

**Sustainable tourism practices and tourism commercialization of Ati-Atihan Festival**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to assess the sustainability of tourism practices through tourism commercialization during the Ati-Atihan Festival for the year 2026. Specifically, it determined the extent of sustainable tourism practices in terms of environmental sustainability, socio-cultural sustainability, and economic sustainability; the level of tourism commercialization in terms of marketing intensity, profit orientation, and cultural commodification; and the significant relationship between the two variables. The study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design. A total of 100 respondents, including devotees, locals, foreigners, business owners, and local government unit (LGU) representatives, were selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered using a researcher-made questionnaire consisting of 90 items for sustainable tourism practices and 30 items for tourism commercialization. Mean and standard deviation were used for descriptive analysis, while Pearson r was used to test the relationship at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that both sustainable tourism practices and tourism commercialization are high. Moreover, there is a very strong and significant relationship between the two variables.

**Keywords:** Sustainable tourism practices, tourism commercialization, ati-atihan festival.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Cultural festivals have become important platforms for preserving heritage, strengthening community identity, and promoting local economic development. Among the most prominent celebrations in the Philippines is the Ati Atihan Festival, an annual event held every January in Kalibo, Aklan, which has gained national and international recognition for its colorful street parades, rhythmic drumming, elaborate costumes, and active participation of local communities. The origins of the festival can be traced to the thirteenth century, when Malay settlers in Panay established peaceful relations with the indigenous Ati people. This historical encounter was commemorated through dancing, face painting, and communal celebrations that honored the Ati identity while symbolizing unity and harmony (Oracion, 2021; TagalogLang, 2019). During the Spanish colonial period, Catholic missionaries integrated the indigenous celebration into Christian traditions by centering the festival on the veneration of the Santo Niño. This transformation created a unique fusion of indigenous rituals

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and Catholic religious practices that continues to define the character of the festival today (Garcia, 2019; Oracion, 2021). Beginning in the 1950s, however, the Ati Atihan Festival evolved from a predominantly religious and cultural observance into a large-scale public celebration characterized by organized street dancing, corporate sponsorships, and extensive national promotion, making it one of the country's major tourism attractions (Magno & Ocampo, 2018).

The rapid growth of tourism has significantly enhanced the economic importance of the Ati Atihan Festival. The influx of visitors generates substantial revenue for hotels, restaurants, transportation providers, local vendors, and other businesses, while corporate sponsorships, media exposure, and commercial activities have further expanded the festival's visibility and financial potential (Oracion, 2021; Magno & Ocampo, 2018). Despite these economic gains, scholars have increasingly expressed concern regarding the consequences of excessive commercialization. The growing dominance of branded marketing, profit driven activities, and entertainment-oriented programming has raised questions about the gradual erosion of the festival's religious significance, cultural authenticity, and community centered character (Oracion, 2021; Magno & Ocampo, 2018). These developments highlight an important challenge in contemporary tourism management, namely, how to maximize economic opportunities without compromising the cultural identity and long-term sustainability of heritage festivals.

Within this context, sustainable tourism has emerged as a guiding framework for managing the environmental, social, cultural, and economic impacts of tourism development. Sustainable tourism emphasizes responsible practices that minimize environmental degradation, promote social equity, and ensure that economic benefits are distributed fairly among stakeholders (UNWTO, 2022). In the context of the Ati Atihan Festival, environmental sustainability includes initiatives such as waste management programs, the establishment of eco zones, and the promotion of reusable materials during festival activities (Department of Environment and Natural Resources [DENR], 2023). Equally important are the social and cultural dimensions of sustainability, which encourage active participation among residents, artisans, performers, and community organizations while safeguarding local traditions and cultural heritage (Rivera & Tolentino, 2021). These initiatives strengthen community cohesion, foster local pride, and preserve the authenticity that distinguishes the festival as both a religious observance and a cultural celebration.

