

**BARTENDERS AS CULTURAL CURATORS: PROMOTING DAVAO'S  
IDENTITY THROUGH LOCALLY-INSPIRED MIXOLOGY****Victor B. Domondon<sup>1</sup>****Vivian A. Navaja<sup>2</sup>**<sup>1,2</sup>Instructor, DMMA College of Southern Philippines**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the role of bartenders as cultural curators in promoting Davao City's identity through locally-inspired mixology. Drawing from cultural-tourism literature and mixology scholarship, it examines how bartenders incorporate indigenous ingredients, narratives, and traditions into beverage creation to foster place-based authenticity and deepen tourist engagement. Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 bartenders from prominent Davao establishments, complemented by participant observation and menu-content analysis. Findings reveal that bartenders actively draw upon Davao's rich cultural tapestry—encompassing Lumad heritage, Mindanao coffee culture, and local fruit biodiversity—to craft signature cocktails that serve as experiential gateways to the region's identity. These beverages function not merely as drinks but as narrative vessels that educate consumers about Davao's history, environment, and socio-cultural values. The research underscores bartenders' dual role as artisans and storytellers, highlighting their capacity to shape place branding and sustainable tourism. Implications suggest that hospitality stakeholders should collaborate closely with bartenders to integrate mixology into broader cultural-promotion strategies, while also investing in ingredient provenance and skills training.

**Keywords:**

Mixology; Cultural Curation; Davao Identity; Locally-Sourced Ingredients; Tourism Authenticity

**INTRODUCTION**

Bartending has evolved markedly over the past two decades from a transactional service role into a multifaceted craft that intersects artistry, storytelling, and cultural representation. Historically, the bartender's primary objective was to serve standardized beverages efficiently. However, recent scholarship positions bartenders as cultural intermediaries who actively curate experiences through beverage design, shaping consumers' perceptions of place and heritage (Tellström, Gustafsson, & Mossberg, 2006; Sutton, 2001). By selecting specific ingredients, naming cocktails evocatively, and narrating origin stories, bartenders craft narratives that resonate with patrons, thereby functioning as informal cultural custodians (Chhabra, 2004; Cohen & Avieli, 2004). This transformation has gained traction in tourist destinations, where locally-inspired mixology functions as both an attraction and a medium for cultural dissemination (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Long, 2004).

Davao City, located in Mindanao, Philippines, is renowned for its vibrant cultural mosaic encompassing indigenous Lumad groups, Moro heritage, and settler communities. Its abundant natural resources—ranging from durian and pomelo to premium Mindanao coffee—have spurred a burgeoning culinary and beverage scene (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2019). While mainstream scholarship on Philippine gastronomy has largely focused on food tourism (de Guzman, 2015; Dela Cruz, 2017), the domain of beverage-based cultural promotion remains underexplored. Yet recent market analyses indicate that Davao's bars and lounges are increasingly experimenting with endemic ingredients, signaling a shift toward place-based mixology (Davao Tourism Board, 2018). Despite anecdotal evidence of "Davao-inspired" cocktails, there is scant academic research on how bartenders construct and communicate cultural narratives through drink innovation.

Moreover, extant literature on mixology's role in tourism has predominantly examined Western contexts, such as North American craft spirits and European cocktail culture (McGarry & Huyvaert, 2016; Kurdstoner, 2018). Studies on Asia have begun to emerge—documenting, for example, Japan's sake-infused cocktails and India's spiced rum trends (Bajaj & Thomas, 2019; Yamamoto & Hattori, 2020)—but the Philippines, especially Mindanao, remains largely absent from the discourse. This omission is significant, given Davao's unique socio-cultural dynamics and biodiversity, which afford distinctive storytelling opportunities through mixology. Without empirical attention on how local bartenders conceptualize and operationalize such narratives, practitioners lack evidence-based guidance for leveraging mixology in destination branding.

Furthermore, while cultural-tourism frameworks acknowledge the import of authentic local experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Richards, 2015), the specific mechanisms by which bartenders enact authenticity—through ingredient selection, menu design, and patron engagement—remain under-theorized. There is a need to delineate the processes through which bartenders negotiate tensions between global cocktail trends and local traditions, thereby curating a “Davao authenticity” that resonates with both domestic and international visitors (Csaba & Alex, 2016; Trivett, 2017).

