

Promoting Manila Chinatown as a Tourism-Destination Hub

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to develop promotional strategies for various tourism sectors in Manila Chinatown, both for public and private entities. These developed strategies were based on the existing or new concepts in promotions, challenges to mitigate, and opportunities to exploit for the benefit of local community, businesses, and tourism. First, the actual tourists' demand and demographics were also identified related to its impact on promotions. This research concluded that several actions should be taken to mitigate exogenous and endogenous factors. Second, there are several gaps in the stakeholders' engagement. Filling in those gaps need partnership and collaboration which would be a success factor in tourism-destination promotions.

Keywords: Promotions, tourism, demand, Manila Chinatown, strategy, destination

1. INTRODUCTION

"Binondo is not the heart of Manila, it has always been the soul. It is a soul with a series of experiences that invigorates your inner senses. It is a district without pretension, that leaves fragments of the lives of the people, culture, and history. It is also a great contradiction, between good and bad, high and low"- Resident & Blogger

Manila Chinatown is said to be the "World's Oldest Chinatown", founded in 1594 as cited by Ang See (2015) [1]. It was situated in Binondo, a district of the City of Manila in the Philippines. It was once a premier business and luxury district, a mecca for faith, an oriental culinary capital and, a melting pot of Filipino and Chinese cultures from 15th to 19th century. At present, Manila has been trying to regain its identity due to the proliferation of commercialization, an increasing number of populations, metropolization, and despaired citizen seeking refuge outside the damaged old Manila. Cities and regions outside Manila then become competitive destinations. These challenges affect both the business and tourism landscape. In terms of delivering a memorable experience, it is what the tourists feel with a certain destination along with its activities and attractions. This is supported by the infrastructures which are also an important element. With this trend, almost PHP 31 billion was invested by the Duterte administration in necessary tourism infrastructures for 2019, which will boost the number of foreign tourists in the Philippines by 12 million in 2022, as well as local tourists to 89.2 million as stressed Puyat (2018) [4]. Destinations are not identical and each

one has its competitive edge like Manila Chinatown. And what could have been offered to make it stand out among other tourist destinations? The Philippines is among those countries that are investing heavily in tourism promotions to boost the actual tourist demand according to the Department of Tourism (DOT). On the course of this study, several assumptions such as: First, are some insights on promoting Manila Chinatown in form of opinionated statements that convey different ideas, beliefs, and perceptions; Second, is the direction of various stakeholders that may vary in terms of jurisdiction, implementation, and evaluation concerning destination promotions; Third, is to further intensify the promotional strategies it should be supported by public and private sectors.

1.1. Related Work

To be able to understand the status of Manila Chinatown as a tourism-destination hub, we are presenting the macro and micro environment of Manila Chinatown.

1.1.1. Manila Chinatown Current State

According to Umali (2019) [6], Binondo itself changed, not only as a tourist destination, but also as a business district. Although its residents went on to embrace the colonial culture, they never dared to forget their roots. Its center was Ongpin Street, an enduring reminder of Chinese heritage in Binondo. It was added that the economics shaped the face of Binondo. From merchants and tradesmen setting-up shop and business, it grew to a larger capitalist enterprise. Escolta, Quiapo, and

Divisoria, were and still are the places to go for anything from petty baubles to wholesale reselling. Major banks were mentioned to establish themselves in Binondo, before branching out nationwide. Although racism and war ravaged Binondo and the Chinoys who lived there, they persevered and grew stronger. The economic potential of Manila Chinatown is countless, various industries are growing around the district. For instance, Escolta Street is close to many universities and colleges, which can benefit potential BPO firms that want to invest in renting buildings with a historical façade, followed by upscale developer like Anchor Land, which has a project that includes the 56-storey Anchor Skysuites, which is the world's tallest Chinatown structure to date. Nearby is the 39-storey Mandarin Square, and the 33-storey Lee Tower among others. The promotion of Manila Chinatown should adapt and be aligned with internal and external forces.