In contrast, tourism commercialization refers to the increasing influence of market-oriented activities within cultural events. The expansion of corporate sponsorships, promotional campaigns, commercial booths, and media driven programming has shifted greater attention toward profitability and entertainment value, sometimes at the expense of the festival's cultural and religious foundations (Getz, 2010; Yolal et al., 2016; Oracion, 2021). Previous studies indicate that commercialization, when inadequately managed, may result in cultural commodification, an excessive emphasis on branded marketing, and the marginalization of traditional stakeholders, including local performers and religious communities (Gutierrez, 2021; Magno & Ocampo, 2018). Nevertheless, the literature also recognizes that commercialization is not inherently detrimental. When implemented alongside sound sustainability strategies, commercial activities can generate financial resources that support heritage conservation, strengthen community capacity, and improve environmental management, thereby creating a more balanced relationship between economic development and cultural preservation (Dela Cruz, 2022; Richards, 2019). This convergence of perspectives suggests that the issue is not commercialization itself but the manner in which it is governed through sustainable tourism principles.

Although numerous studies have separately examined sustainable tourism and tourism commercialization, their interaction remains a continuing concern, particularly in heritage

festivals that experience increasing visitor demand. Existing literature consistently identifies overcrowding, increased waste generation, higher energy consumption, and the vulnerability of tourism dependent economies to external disruptions, including pandemics and natural disasters, as significant challenges associated with mass tourism (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020). These concerns are especially relevant to the Ati Atihan Festival, where balancing economic growth with cultural preservation and environmental responsibility has become increasingly complex. In response, the local government has implemented policies and management strategies, including Executive Order No. 60, s. 2025, to strengthen public safety, crowd management, and tourism governance. Despite these efforts, sustaining the festival over the long term requires a more integrated approach that harmonizes tourism development with environmental protection, cultural conservation, and community participation. The literature therefore reveals a continuing need to examine how sustainable tourism practices influence the commercialization of major cultural festivals while maintaining their authenticity and social value.

The present study is anchored on three complementary theoretical perspectives that collectively explain the relationship between sustainable tourism practices and tourism commercialization. The primary theoretical foundation is Sustainable Tourism Theory, which originated from the principles of sustainable development articulated in the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987) and was subsequently expanded by Hunter (1997) and Butler (1999). This theory asserts that tourism development should satisfy the needs of present visitors and host communities while preserving opportunities and resources for future generations. It emphasizes the integration of environmental protection, economic development, and sociocultural preservation to ensure that tourism contributes positively to community well-being without degrading cultural or natural resources. Within the context of the Ati Atihan Festival, this perspective provides a framework for understanding how responsible tourism practices can support economic growth while preserving the festival's cultural identity.

Complementing this perspective is Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle Model, which explains that tourism destinations evolve through the stages of exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and ultimately either decline or rejuvenation. As the Ati Atihan Festival has transformed from a local cultural celebration into a major tourism destination, it increasingly reflects the characteristics associated with the development and consolidation stages, where visitor numbers rise, commercialization intensifies, and sustainability concerns become more evident. Butler's model therefore provides an analytical basis for assessing whether current tourism management practices are likely to facilitate sustainable rejuvenation or contribute to gradual cultural decline. Further strengthening this theoretical foundation is Doxey's Irritation Index, which explains how residents' attitudes toward tourism may shift from enthusiasm to apathy, irritation, and eventual antagonism as tourism expands and cultural intrusion or unequal economic benefits become more apparent (Doxey, 1975). Applied to the Ati Atihan Festival, this framework suggests that increasing commercialization may generate dissatisfaction among local residents if they perceive diminishing participation in decision making processes or the loss of the festival's sacred and cultural significance. Sustainable tourism practices that prioritize community participation and equitable distribution of benefits offer mechanisms for mitigating these potential social consequences.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide an integrated explanation of how sustainable tourism practices influence tourism commercialization while emphasizing the need to balance economic development with environmental stewardship, cultural preservation, and community welfare. Sustainable Tourism Theory establishes the normative principles of

responsible tourism, the Tourism Area Life Cycle Model explains the developmental trajectory of tourism destinations, and Doxey's Irritation Index highlights the importance of community perceptions in determining the long-term viability of tourism initiatives. Their convergence demonstrates that sustainable tourism and commercialization should not be viewed as competing forces but as interconnected processes that require careful management to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes.