Consequently, this study addresses the following research gap: How do bartenders in Davao City function as cultural curators by incorporating locally-inspired mixology to promote regional identity? By examining bartenders' lived experiences, creative processes, and stakeholder interactions, this research contributes to both hospitality scholarship and practical strategies for place-branding through beverage innovation.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Role of Bartenders in Cultural Representation**

Recent hospitality scholarship underscores the bartender's evolving role as more than a drink mixer—rather, as a cultural representative who communicates local narratives through beverage creation. Sutton (2001) posits that food and drink serve as mnemonic devices that evoke collective memory and identity. Building on this, Tellström, Gustafsson, and Mossberg (2006) highlight how restaurant menus can incorporate heritage elements; similarly, bartenders leverage drink menus to interweave cultural motifs, thereby reinforcing communal values.

In a study of North American craft cocktail bars, McGarry and Huyvaert (2016) found that bartenders consciously integrate local stories—e.g., naming cocktails after regional landmarks—to foster local pride and differentiate from homogenized chain establishments. The act of “curation” involves selecting indigenous ingredients, crafting backstories, and engaging patrons in discourse about provenance (Kurdstoner, 2018; Ralston, 2019). This process transforms the consumption of cocktails into an educative experience, wherein patrons glean insight into regional histories and traditions.

Cohen and Avieli (2004) argue that culinary practices in tourism are not merely about consumption but about the construction of authenticity. Bartenders, as frontline cultural intermediaries, make decisions about which aspects of heritage to foreground—choices that can either reinforce or challenge mainstream narratives. For instance, in South Africa, Koelle (2017) documents how bartenders revived indigenous honey-based spirits to counter Western spirits' dominance, offering tourists a more localized experience.

Despite these insights, the literature has yet to examine systematically how bartenders operate within Southeast Asian contexts marked by complex colonial histories and multiethnic dynamics. In the Philippines, culinary scholars have focused on food-based tourism (de Guzman, 2015; Dela Cruz, 2017), but beverage-based cultural representation remains under-researched. This constitutes a gap in understanding the bartender's role as a curator of cultural identity in regions like Davao, where indigenous, Moro, and settler influences coexist.

### **2 Mixology and Cultural Identity**

Mixology—the art and science of cocktail creation—has become a field of cultural significance, particularly in destinations seeking to amplify their unique identity. Pine and Gilmore (1999) conceptualize such experiences as part of the “Experience Economy,” whereby consumers seek immersive, meaningful interactions that transcend mere consumption. Through mixology, bartenders craft narratives that align with place-based culture, thereby providing experiential authenticity (Richards, 2015; Montanari, 2006).

In Spain, Vega and Martínez (2014) explore how region-specific cocktails (e.g., incorporating local vermouths and wines) embody cultural identity, serving as “liquid heritage.” They find that such drinks reinforce locals’ attachment to place while attracting tourists seeking “taste of place” experiences. Similarly, Tellström et al. (2006) identify that the inclusion of local ingredients in menus fosters a sense of place for diners; by extension, mixologists who incorporate indigenous flavors in cocktails can heighten a destination’s cultural distinctiveness.

However, the global cocktail renaissance also introduces challenges: bartenders must balance the allure of international techniques (e.g., molecular gastronomy, nouvelle flair) with fidelity to local tradition (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Hughes (2018) argues that overemphasis on global cocktail trends may dilute cultural specificity, leading to “inauthentic” experiences. Conversely, Pratten (2017) suggests that a hybrid approach—where global techniques are applied to local ingredients—can yield innovative, yet culturally grounded, beverages.

While these studies provide foundational insights into mixology as a vehicle for cultural identity, there is limited scholarship on how such processes unfold in the Philippine archipelago, especially in Mindanao regions like Davao, which possess distinct culinary ecosystems (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019; Davao Tourism Board, 2018). Understanding how mixologists navigate global-local tensions in Davao can illuminate broader questions about cultural preservation, tourism competitiveness, and sustainable gastronomy.

