Ads Social media Printed magazines	TV Vlog Movie Friend Social media
Themes	Media Organizations Word-of-Mouth	Media Organizations Word-of-Mouth

Technological advancements in media greatly enhance the brand exposure of destinations. Peer-to-peer recommendations and word-of-mouth are powerful marketing tools, as people tend to trust their peers more. This influence grows when advocates, known as media influencers, have established credibility in their field (Hill, 2016). Word-of-mouth happens naturally when people are satisfied with a product or service and want to share their positive experiences about a destination.

CONCLUSION

To stay competitive, tourism operators should offer high-quality packages that are attractively priced. Siargao is typically seen as a mid-priced ecotourism destination, appealing to tourists with products and services that are neither too cheap nor too expensive. However, perceptions vary: some tourists find it affordable, while others consider it costly. This disparity may influence their decision to revisit Siargao, especially since tourists have many alternative ecotourism options.

Siargao is a top destination for surfing in the country, attracting both tourists and those yet to visit. This reputation is shaped by social media and recommendations from friends and family. However, financial constraints are the main reason non-visitors haven't traveled there. Additionally, time availability and distance are key factors in planning a trip. Ultimately, financial capability significantly influences the decision to visit ecotourism spots like Siargao. Tourists and non-visitors have different preferences for ecotourism activities. Non-visitors favor surfing, while tourists prefer island hopping and swimming, highlighting their enthusiasm for surfing. Siargao, known for its natural beauty, is a popular destination on many tourists' bucket lists. Both groups primarily gather their images of Siargao from media and word-of-mouth, with social media being the most influential source.

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