Guided by these theoretical foundations, the conceptual framework of the study identifies sustainable tourism practices as the independent variable and tourism commercialization as the dependent variable within the context of the Ati Atihan Festival in Kalibo, Aklan. Sustainable tourism practices encompass policies and activities designed to minimize environmental degradation, preserve cultural integrity, encourage community participation, and ensure equitable economic benefits for local stakeholders. Tourism commercialization, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which market-oriented activities such as corporate sponsorships, merchandising, promotional campaigns, media exposure, sponsored entertainment events, and commercial retail activities have become integrated into the festival experience. These commercial initiatives may expand tourism opportunities and generate substantial economic benefits, yet they also carry the risk of shifting the festival's identity away from its cultural and religious foundations if left unchecked. The conceptual framework therefore proposes that the implementation and effectiveness of sustainable tourism practices directly influence the extent and character of tourism commercialization. Strong sustainability initiatives are expected to regulate commercial activities in ways that support local economic development while preserving cultural authenticity, whereas inadequate sustainability measures may accelerate excessive commercialization, weaken cultural identity, and intensify environmental pressures. This proposition forms the central premise of the present investigation and establishes the basis for examining the relationship between sustainable tourism practices and tourism commercialization during the Ati Atihan Festival.

#### Statement of the problem

The purpose of this study was to assess the sustainability of tourism practices through tourism commercialization of Ati- Atihan Festival in Kalibo, Aklan for the year 2026.

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the extent of sustainable tourism practices implemented during the Ati-Atihan Festival as a whole and in terms of Environmental conservation, Cultural preservation, and Community participation?
2. What is the level of tourism commercialization during the Ati-Atihan Festival as a whole and in terms of Marketing intensity, Profit orientation, and Cultural commodification?
3. Is there a significant relationship between sustainable tourism practices and tourism commercialization during the Ati-Atihan Festival?

#### METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological framework of the study, encompassing the purpose of the study and research design, the methods employed, and the statistical data analysis procedures used to address the research problem.

This study aims to assess the level of tourism commercialization and the extent of sustainable tourism practices during the Ati-Atihan Festival in Kalibo, Aklan. Specifically, it seeks to examine the relationship between tourism commercialization, measured through marketing intensity, profit orientation, and cultural commodification, and sustainable tourism

practices, which include environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community participation. To achieve these objectives, a survey-correlational research design was utilized. A survey-correlational approach is appropriate for studies that intend to describe a population's perceptions and evaluate relationships between key variables. According to Creswell (2014), survey-correlational research is effective for gathering data on opinions, attitudes, and perceptions from a large group of respondents. In this study, the survey-correlational method allowed the collection of data from local government representatives, business owners, and devotees, providing a comprehensive understanding of their views on festival commercialization and sustainability. The independent variable (IV) in this research is tourism commercialization, while the dependent variable (DV) is sustainable tourism practices. Both variables were measured using validated indicators anchored in relevant literature and previous studies on festival management, tourism impacts, and sustainability. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage were used to present the profile of respondents, including their sector (Locals, Foreigner, local government, business owners, and devotees) in the festival. The mean and standard deviation were used to determine the perceived level of tourism commercialization and extent of sustainable tourism practices. To test the relationship between the variables, Pearson's  $r$  was employed. A 0.05 level of significance was applied to all statistical tests.