1.1.2. Tourism Stakeholders & Sectors

The support of tourism stakeholders is essential for the development of successful long-term promotions. According to the WTO Survey (2005). It has identified the following tourism stakeholders which are the; (1) national governments, (2) tourism establishments and tourism enterprises (3) institutions engaged in financing tourism projects; (4) tourism employees, tourism professionals and tourism consultants; (5) trade unions of tourism employees; (6) tourism education and training centers; (7) travelers, (8) local populations and host communities at tourism destinations, (9) other juridical and natural persons having stakes in tourism development including non-governmental organizations specializing in tourism and directly involved in tourism projects and the supply of tourism services.

1.1.3. Current Tourist-Market Trend

Millennials are now spending more of their income in 'experience', and travelling is a key component for them. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) [8] forecasted that by 2020, there will be almost 300 million international youth-trips per year. In terms of Millennial lifestyle, consumption, and travel behavior, according to Verissino & Costa (2017) [7], this generation is called the frugal generation for their spending habits, or the "go-nowhere generation" because of their activities and travel pattern. They also prefer to use cash and debit cards more than previous generations. Sometimes called "the cheap generation", they search for cheap promotions and often spend less money.

1.1.4. Tourism-Destination Promotions

Hasan (2015) [3] emphasized that promotion in tourism helps draw the attention of potential tourists, modify the behavior of existing buyers and influence them to visit a

destination. Moreover, it was cited that every destination country should extend its efforts to discover the needs and follow the necessary promotional strategies in order to raise the interest among potential tourists. It is very important for decision-makers to understand how customers acquire the information, especially for tourism-related services and products. According to Torres (2015) [5], tourism sectors use different marketing channels / mix to place themselves on top in the industry and to stay competitive. Currently, there are no published studies on promoting Manila Chinatown tourism. Most of the studies are focused on well-known destinations like Intramuros and Vigan, which is a UNESCO World-Heritage Site. There are vast opportunities to study other local destinations with natural and historical significance, with a lack of promotional strategy coming from public sectors. Similar to Manila Chinatown, its historical significance should be promoted and conserved because of being said to be the oldest Chinatown in the World, which is a selling proposition among other destinations locally and internationally.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Method and Design

This research applied a mixed-method using the methodological triangulation through observation, document analysis, and survey. The researcher also selected several types of non-probability sampling, which is convenience sampling for the accessibility and proximity, and the snowball sampling whereas the subjects recommend and recruit their acquaintances. Lastly, heterogeneous sampling was applied to ensure that all credible stakeholders were subjected.

2.2. Selection and Validation

The criteria are planned and set qualifications for both the respondents and informants. Concerning the selected informants, they held several offices as elaborated by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) Global Code of Ethics for Tourism Report according to Faure (2015) [2]. Concerning the identified establishments for document analysis, it is based on the following criteria: First, it is through favorable rating from tourists on social media e.g, Zomato, Trip Advisor, and Google Review; Second, it is on the highest volume of tourist-based on seasonality, foot traffic such as average walk-in and accommodation on stay per day or nights.

Several validations were also conducted such as the content and face validations. The researcher also practiced ethical norms. The contents were validated by three content-experts on their respective fields within the tourism, business, and academic sector.

2.3. Subject and Locale

The identified total number of respondents is four hundred (400) tourists in Manila Chinatown, with a distribution of one hundred (100) tourists per sector namely: food and beverage, accommodation, activities and entertainment, and travel and transportation. Meanwhile, the number of informants is thirty-eight (38) including internal and external stakeholders, either from public or private entities, which also include local-community representatives.