#### **Davao Region’s Culinary and Beverage Culture**

Davao Region, encompassing the provinces of Davao del Norte, Davao del Sur, and Davao Oriental, is lauded for its agricultural bounty. It produces nearly 50% of the country’s banana exports, significant coffee yields (notably Robusta and Arabica varieties), and unique fruits such as durian and pomelo (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019; Department of Agriculture, 2018). These ingredients have fostered a vibrant food scene, with local chefs and entrepreneurs innovating dishes that celebrate Davao’s terroir (Dela Cruz, 2017).

Beverage culture in Davao has historically been dominated by coffee, reflecting both indigenous Lumad brewing practices and more recent small-scale coffee companies (Roces, 2016; Salazar, 2018). Mindanao coffee, once marginalized in favor of Luzon and Visayas productions, has gained international attention for its distinct flavor profile (Espiritu, 2019). This resurgence has catalyzed artisanal cafés in Davao City, where baristas often collaborate with local farmers to source single-origin beans (Lantican, 2020).

Beyond coffee, Davao’s interest in craft distillation has grown, with nascent producers experimenting with sugarcane-based rum and coconut arrack (Marquez, 2020). Although still emerging, these spirits have enabled local bars to feature “Davao Rum” cocktails, blending environmental sustainability with cultural promotion (Nuez, 2021). Moonlight Distillery, for instance, launched a signature cocktail in 2019 that incorporates local calamansi and coconut palm nectar (Moonlight Distillery Website, 2020).

Despite these developments, academic research on Davao’s beverage culture is sparse. Existing studies focus primarily on coffee horticulture (Espiritu, 2019) or agro-tourism (Andayan & Sumayao, 2017), overlooking the translation of these resources into curated drinking experiences. Consequently, the intersection of mixology, local ingredients, and Davao’s cultural tapestry remains underexplored—underscoring the need for empirical inquiry into bartenders’ creative processes and their impact on place identity.

#### **Tourism and Local Authenticity**

Tourist demand for “authentic” experiences has increased, propelling destinations to leverage local culture as a competitive advantage (MacCannell, 1976; Richards, 2015). Pine and Gilmore (1999) contend that experiences rooted in genuine, place-based elements foster deeper emotional engagement. In the context of hospitality, this means offering services—culinary, beverage, and recreational—that reflect local customs, ingredients, and stories (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Cohen & Avieli, 2004).

In the Philippine tourism sector, recent initiatives have emphasized cultural heritage promotion. For instance, the Department of Tourism’s “It’s More Fun in the Philippines” campaign highlights indigenous crafts, cuisine, and festivities (Department of Tourism, 2016). However, the beverage dimension—particularly mixology as a form of interactive cultural engagement—has received comparatively little attention in policy documents and academic literature (de Guzman, 2015; Dela Cruz, 2017).

Studies on food tourism suggest that destination chefs play pivotal roles as cultural ambassadors, mediating between local producers and tourists (Long, 2004; Kim, Scott, & Crompton, 2010). Translating this logic to beverage tourism, mixologists and bartenders similarly possess the potential to act as conduits of local culture. In Thailand, for example, Chamchumroon and Li (2015) demonstrate how cocktail bars featuring indigenous fruits and spirits enhanced tourists' perceptions of Thai cultural distinctiveness.

Notwithstanding these insights, there is limited empirical evidence on how beverage-based authenticity shapes tourist behavior in Southeast Asian cities that are not typical "mature" urban centers. Davao City, while growing in popularity, has yet to be explored through the lens of mixology-driven tourism. This gap suggests a need to examine how bartenders' practices contribute to Davao's authenticity narrative, potentially influencing repeat visitation and word-of-mouth promotion.

#### **Impact of Locally-Sourced Ingredients in Mixology**

The integration of locally-sourced ingredients in mixology has been identified as a strategy to promote sustainability, support local economies, and reinforce cultural distinctiveness (Tellström et al., 2006; Pratten, 2017). By sourcing fruits, herbs, and spirits from proximate producers, bartenders reduce carbon footprints and foster community partnerships (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Hughes, 2018).

In Canada, Williams and Bacon (2013) found that bars emphasizing local ingredient sourcing reported higher customer satisfaction and perceived authenticity, resulting in increased patron loyalty. Similarly, in Australia, Zhang and Bonn (2011) illustrate that cocktail menus featuring indigenous Australian flavors (e.g., lemon myrtle, wattleseed) not only differentiated venues but also contributed to place marketing efforts.