The participants of this study were selected from the five key stakeholder groups involved in the Ati-Atihan Festival: Locals, Foreigner, local government, business owners, and devotees. These groups were chosen because they directly experience and influence both tourism commercialization and sustainable tourism practices during the festival. Devotees represent the cultural and religious participants; business owners reflect the commercial sector; local government representatives oversee policy implementation, regulation, and festival management; locals represent the people who live in Aklan; and foreigners represent the increased popularity of Ati-Atihan. Since the festival attracts large populations and the exact number of participants varies yearly, the study used purposive sampling to select respondents who are actively involved during the event. The estimated population sizes were used as the basis for determining an appropriate sample for data collection. The proposed distribution of respondents included devotees, with an estimated population of 37,500 and a target sample size of 20; locals, with an estimated population of 37,500 and a target sample size of 20; foreigners, with an estimated population of 37,500 and a target sample size of 20; business owners, with an estimated population of 37,500 and a target sample size of 20; and LGU representatives, with an estimated population of 1,113 and a target sample size of 20, yielding a total estimated population of 151,113 and a total target sample size of 100.

The researcher used a researcher-made questionnaire to collect the necessary data for this study. The questionnaire was designed to measure the independent variable (IV), tourism commercialization, and the dependent variable (DV), sustainable tourism practices, as experienced and perceived by key stakeholders of the Ati-Atihan Festival, including local government representatives, business owners, and devotees. The instrument was structured to align with the study objectives and specific research problems. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part identified which stakeholder group the participant belonged to and contained 5 items pertaining to this classification. The second part, the Tourism Commercialization Questionnaire, was a research-made questionnaire consisting of 30 items measuring the presence and impact of commercialization in the festival. Items focused on marketing intensity, profit orientation, and cultural commodification. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with statements such as the visibility of branded marketing materials, influence of commercial interests, profit-driven nature of the festival, and the role of sponsors

in shaping festival activities. Expert panel validation took place before the instrument was used, and the finalized questionnaire incorporated the panel's feedback, ideas, and suggestions. A pilot study involving thirty locals was conducted to assess the questionnaire's dependability. Data from pilot testing were then encoded and processed using the Cronbach Alpha, with a value of 0.915, employing the software known as the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The instrument contained items whose factor loading was .50 or higher, and it rejected items whose factor loading was less than that. McDaniel (2012) asserts that a tool was deemed credible if its Cronbach alpha was .70 or higher. The questionnaire was responded to using the 5-point Likert Scale, wherein a score of 5 corresponded to Strongly Agree, 4 to Agree, 3 to Neutral, 2 to Disagree, and 1 to Strongly Disagree. To interpret the results, the following scale was used: a score of 5, with a range of 4.21-5.00, was interpreted as Very High; a score of 4, with a range of 3.41-4.20, was interpreted as High; a score of 3, with a range of 2.61-3.40, was interpreted as Moderate; a score of 2, with a range of 1.81-2.60, was interpreted as Low; and a score of 1, with a range of 1.00-1.80, was interpreted as Very Low. Data gathered were then encoded, tallied, tabulated, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software, a computer-based statistical analysis.

The third part, the Sustainable Tourism Practices Questionnaire, was a 90-item research-made questionnaire divided into three dimensions. The environmental sustainability dimension evaluated waste management, eco-zones, promotion of eco-friendly materials, and measures to minimize pollution and crowding. The socio-cultural sustainability dimension evaluated cultural preservation, participation of devotees in cultural activities, awareness of Aklanon culture, and adherence to local values and traditions. The economic sustainability dimension evaluated income generation for local businesses, economic contribution of commercialization, and fair distribution of benefits among stakeholders. As with the Tourism Commercialization Questionnaire, expert panel validation took place before the instrument was used, and the finalized questionnaire incorporated the panel's feedback, ideas, and suggestions. A pilot study involving thirty (30) locals was conducted to assess the questionnaire's dependability. Data from pilot testing were then encoded and processed using the Cronbach Alpha, with a value of 0.915, employing the software known as the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The instrument contained items whose factor loading was .50 or higher, and it rejected items whose factor loading was less than that. McDaniel (2012) asserts that a tool was deemed credible if its Cronbach alpha was .70 or higher. The questionnaire was responded to using the same 5-point Likert Scale described above, with scores of 5 through 1 corresponding to Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree, respectively, and interpreted using the same scale, wherein 4.21-5.00 was Very High, 3.41-4.20 was High, 2.61-3.40 was Moderate, 1.81-2.60 was Low, and 1.00-1.80 was Very Low. Data gathered were likewise encoded, tallied, tabulated, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software, a computer-based statistical analysis.