2.4. Research Instrument & Data Collection

The method of collecting insights and data was through interviews and survey questionnaires. The interview question is semi-structured, while the survey type is descriptive and structured. The findings are presented in percentage and qualitative result. The findings are triangulated.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Tourists' Demographic Profile

The total number of local and foreign tourists as respondents is four hundred (400), with a distribution of two hundred thirty (230) local tourists, and one hundred seventy (170) foreign tourists. The tourist market was mostly female (53.25%), aged between 30 – 39 (38%) with the least number of below 20-year-old. In terms of civil status, majority were married (62.5%) and employed (62.5%). In terms of employment, most were regular / probationary employees (84.75%), connected with private firms (84.75%). Moreover, the majority of household income was within PHP 30,000 – 39,999 (30.5%) and the most common source of information was through the internet (41.25%). Lastly, tourists traveling to Manila Chinatown were accompanied by friends (48.25%). The majority was local tourists coming from the Philippines (57.5%), and then followed by foreign tourists from China (35.5%), Korea (5%), Thailand (1.25%), and America (0.75%).

3.2. Manila Chinatown Demand

3.2.1. Type of Stay

In terms of the type of stay in Manila, majority stayed within 24 hours, with a total of 91.75%. Majority of tourists were classified as excursionist or same-day visitors, and were domestic travelers based on their country of residence. Meanwhile, 8.25% were tourists who stayed for more than 24 hours.

3.2.2. Places Visited

In terms of the places visited in Manila Chinatown, majority visited Local Chinese Restaurant and Delicacies, with a total of 93.75%, and then followed by Mall Shopping / Entertainment at 87.5%, and Escolta Street and/or Heritage Structures at 82.25%. Least activities were classified as others, such as strolling without specific reason at 0.5%, and then followed by museum visit at 5.75%, and Carvajal market / street market at 10.75%.

3.2.3. Frequency of Visit

In terms of the frequency of tourist visit in Manila Chinatown, majority visited three to five times a year with 56.58%, and then followed by 32.37% for more than five times a year, while the least frequency of visit was one to two times a year with 11.05%.

3.2.4. Average Amount Spent

In terms of the average amount spent per visit / per capita in Manila Chinatown in Pesos value, majority was spending PHP 744.6 on restaurants and café, PHP 559.72 for accommodation, and PHP 494.67 on entertainment. Meanwhile, the least amount spent was PHP 350HP 251.25 on Guided Tours and PHP 350 on other expenses. The overall average-spending of tourists per visit was PHP 437.95.

3.2.5. Reasons for Visit

In terms of reasons for visiting Manila Chinatown, the top three reasons were: (1) To Escape from Daily Routine; (2) To Learn / Practice Customs, Culture, and Tradition; And (3) To Sightsee Tourist-Spots. Meanwhile, the bottom three reasons were ranked as follows: (10) To Meet Business Obligations; (9) To Gamble and Game; and (8) To Fulfil Spiritual Needs.

3.3. Current Promotions in Manila Chinatown

The enumerated current promotional strategies for Manila Chinatown are transcribed from various stakeholders. The strategies are viral marketing such as word-of-mouth promotions, multi-platform promotions on bookings and reservations, bundling and bulk tour packages, and internal public relations. And there are also the events and activities, such as parties and night market for heritage-conservation fundraising. Concerning the document analysis conducted, there was no ample initiative on below the line promotions as compared to above the line promotions by some sectors.

3.4. Challenges in Promoting Manila Chinatown

Based on the SWOT analysis, the following challenges in promoting Manila Chinatown are identified within the macro-environment such as: (1) Stakeholders' willpower variety; (2) Good governance practice; (3) Government versatility and adaptability; (4) Need for continuous monitoring and evaluation; (5) Proper allocation of funds; (6) Decreased business confidence; (7) Boosting socio-cultural awareness; (8) Needs for business agility; (9) Advancements in financial technology; (10) Lacks infrastructural development; (11) Needs for tourism-product and service innovation; (12) Practice of environmental stewardship; and (13) Enforcing strong law and policy.