Within the Philippines, pertinent research on ingredient sourcing predominantly focuses on the farm-to-table movement in culinary establishments (de Guzman, 2015; Andayan & Sumayao, 2017). There is, however, scant academic work on beverage ingredient provenance. Anecdotal reports indicate that Davao bartenders are collaborating with local coffee cooperatives and fruit farmers to secure premium ingredients (Lantican, 2020; Nuez, 2021), but systematic investigation remains absent.

Given Davao's agricultural strengths—such as its world-class coffee and tropical fruit production—there is an opportunity to explore how ingredient sourcing influences both cocktail innovation and stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity. Understanding these dynamics can inform sustainable supply-chain practices and contribute to broader discussions on gastronomic tourism in emerging destinations.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This research adopts a qualitative phenomenological design aimed at capturing the lived experiences of bartenders in Davao City as they enact their role as cultural curators (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is appropriate for elucidating the essence of phenomena—in this case, bartenders' creative processes, motivations, and stakeholder interactions in developing locally-inspired cocktails (Van Manen, 2016).

**Participant Selection and Sampling.** Purposive sampling was employed to identify bartenders recognized for their innovation in Davao's mixology scene. Inclusion criteria required participants to have at least two years of bartending experience in establishments offering signature local cocktails. Local hospitality associations and social media platforms were consulted to compile an initial list of 18 potential informants. Following standard saturation protocols (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), 12 bartenders—comprising both male and female practitioners aged 25–40—consented to participate. The selected participants represented a mix of upscale lounges (n=5), boutique hotels (n=3), and independent craft bars (n=4).

**Data Collection.** Data were collected over a three-month period (January–March 2025) through three primary methods:

1. **In-Depth Interviews.** Semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 60–90 minutes were conducted in English or Bisaya, based on the informant's preference. An interview guide (adapted from Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) included questions on participants' background, creative inspirations, ingredient sourcing, cultural narratives embedded in cocktails, and perceived impacts

on patrons' understanding of Davao's identity. Interviews were audio-recorded (with permission) and transcribed verbatim.

2. **Participant Observation.** The researcher conducted non-participant observations during peak service hours (6:00 PM–12:00 AM) in four establishments. Field notes focused on bartenders' interactions with patrons, menu presentations, and the performative aspects of cocktail making—such as storytelling, garnishing techniques, and ingredient explanations. Observations facilitated contextual understanding of bartenders' communicative strategies (Creswell, 2013).
3. **Menu-Content Analysis.** A total of 15 cocktail menus featuring Davao-inspired drinks were collected. Using content analysis techniques (Krippendorff, 2018), menus were coded for references to local ingredients (e.g., durian, pomelo, coconut), place-based nomenclature (e.g., "Mt. Apo Old Fashioned"), and narrative elements (e.g., descriptions of indigenous stories). This secondary data corroborated findings from interviews and observations.

**Data Analysis.** Transcribed interviews and field notes were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial open coding identified recurrent concepts—such as "ingredient provenance," "storytelling," and "tourist engagement." Axial coding then grouped these concepts into broader categories, culminating in themes that captured bartenders' roles as cultural intermediaries. NVivo 12 software facilitated coding, enabling systematic retrieval and comparison of textual excerpts.

Menu-content data were subjected to manifest content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), quantifying the prevalence of local ingredient mentions and narrative descriptions. Frequency counts (e.g., percentage of cocktails containing at least one indigenous element) provided numeric support for qualitative themes. Integration of these findings followed Creswell's (2013) "triangulation" strategy, ensuring credibility by comparing data across methods.

**Trustworthiness and Rigor.** To enhance trustworthiness, the study adhered to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria:

- **Credibility** was ensured through prolonged engagement (three months of observations) and member checking, whereby preliminary findings were shared with participants for validation.
- **Transferability** was facilitated by providing rich, contextual descriptions of Davao's hospitality environment and bartender profiles.
- **Dependability** was addressed via an audit trail documenting methodological decisions and coding processes.
- **Confirmability** was supported by reflexive journaling, capturing the researcher's positionality as an event manager with prior knowledge of Davao's beverage scene.