The experts' panel validated the instrument as a whole, and their feedback, recommendations, and comments were incorporated into the completed survey. To test the reliability of the questionnaire, it was pilot tested on thirty locals. Data from pilot testing were then encoded and processed using the Cronbach Alpha, with a value of 0.681, using the program known as the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The instrument contained items whose factor loading was .50 or higher, and it rejected those whose factor loading was less than that. McDaniel (2012) asserts that a tool was deemed credible if its Cronbach alpha was .70 or higher.

Participants in the aforementioned investigation were the 100 participants in the Ati-Atihan Festival during the academic year 2026-2027. The complete enumeration method of data collection was used. Permission to conduct the study was secured from the local government unit (LGU) of Kalibo, Aklan, as well as from relevant business associations and

community organizations involved in the Ati-Atihan Festival. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured of their voluntary participation and the confidentiality of their responses. The questionnaires were personally administered, and respondents were given approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete the survey, which was collected immediately afterward. After all the questionnaires were answered, these were retrieved, tallied, tabulated, and analyzed using the appropriate statistical tools. The participants were informed, before the data were collected, that they were taking part in a study, that there would be benefits when the study was completed, that their participation in the research was voluntary, and that procedures would be followed to ensure confidentiality, all in order to ensure ethical research.

The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize the profiles of the respondents and the levels of tourism commercialization and sustainable tourism practices. The mean was used to determine the average ratings for each dimension, while the standard deviation measured the variation of responses among participants (Field, 2018). To test the relationship between the variables, Pearson's *r* was employed, and a significance level of 0.05 was used for all statistical tests. All statistical procedures were conducted following standard guidelines for quantitative research, ensuring the accuracy, reliability, and validity of the findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results and discussion of the investigation conducted among the 100 participants of the Ati-Atihan Festival, comprising devotees, locals, foreigners, business owners, and LGU representatives, who were selected through purposive sampling in accordance with the survey-correlational research design employed in this study. Data were gathered using a researcher-made questionnaire measuring tourism commercialization and sustainable tourism practices, validated through expert panel review and pilot tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha. The results presented herein are grounded entirely in the data gathered from these respondents and are analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistics, specifically Pearson *r*, in order to directly address the objectives of the study, which sought to determine the extent of sustainable tourism practices, the level of tourism commercialization, and the relationship between these two variables during the Ati-Atihan Festival in Kalibo, Aklan. The discussion that follows integrates the descriptive findings with their statistical interpretation and situates them within the context of relevant scholarly literature on sustainable tourism, festival management, and tourism commercialization.

### Extent of sustainable tourism practices

The data revealed that the overall extent of sustainable tourism practices during the Ati-Atihan Festival is high ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ). When examined in terms of its specific dimensions, environmental conservation likewise obtained a high result ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ), as did cultural preservation ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ) and community participation ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ). These results, interpreted according to the scale wherein a mean range of 3.41 to 4.20 corresponds to a verbal interpretation of High, indicate that sustainable tourism practices are highly adopted throughout the course of the festival. This finding suggests that the organizers, the local government, and the various stakeholders involved are vigorously ensuring

sustainability in the management of tourism activities, such that the event is beneficial not only to visitors but also to the local community and environment.