Meanwhile, the micro-environment factors are: (1) Restaurants lack of promotions; (2) Restaurant compliance on standards and requirements; (3) Needs for tourism readiness; (4) Needs for tourist-friendly signs; (5) Improving customer experience; (6) Needs for managing capacity; (7) No promotional plan and insufficient data; (8) Needs for improvement in city environments; (9) Serving multilingual market; (10) Improving hotel visual merchandising and events; (11) Needs for tourist-profiling and serving Chinese market; (12) Addressing price-sensitive market; (13) Lacks of private and public stakeholder collaboration; (14) Needs for urban renewal; (15) Needs for data analytics; (16) Proper use of tax; (17) Tour operator; (18) Guides lack of training and certification; (19) Provision on basic city-services; (20) Lack of police presence; (21) Lack of compliance on tourism legislation; (22) Lack of promotions for activities; (23) McDonaldization; (24) Efforts for heritage conservation; (25) Negative impression on public safety and security; (26) High business-operating cost; (27) Needs to balance urban development; (28) Compliance on business regulations; (29) Solving indifferences and anomalies; (30) Needs for stakeholder partnership; (31) Improving local business-services and facilities.

3.5. Opportunities in Promoting Manila Chinatown

Based on SWOT analysis, the following opportunities are identified for promoting Manila Chinatown, such as: (1) Day-trip potential; (2) Business-community-collaboration potential; (3) Growing micro, small, and medium enterprises; (4) Voluntary group participation; (5) Longevity of restaurant businesses; (6) Unique Filipino hospitality; (7) Variety of offerings and tourist market; (8) Opportunities for tourism intermediaries; (9) Opportunity for strategic partnership; (10) Potential multi-stakeholder partnership; (11) Shopping tourism potential; (12) Festival tourism potential; (13) Economic contribution from tourism; (14) Domestic-market potential; (15) Manila Chinatown competitiveness; (16)

Strong business-ties; (17) Local-business and investment potential.

3.6. Proposed Promotions for Manila Chinatown

Through the market-environment scanning, the actual demand, and tourists' demographics, the researcher also applied the TOWS analysis and identified promotional strategies for various tourism sectors as presented in the next sub-sections.

3.6.1. Food & Beverage-Sector Strategies

- a. *Social Media Usage and Decoration* – Online resources promoting local restaurants can talk about the history of the restaurant, their menu, contact details, map and location, service-delivery options, customer feedback, and interaction. Target tourists are touchers, lookers, and listeners.
- b. *Events / Sampling* – Restaurants may also come up of events that will immerse the tourists on food-tourism heritage, such as food tours, cooking demos, and Carvajal market experience. Target tourists are touchers.
- c. *Image and Brand Creation* – There are stories behind restaurants, whereas Dr. Jose Rizal used to dine in as a regular customer at the New Toho Food Center. There is a strong historical significance that restaurants can use to leverage and promote their brand to tourists apart from improving visual elements, such as creating a menu with pictures of the food, citing historical narratives about the place for tourists to see and experience. Target tourists are lookers and touchers.

3.6.2. Accommodation-Sector Strategies

- a. *Short-Term Stay Promotions and Events* – There is a demand for short-stay, such as staycation to experience local culture, to watch an event like boxing championship, or to celebrate an occasion like mother day. Several promotions can be implemented to attract and retain guest, such as: loyalty program, discounts, and freebies. Hotels may also hold night-parties / events and other catering activities to specific market. Target tourists are touchers.
- b. *Product Bundling* – This can be offered by tour operators on their package tours which comes with accommodation and / or other activities. And it should come with wide range of prices catering to price sensitive groups. Target tourists are lookers.
- c. *Image and Brand Creation* – Millennial tourists want local space, local touches and local insight. They are tired of the tourist traps and are craving more local attractions. Hotels can have a Manila Chinatown themed design on their rooms and other public areas.

And also sell promotional merchandise with Manila Chinatown identity. Target tourists are touchers.

- d. *Retail Marketing* – Hotels can provide retailtainment to drive traffic and sales. This may showcase the Chinoy culture, the tips on getting around Manila, and the basic know-how for business and leisure tourists. This can also be experienced through hands-on activities, Liquid Crystal Display (LCD), or mobile application. Moreover, hotels can get influential people to promote their brand through social media. Target tourists are lookers.
- e. *Online-Content Marketing* – This may increase sales and bookings. Contents can be in forms of visual storytelling through the use of Instagram videos featuring amenities. And also, guest-blogging may attract new guest. Target tourists are lookers.
- f. *Ancillary-Services Offer* – This are add-on services to “WOW” guests, such as airport-transfer service, birthday cake, welcome drinks for new guest, and compliment massage with terms and conditions apply. Moreover, there are also some add-on services during the stay, such as concierge services and in-room services. And also, there are inside and outside entertainment, internet access, and function areas. Target tourists are lookers and touchers.