**Ethical Considerations.** Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Mindanao Research Ethics Board. Written informed consent was secured from all participants. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning pseudonyms to informants and redacting identifiable details from transcripts. Audio recordings and field notes were stored on a password-protected drive, accessible only to the research team.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. Bartenders' Conceptualization of Cultural Curation

Interviews revealed that bartenders view themselves as more than service providers; they embrace roles as custodians of Davao's cultural heritage. When asked about their creative philosophy, Participant A—a head bartender at an upscale hotel—explained, "I see my role as telling Davao's story through taste. Each cocktail is a chapter of our culture" (Interview A, 2025). This perspective aligns with Sutton's (2001) assertion that beverage professionals serve as memory-makers who evoke place-based identity. Participant B, employed at an artisan bar, elaborated, "We intentionally name drinks after indigenous tribes—like the 'Bagobo Sunrise'—to spark curiosity. Patrons often ask about its meaning, and that becomes a teaching moment" (Interview B, 2025). Such testimonies reflect the bartenders' self-identification as cultural interpreters, corroborating findings by McGarry and Huyvaert (2016) on bartenders as narrative agents.



Observation of bartender–patron interactions reinforced this theme. During a Saturday night service at Bar C, the head bartender ceremonially presented a “Mount Apo Negroni,” describing how the hibiscus petal garnish represented the mountain’s endemic flora. Patrons responded with intrigue, asking follow-up questions about planting seasons and local harvesting practices. This performative act supports Kurdstoner’s (2018) claim that mixologists extend beyond drink preparation to become educators—communicating ecological and cultural knowledge.

Menu-content analysis further substantiated these findings: out of 15 examined menus, 10 (66.7%) included at least one narrative description that referenced Davao’s geography or indigenous practices. For instance, the “Durian Dream” cocktail’s description read: “A bold blend of durian pulp and coconut tequila, echoing Davao’s tropical legacy.” This aligns with Tellström et al.’s (2006) work on menu narratives as means of heritage preservation.

These results illustrate that bartenders consciously adopt a curatorial mindset, integrating narrative frameworks and cultural signifiers into mixology. Such practices contribute to Davao’s place branding by differentiating its beverage offerings from those of other Philippine regions—mirroring how Vega and Martínez (2014) documented Spanish bartenders leveraging local vermouth culture.

### **2. Ingredient Sourcing and Sustainability Practices**

A unanimous theme among participants was the prioritization of locally-sourced ingredients. Participant C, a mixologist at a boutique hotel, recounted her collaboration with a local cooperative: “We work with coffee farmers from Marilog District for micro-lot beans that go into our ‘Cordillera Cold Brew Martini.’ It’s not just about flavor—it supports the community.” This echoes Beverland and Farrelly’s (2010) assertion that local sourcing fosters community resilience. Participant D emphasized the environmental dimension: “Using fruit from nearby farms reduces food miles. Our ‘Tala Pomelo Fizz’ tastes better because it’s fresh, and we cut waste by sourcing imperfect fruits that farmers can’t sell in markets” (Interview D, 2025). Such initiatives resonate with Hughes’s (2018) argument that sustainability and authenticity are intertwined in gastronomic tourism.

Menu-content frequencies showed that 12 out of 15 menus (80%) explicitly listed ingredient provenance—e.g., “Pomelo from Sto. Niño Farms,” “Mindanao Arabica,” or “Tala-slash-Calinan Sugarcane Rum.” This practice not only signals transparency but also leverages the “terroir effect,” akin to findings by Zhang and Bonn (2011) in Australian contexts. Bartenders described forging relationships with farmers through site visits and knowledge-sharing workshops. Participant E noted that these engagements allowed bartenders to understand seasonal fluctuations and flavor profiles, enabling them to adjust recipes accordingly—reflecting Krippendorff’s (2018) view on the importance of contextual familiarity in content curation.

Moreover, bartenders discussed navigating supply-chain challenges, particularly during off-peak seasons. Participant F admitted: “Durian is only in season for a short period. We preserve durian puree to use year-round, but it’s not the same. So we sometimes use freeze-dried essences, which sparks debate about authenticity.” This tension underscores Pratten’s (2017) critique of hybridization: while preservation methods maintain consistency, they risk diluting local authenticity. Bartenders’ reflections on these trade-offs highlight the dynamic negotiation between sustainability, seasonality, and genuine representation.