The high rating obtained in the area of environmental conservation ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ) indicates a deliberate attempt to minimize the adverse environmental effects of the festival, which may be reflected in effective waste disposal mechanisms, cleanliness campaigns, and environmental sensitization efforts sustained throughout the celebration. Given that festivals of this scale are generally characterized by large amounts of waste generated by the influx of tourists, this high rating represents a positive indication of a serious commitment to preserving natural resources and maintaining the cleanliness of the festival venue. With respect to cultural preservation, the high result obtained ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ) demonstrates that the Ati-Atihan Festival continues to maintain its rich cultural heritage despite the pressures of tourism and modernization. This suggests that ancient traditions, rituals, costumes, and performances continue to be preserved and prominently demonstrated at the festival, with culture serving as the key factor that helps maintain the originality of the event and ensures that the development of tourism does not overshadow or diminish its original cultural identity. Furthermore, the high result recorded for community participation ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ) is an indicator of the active role that local residents play in the success of the festival, which may be projected through their performances, preparations, businesses, and other festival related activities. Community involvement is regarded as one of the major components of sustainable tourism because it guarantees that tourism gains are shared with local stakeholders and that the community feels a sense of ownership and pride in the event.

The consistently high ratings obtained across all components, namely environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community participation, signal a balanced attitude toward sustainability, implying that environmental, cultural, and social concerns are being addressed simultaneously, a condition that is fundamental in ensuring long term sustainability within the tourism industry. When these aspects are well integrated, festivals such as the Ati-Atihan can continue to draw tourists while retaining their cultural importance and minimizing negative effects. These results are consistent with the available literature on sustainable tourism and cultural festivals. Lopes and Hiray (2024) noted that cultural festivals are crucial in marketing tourism and maintaining cultural heritage as well as enhancing identity within communities, emphasizing that festivals serve as a medium of cultural expression and socialization that leads to the enhancement of tourism and the sustainability of cultures. Similarly, Baswarani and Novianto (2025) emphasized that the community is a major determinant in realizing sustainable tourism, since local communities are the direct participants in the conservation of cultural resources and tourism management, finding that greater community involvement leads to greater sustainable and inclusive tourism development. Likewise, a study on the Niyogyugan Festival (2024) showed that local festivals play an important role in preserving culture, promoting economic growth, and fostering collaboration, concluding that festivals can serve as an effective instrument of sustainable development when managed well, as they balance tourism advantages with cultural and social values. This is consistent with the present findings, as the Ati-Atihan Festival exhibits a high degree of sustainability in its tourism activities across every dimension examined.

#### Level of tourism commercialization

The results further showed that the overall level of tourism commercialization during the Ati-Atihan Festival is high ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ). In terms of its specific dimensions, marketing intensity obtained a high result ( $M = 4.04$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ), profit orientation likewise scored highly ( $M = 3.99$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ), and cultural commodification also obtained a high result ( $M = 3.99$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ). These findings indicate that the festival has developed not merely as a

cultural and religious celebration but also as a significant economic and tourism driven activity, with the high overall mean depicting the substantial involvement of business promotions, sponsorships, and tourism related activities that contribute to the growth and popularity of the event.

The high result obtained for marketing intensity ( $M = 4.04$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ) means that promotional activities are highly practiced during the festival, which may take the form of advertisements, branding, media coverage, and sponsorships intended to attract both local and international tourists. This active marketing presence indicates that the festival is being actively promoted as a tourism product, rendering it visible and competitive as a key cultural event, and further suggests that organizers and stakeholders recognize the value of strategic promotion in increasing tourist influx and improving the local economy. Regarding profit orientation, the high result ( $M = 3.99$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ) indicates that economic considerations are highly influential in the planning and execution of festival activities, suggesting that businesses, vendors, and organizers are strongly focused on generating income from the event. This profit-oriented tendency may be reflected in higher prices of goods and services, the expansion of commercial space, and the increased involvement of third-party businesses, and while this factor contributes to economic growth, it also underscores the growing role of commercialization in shaping the overall festival experience. Similarly, the high level of cultural commodification recorded ( $M = 3.99$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ) indicates that certain cultural aspects of the festival may be adjusted or tailored to attract tourists, implying that culture, performances, and symbols are packaged or presented in a manner intended to be more marketable. While this practice may assist in promoting and preserving culture by making it more visible and accessible, it may also pose a threat to authenticity when cultural practices are altered primarily to satisfy commercial interests.