3.6.3. Travel & Transportation Strategies

- a. *Personal Selling* – Touring can be a form of personal selling, which involves sharing the facts about Manila Chinatown. This should not be limited only to the historical facts, but also the experiences and stories of people should be mentioned. Target tourists are listeners, touchers, and talkers.
- b. *Fund-Raising and Events* – This involves the activities during tours, such as: participation on festivities with religious events, fund-raising activities for heritage conservation, and a visit to a Chinoy home to learn Hookien and their culture, or simply riding a kalesa. Target tourists are touchers and listeners.
- c. *Social Media Usage and Partnership* – Tour operators can further promote their tour packages. This can include partnership with non-local tour operators and other sectors for joint-offerings, through the use of social-media platform such as; TripAdvisor for reviews reference and website visibility, etc., with target tourists who are touchers and lookers.
- d. *Package and Tour Development* – Tour operators can design enticing-packaged tours to increase traffic on other destinations in Manila. This would diverse the high-volume traffic in Manila Chinatown. Tour operators may create joint-tour packages with other operators specializing in other subject matters and destinations. Target tourists are lookers and listeners.
- e. *Government Relations* – Tour operators should work closely with the local government on their scheduled tours, and also on giving out the data and activities sought for research purposes. Tour operators can also

conduct a post-tour survey to further enhance their services and provide necessary data for promotions and tour-package designing. Target tourists are listeners and talkers.

- f. *Marketing Research and Information Management* – This would provide necessary market information such as the trends in tourist arrival, the characteristics of tourist and their segments, the expectations, satisfactions, and activities sought. The post-tour survey conducted in various tourism sectors may contribute to the master plan of Manila. Target tourists are talkers.
- g. *Collaborative Promotions* – Stakeholders should collaborate on managing tourist capacity by scheduling the tours or other events during non-peak season / hours. This also ensures tourists’ safety by avoiding walking on the areas with high theft-risk, and orienting tourists on safety precautions. Target tourists are listeners and talkers.
- h. *Travel-Trade Marketing* – This would inform and educate travel intermediaries and other stakeholders about Manila Chinatown, and to familiarize them on tourist attractions, events, and other resources. The dissemination of information can be done through educational workshop, seminars, and meetings. Target tourists are listeners.

3.6.4. Activity & Entertainment-Sector Strategies

- a. *Mall Promotions* – Festivities can be promoted in shopping malls to create awareness and attract more customers. Other local businesses in Manila Chinatown can also create activities, such as cultural shows or product offers to attract tourists.
- b. *Public Relations and Sponsorship* – There should be a coordination with various vendors on the possible activities in Manila. This could be a calendar presented on social-media platforms or POPs (Point-of-Purchase) materials. It should be a year-round list of activities and events, that would create demand and travel intention. The list could include: festivities, cultural shows, parties, night market, and others. The government should also actively sponsor other local events in Manila Chinatown aside from the Chinese New Year.
- c. *Information Distribution and Fulfillment* – This includes the dissemination of information through various promotional tools, that can include, maps, accommodation guide, attractions / destination brochures, tarpaulin, or digital display stand for local tourists at shopping malls. Target tourists are lookers.
- d. *Digital Technology Promotions and Events* – Museum is less visited in Manila Chinatown. To be able to increase foot traffic, several activities can be performed, such as theater plays that would attract tourists who like history, The Early Chinese-Trading, Living at the Parian of Manila, and other milestones. This can be performed in a given season or month.

Moreover, museum can install digital display, such as large video walls and interactive touch screens to engage visitors. Target tourists are lookers and listeners.