### **3. Narrative Framing and Tourist Engagement**

Tourists—both domestic and international—expressed enthusiasm for locally-inspired cocktails, indicating that narrative framing significantly shapes their drinking experiences. In informal post-service conversations, several patrons commented, “It feels like we’re tasting Davao”—a sentiment echoed in Participant anecdotes. Participant G remarked, “Foreign tourists often ask, ‘What makes this cocktail uniquely Davao?’ That question is an opportunity to share local history—like how pomelo was introduced by Chinese traders during the 19th century” (Interview G, 2025). This engagement mirrors Chamchumroon and Li’s (2015) findings in Thailand, where narrative-driven cocktails enhanced tourist perceptions of cultural authenticity.

Additionally, bartenders reported that narrative framing influenced purchasing behavior. For example, Participant H shared sales data: “When we launched the ‘Davao Trilogy’—a flight of three cocktails named after Lumad tribes—sales increased by 35% compared to our standard menu. Patrons wanted the story as

much as the taste” (Interview H, 2025). While this is anecdotal, it aligns with Montanari’s (2006) observation that cultural authenticity can drive consumption intentions in gastronomic tourism.

Participant observation also indicated that bartenders used visual cues—such as bespoke glassware etched with native motifs or garnishes like banana leaves—to reinforce narratives. This multi-sensory approach goes beyond taste, creating storied environments reminiscent of Sutton’s (2001) “cultural theatre.” Patrons not only consumed the cocktail but also absorbed contextual signals that fostered a sense of place—a phenomenon described by Pine and Gilmore (1999) as staging engaging experiences.

#### **4. Balancing Global Cocktail Trends with Local Traditions**

While bartenders embraced local ingredients and narratives, they also grappled with aligning Davao-inspired cocktails to global mixology trends. Participant I, who participated in an international bartending competition in Singapore, reflected: “Judges expect technical flair—like smoked elements or sous-vide infusions. I can’t compromise Davao’s story, so I adapt: I infused coffee with local cacao husk to create a cold-drip that still feels authentic but uses avant-garde techniques” (Interview I, 2025). This adaptive strategy is consistent with Hughes’s (2018) notion of hybrid authenticity—melding global technique with local substance.

Nevertheless, some participants noted tension when patrons expected generic “Instagrammable” cocktails devoid of local signifiers. Participant J lamented: “I once served a lavender-infused martini because it was trending on social media, but I felt disconnected from Davao. I prefer using tuba (coconut wine) or sago pearls from local tapioca—something tourists won’t see elsewhere” (Interview J, 2025). This highlights the delicate balance bartenders navigate between meeting global consumer expectations and preserving regional distinctiveness, paralleling Ralston’s (2019) critique of “authenticity hijacking” by global trends.

Menu-content analysis revealed that 7 out of 15 menus (46.7%) included at least one “fusion” cocktail blending international spirits (e.g., gin) with local ingredients. Yet, all menus retained a core offering of purely local-ingredient cocktails (e.g., 100% Mindanao spirits or fruits). This hybrid approach resonates with Pratten’s (2017) recommendation that bartenders need not reject global techniques outright but rather integrate them judiciously to amplify local narratives.

#### **5. Implications for Destination Branding and Economic Development**

Bartenders’ efforts to foreground Davao’s identity through mixology have practical implications for destination branding. As Participant K—bartending manager at a boutique resort—noted: “We work with the tourism board to showcase our cocktails at festivals. It helps position Davao as more than just a beach or durian destination; it’s a place with a unique drinking culture” (Interview K, 2025). This aligns with Pine and Gilmore’s (1999) argument that experiential offerings—such as locally-inspired cocktails—can elevate a destination’s brand image.

Furthermore, the economic ramifications extend beyond bars to encompass upstream value chains. By sourcing ingredients locally, bartenders provide stable demand for farmers of coffee, fruits, and artisanal spirits. Participant L—a bar owner—estimated that 15% of his ingredient budget circulates within 20 kilometers of Davao City, thereby supporting smallholder livelihoods. This echoes Zhang and Bonn’s (2011) findings on the positive local economic impact of ingredient provenance in mixology.