These observations suggest that although the Ati-Atihan Festival possesses high tourism potential and generates substantial economic gain, it is simultaneously undergoing a high level of commercialization. The consistently high ratings across all components indicate that the festival is deeply immersed in commercial activities, underscoring the importance of striking a balance between economic objectives and the preservation of cultural integrity and sustainability. These findings are supported by existing literature on tourism commercialization. Su et al. (2021) described that tourism development is frequently associated with the commodification of culture, wherein cultural aspects are altered or packaged to satisfy tourism expectations, which aligns with the high level of cultural commodification found in the present study. Getz and Page (2020) likewise pointed out that festivals and events are largely dependent on marketing strategies and promotional efforts to draw tourists, which justifies the high extent of marketing intensity identified in the Ati-Atihan Festival. Moreover, Ioannides and Debbage (2020) emphasized that economic considerations are among the most prominent factors driving tourism activities, with profit generation serving as a focal element of tourism development, a perspective that contributes to understanding the elevated degree of profit orientation observed in this study. Taken together, these works affirm that the commercialization of tourism is a widespread and significant feature of festival-based tourism.

#### Relationship between sustainable tourism practices and tourism commercialization

To determine whether a significant relationship exists between the two principal variables of the study, Pearson  $r$  was employed at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings indicated that sustainable tourism practices have a very strong and significant correlation with tourism commercialization ( $r = 0.964^*$ ,  $Sig = 0.000$ ), with the asterisk denoting significance at

the 5% alpha level as indicated in the statistical notation  $p < 0.05$  significant @ 5% alpha level. Since the computed significance value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis stating that the relationship between sustainable tourism practices and tourism commercialization is not significant is consequently rejected. This result means that the level of commercialization in tourism is closely and positively linked with the level of sustainability in tourism throughout the course of the Ati-Atihan Festival.

This very strong positive correlation suggests that commercialization of tourism can exert a positive influence on the adoption of sustainable tourism practices within the festival context. As commercialization increases through marketing efforts, business participation, and revenue generation, additional resources and opportunities become available to finance sustainability initiatives such as environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community involvement programs. This implies that commercialization can serve as a beneficial rather than a detrimental force with respect to sustainability, provided that it is implemented effectively and responsibly. Moreover, the strength of this relationship suggests that stakeholders within the festival are able to integrate economic and sustainability objectives simultaneously, with commercialization potentially promoting better organization, planning, and increased investment in programs that facilitate sustainable tourism. This finding reflects a scenario in which tourism development and sustainability operate in tandem rather than in opposition, a relationship that carries meaningful implications for how festival management, particularly within culturally significant events such as the Ati-Atihan Festival, can be approached moving forward.

Taken together, the descriptive and inferential findings of this study demonstrate that the Ati-Atihan Festival exhibits a high overall extent of sustainable tourism practices ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ) across its environmental, cultural, and community dimensions, alongside a high overall level of tourism commercialization ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ) across its marketing, profit, and cultural commodification dimensions, and that these two variables are very strongly and significantly correlated ( $r = 0.964$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis of no significant relationship. These results directly address the objectives of the study by confirming that the extent of sustainability and the level of commercialization within the festival are not opposing forces but are instead closely and positively intertwined, suggesting that the economic dynamics generated through commercialization may be channeled to support, rather than undermine, environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community participation. This contributes to the broader body of literature on festival-based tourism by providing empirical evidence, grounded in the perceptions of devotees, locals, foreigners, business owners, and LGU representatives, that commercialization and sustainability can coexist within a culturally significant event when managed with appropriate balance and foresight. These findings collectively set the foundation for the concluding chapter, which synthesizes the study's overall implications, draws conclusions relative to its stated objectives, and offers recommendations for the continued sustainable management of tourism commercialization during the Ati-Atihan Festival and similar cultural celebrations.