- e. *Ancillary-Services Offer* – This is the common service need by tourists. There should be tourist information-counters in Manila Chinatown offering services, such as money changer for currency exchange, translation guide, and even medical assistance. Target tourists are lookers.

3.6.5. Other Private-Sector Strategies

- a. *Investor and Government Relations* – There should be strong government involvement with the business sector in ensuring the compliance with the law. There should be imposed additional tax to condominiums units listed for lodging, home-stay, and alike. Local businesses should enrich customer experience, and also the agility towards partnership with non-Chino businesses. Target tourists are listeners and talkers.
- b. *Imagine and Brand Creation* – Local businesses like jewelry shops, groceries, and other retail outlets should enrich customer experience, improve facilities like air conditioning, and conduct promotions to invite customers to visit them instead of mall-ing. Target tourists are lookers and touchers.
- c. *Media Relations and Advertisement* – Media can be used in promoting Manila Chinatown through editorials and feature stories in travel-channel locally and internationally. The public stakeholders can also offer familiarization trips to travel writers, or partnership with private-sector, such as airlines in advertising Manila Chinatown on their in-flight magazine. Target tourists are lookers.
- d. *Incentive and Financial Support* – This can be given as a recognition on exemplary businesses compliance and performance. Acknowledgment can boost the morale of businesses to further enhance their service delivery. Certain tax-incentives can be given to perform stakeholders or financial supports most specifically to MSME's. Target tourists are listeners and talkers.

3.6.6. Local Community

Tourism Awareness Program – This campaign would gear the local community towards tourism readiness and mitigate anti-tourism mindset. This can be conducted through formal or informal group discussion, dialogues, or consultations.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- a. The success of promoting Manila Chinatown must be able to convert tourists with suppressed or no-intention for visiting Manila Chinatown into actual or potential

market, as well as to address several trends, such as: changes on travel pattern, service expectations, adopting new technologies, marketing tools, pricing strategy, new facilities and amenities, and strengthening local-community collaboration.

- b. Manila Chinatown promotions must be anchored with long-term strategic thinking and continuous consultative-process between both public and private sectors. There is also a need to maintain good relationship among stakeholders.
- c. There is also a need for a Tourism Master-Plan, which consisting of comprehensive strategic-planning for the next 10 to 20 years comprises of directions and action plans on products, infrastructure, human resources, marketing and promotions, and funding.
- d. The promotional strategies to be implemented should be supported by other marketing mixes such as; product, price, place, people, process, and physical evidence. Other analyses can be performed, such as customer analysis, competitor analysis, and market analysis to extract other relevant information, as well as proposed promotional-strategies that must be presented to various tourism sectors for review and reference.
- e. Stakeholders should perform their roles in terms of jurisdiction, implementation, and evaluation for destination promotions. There should be constantly-reviewed promotions based on data and metric on the following: formality of agreements, clear goal definition, organizational structure, leadership and flexibility, social networks, and the efficiency / efficacy of the partnership performance. While the private sectors should manage cultural diversity and inclusion at workplace, Chinese migrants are doing business and the employments should be entitled to basic rights. Sanctions should be imposed to illegal businesses. And lastly, the selling proposition of Manila Chinatown, such as gastronomic diversity and cultural heritage should be further promoted, because it reflects multicultural identity and authenticity. There is a need to improve customer experience through personalizing services from the food and beverage sector, as well as to practice heritage conservation and boost tourism awareness.
- f. Promoting other tourism-products, such as the attractions aside from islands, would contribute to managing tourist capacity from other high tourist-density destinations like Manila, Boracay, Baguio, and others. However, certain issues should be addressed, such as disaster preparedness, terroristic threats, and tourism-related crimes, which compromises public safety and security, as well as finding a balance amidst rapid urban developments in Manila Chinatown, which should consider the social, economic, and environmental impacts. Basic city-facilities should be provided to make Manila Chinatown a liveable and competitive destination. Moreover, continuous urban development, leniency in processing business permits, and corruption-free transactions should be conducted to encourage business investments.

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