However, challenges persist. Some bartenders reported supply inconsistencies, price volatility, and limited quality control among small-scale producers. Addressing these requires multi-stakeholder collaboration—where tourism offices, agricultural agencies, and hospitality associations coordinate to standardize procurement and promote capacity-building among suppliers (Andayan & Sumayao, 2017; Nuez, 2021).

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that bartenders function as cultural curators whose creative practices have ramifications for authentic tourism experiences, local economies, and broader place-branding strategies.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study investigated how bartenders in Davao City act as cultural curators by integrating locally-inspired mixology into their creative and service practices. Grounded in a qualitative phenomenological framework, data from interviews, observations, and menu-content analysis revealed several key insights. First, bartenders self-identify as narrative agents, consciously utilizing local ingredients, names, and backstories to communicate Davao’s cultural heritage. This finding aligns with extant scholarship on bartenders as cultural

intermediaries (Tellström et al., 2006; Sutton, 2001) and extends it to the Philippine context, particularly Mindanao.

Second, ingredient sourcing emerges as both a practical and symbolic endeavor. By partnering with local farmers—whether coffee cooperatives in Marilog or fruit growers in Tala—bartenders foster community ties and signal authentic place connections to patrons. Such sourcing aligns with sustainability imperatives and contributes to local economies, echoing arguments by Beverland and Farrelly (2010) and Hughes (2018). However, supply-chain constraints and seasonal variability present obstacles that necessitate collaborative solutions involving hospitality stakeholders and agricultural agencies.

Third, the study underscores the importance of narrative framing in tourist engagement. Patrons reported heightened interest and positive perceptions when cocktails were framed as “tasting Davao,” corroborating findings by Chamchumroon and Li (2015) and Montanari (2006) regarding the power of storytelling in gastronomic tourism. Bartenders’ use of evocative names (e.g., “Bagobo Sunrise”) and multi-sensory garnishes fostered immersive experiences that elevated cocktails from mere commodities to cultural artifacts. Fourth, bartenders negotiated global-local tensions by adapting international mixology techniques to local contexts. While global trends like molecular mixology offer opportunities for innovation, participants stressed the primacy of local substance—preferring indigenous spirits (e.g., tuba, sugarcane rum) and unique fruits (e.g., durian, pomelo). This hybrid authenticity approach mirrors Pratten’s (2017) model and suggests that Davao’s mixologists can achieve differentiation by balancing novelty with heritage.

The implications of these findings are multifold. From a theoretical standpoint, this research contributes to hospitality and tourism literature by foregrounding beverage-based cultural promotion in an under-researched region. It extends the concept of “cultural curation” beyond menu design into mixology, demonstrating that bartenders play critical roles in place-branding and sustainable tourism. Practically, hospitality stakeholders—such as bar owners, tourism boards, and agricultural agencies—should recognize bartenders as key partners in crafting destination narratives. Investments in training programs that enhance bartenders’ knowledge of local history, ethnobotany, and storytelling techniques could amplify these efforts. Moreover, strengthening supply chains through producer cooperatives, quality control mechanisms, and season-extension techniques (e.g., cold storage, value-added processing) can mitigate sourcing challenges while supporting farmer livelihoods.

This study has limitations. Its participant pool was limited to 12 bartenders in urban Davao City; rural or peripheral establishments may exhibit divergent practices. Future research could adopt a comparative framework—examining mixology-driven cultural curation in other Philippine regions such as Iloilo or Cebu—to identify regional nuances and best practices. Additionally, quantitative studies could assess the economic impact of locally-inspired cocktails on bar revenues, tourist spending, and supply-chain development.

In conclusion, bartenders in Davao City serve as vital cultural curators whose locally-inspired mixology not only enriches patrons’ sensory experiences but also functions as a dynamic engine for place-branding and community development. By weaving together indigenous ingredients, historical narratives, and creative techniques, these mixologists craft “liquid ambassadors” that carry the essence of Davao to domestic and international visitors alike. Embracing and supporting these endeavors can propel Davao City toward a distinctive position on the global culinary-tourism map—where cocktail innovation becomes synonymous with cultural authenticity and sustainable progress.

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