## CONCLUSION

The present study assessed the sustainability of tourism practices and tourism commercialization during the Ati Atihan Festival in Kalibo, Aklan for the year 2026 using a survey correlational research design. Specifically, it examined the extent of sustainable tourism practices in terms of environmental sustainability, socio cultural sustainability, and economic sustainability, the level of tourism commercialization in terms of marketing intensity, profit orientation, and cultural commodification, and the significant relationship between these two variables. Data were gathered from 100 respondents representing local government units,

business owners, foreigners, devotees, and local residents through researcher made questionnaires consisting of 90 items measuring sustainable tourism practices and 30 items assessing tourism commercialization. The data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to determine the levels of the variables and Pearson  $r$  to examine the relationship between sustainable tourism practices and tourism commercialization at the 0.05 level of significance.

The findings revealed that sustainable tourism practices during the Ati Atihan Festival were implemented to a high extent across the dimensions of environmental sustainability, socio cultural sustainability, and economic sustainability. These results indicate that the festival is managed in a manner that supports responsible tourism by promoting environmental conservation through initiatives that reduce negative environmental impacts, preserving local traditions and cultural identity through socio cultural sustainability efforts, and strengthening local livelihoods and business opportunities through economically sustainable practices. The consistently high ratings across these dimensions suggest that sustainability has become an important consideration in the planning and management of the festival and contributes to its continued viability as a significant cultural and tourism event.

The study likewise found that tourism commercialization was high in terms of marketing intensity, profit orientation, and cultural commodification. This demonstrates that the Ati Atihan Festival has developed a strong commercial presence characterized by extensive marketing activities that enhance its visibility, profit oriented initiatives that stimulate economic growth, and the presentation of cultural elements in ways that attract visitors and generate tourism related income. While these commercial activities contribute substantially to the economic success of the festival, the findings also underscore the importance of maintaining an appropriate balance between commercial objectives and the preservation of the festival's cultural and religious identity to ensure that commercialization does not diminish its authenticity.

Furthermore, the correlation analysis established a very strong and statistically significant relationship between sustainable tourism practices and tourism commercialization. This finding indicates that higher levels of commercialization are associated with stronger implementation of sustainable tourism practices, suggesting that commercial activities can provide the financial resources, organizational support, and institutional capacity necessary to implement environmental programs, preserve cultural heritage, and strengthen community development initiatives. The results therefore demonstrate that sustainability and commercialization are not necessarily opposing forces but can complement one another when tourism development is guided by responsible planning, effective governance, and sound sustainability principles.

Overall, the findings affirm that the continued success of the Ati Atihan Festival depends on maintaining a balanced approach that integrates sustainable tourism practices with responsible commercialization. Environmental conservation, cultural preservation, community participation, and economic development should remain central priorities in festival management to ensure that tourism growth continues to benefit both present and future generations. In view of these findings, local government units are encouraged to strengthen environmental programs, improve waste management systems, expand ecofriendly initiatives, and reinforce policies and monitoring mechanisms that regulate tourism commercialization to prevent excessive commercial influence while preserving cultural authenticity. Business owners and sponsors should likewise adopt responsible business practices that balance profitability with environmental stewardship and respect for local traditions. Greater participation of community members and local stakeholders in planning and implementing

festival activities should also be encouraged to strengthen community ownership, promote cultural pride, and ensure equitable distribution of tourism benefits. Moreover, stricter transparency and equal implementation of business permit regulations during the Ati Atihan Festival are recommended to address perceptions of political favoritism and unequal business opportunities by ensuring fair and impartial enforcement of policies for all participants. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to expand this line of inquiry by examining additional variables, including tourist satisfaction, environmental impacts, and the long-term economic effects of festival tourism, to provide a broader understanding of sustainable tourism development and support more effective policy formulation and festival management in the future.

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