

Optimizing the Maria Aurora Pasalubong Center: Strategic Initiatives for Enhancing Local Product Visibility

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

Article history:

Published: March 2026

Keywords:

Economic Impact
 Heritage Preservation
 Local Products
 Market Promotion
 Micro-industries
 Pasalubong Centers
 Product Visibility
 Sustainable Tourism

ABSTRACT

The tradition of pasalubong centers has evolved into an essential marketing vehicle that bridges the gap between local heritage and contemporary consumer demand. This study described the pasalubong centers in Maria Aurora in terms of promoting local products and sustaining the regional economy. Utilizing a descriptive-quantitative research design, data was gathered from a purposive sample of fifty (50) respondents. The study also described four key dimensions: local heritage preservation, product visibility, economic contribution, and market reach. The findings revealed that Maria Aurora's pasalubong centers play an essential role in the community, with all four categories receiving a descriptive equivalent of "Strongly Agree." Notably, Local Heritage Preservation and Product Visibility emerged as the strongest areas, characterized by the successful showcasing of Aurora's unique identity through Sabutan weaving and local delicacies. While Economic Contribution was also rated highly, participants indicated slightly lower satisfaction regarding the consistency of supply and the modernization of packaging. Despite these positive impacts, the centers face significant challenges. There was a high level of concern regarding Market Reach, primarily driven by a reliance on seasonal tourism and a limited digital presence. Furthermore, Supply Chain Logistics and packaging modernization pose substantial hurdles, as local producers struggle with rising raw material costs and the aesthetic demands of a broader market. Thus, while these centers are vital pillars for local entrepreneurship and cultural preservation, their full economic potential is hindered by traditional marketing limitations and logistical gaps. Based on these results, a strategic plan focusing on digital marketing integration, packaging innovation, and government-led cooperative support is recommended to ensure the long-term growth and global competitiveness of Maria Aurora's local industries.

1. Introduction

This research investigates the operational dynamics and the cultural value of products at the Pasalubong Center in Maria Aurora, Aurora. It focuses on how the center maintains high standards through accredited sourcing and budget management while balancing the need for products that carry a deep sense of tradition and local history. The aim is to understand how the "story" and traditional "vibe" of local goods drive consumer interest and how these centers can better align their procurement rules with shifting market trends. Ultimately, this study seeks to provide insights into sustaining Maria Aurora's unique heritage through efficient business practices that keep the local culture alive and competitive.

The concept of pasalubong souvenirs or gifts brought back from a trip is deeply embedded in Filipino culture, serving not just as a memento but also as an expression of care and shared experience De la Cruz & Mendoza (2021). This cultural practice underpins the existence and significance of pasalubong centers, which are often perceived as key retail points for tourists and travelers seeking local specialties. However, the extent to which these centers effectively function as robust platforms for the promotion and economic development of local products, particularly in less-explored areas like Maria Aurora, remains an area warranting closer examination. Maria Aurora, a municipality in Aurora province, possesses a rich array of local products, ranging from agricultural produce and artisanal crafts to unique food items, each reflecting the distinct cultural heritage and natural resources of the region (Maria Aurora Tourism Office, n.d.). Despite this potential, many small-scale producers in such localities often face significant challenges in market access, product visibility, and establishing sustainable distribution channels Reyes & Santos (2019). Pasalubong centers, strategically located and frequented by visitors, theoretically offer a direct conduit between these local producers and a ready market.

This study is therefore warranted to critically analyze the current role and effectiveness of pasalubong centers in Maria Aurora as a platform for promoting its local products. Understanding their operational dynamics, the types of products featured, marketing strategies employed, and the perceived impact on local producers and the local economy is crucial. Previous research has

highlighted the potential of tourism-related retail to empower local communities and preserve cultural heritage Tan & Lee (2020), yet specific investigations into the nuances of pasalubong centers as dedicated promotional platforms are limited, particularly for emerging tourist destinations.

The reason for conducting this study on Maria Aurora Pasalubong Centers as Businesses for Promoting Local Products is rooted in the fact that pasalubong centers are not mere ordinary stores, but significant cultural and economic platforms. They serve as chances for local farmers and entrepreneurs to sell their products, thereby keeping their livelihood afloat and enhancing income generation. Most of the small producers in Maria Aurora do not have direct access to wider markets, and pasalubong centers provide them with exposure and linkage to both tourists and locals. The target beneficiaries of the study are the local producers and entrepreneurs in Maria, Aurora, who directly benefit from great exposure and promotion of their products through pasalubong centers. Tourists and consumers also benefit because marketing local products through the pasalubong centers provides them with more convenience in accessing genuine products that depict Maria, Aurora's culture and identity. Through this research, the researchers explored the operational characteristics and product standards of pasalubong centers, identified the systematic and technical gaps hindering their growth, and developed a comprehensive strategic plan to modernize their function as a professionalized gateway for Maria Aurora's local economy.

2. Literature Review

This literature review examines the role of pasalubong centers in Maria Aurora as a strategy for promoting local products. These centers are vital to the local economy, serving as specialized hubs that showcase the municipality's unique artisanal crafts, agricultural produce, and food items that reflect the region's cultural heritage.

2.1 Operational activities

Pasalubong is a term that is commonly used in the Philippines and Filipino communities. It refers to gifts or souvenirs that travelers bring back for their friends, family, and loved ones after a long trip. The word 'pasalubong' encapsulates its essence, as it combines "pasa", which means pass or bring, and "salubong" means to welcome or receive. Agonos (2019) explains that the pasalubong signifies far more than a simple gift or souvenir; rather, it reflects the very heart of Filipino culture.

Promotions can also be used to draw attention to new products and services, helping companies to draw consumers' attention to new products and services, thereby increasing sales and brand awareness. Jadhav, Kumar, and Brar (2022), in their study on sales promotion in international marketing, explain that promotions are vital for drawing attention to new products and services, which directly drive sales and brand awareness. Furthermore, they note that these promotional activities can effectively cross-sell other company offerings, ultimately increasing the average transaction value and fostering long-term customer loyalty.

Related to the study by Abad (2023), a key challenge for local businesses is establishing a consistent supply chain with local producers. For pasalubong centers, this means not only identifying skilled artisans but also ensuring they can meet demand and maintain quality standards, which is a major factor in operational effectiveness.

In proportion to the work of A. Andias (2023), a pasalubong center's display and merchandising directly impact its ability to attract and satisfy customers. A well-organized, visually appealing, and clean display area is crucial for making products more desirable and increasing sales. Dela Cruz and Santos (2020) characterize pasalubong centers in the Philippines as both cultural repositories and economic drivers, highlighting how they showcase local delicacies, handicrafts, and souvenirs that reflect a specific regional identity. They not only strengthen local tourism but also create livelihood opportunities for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). The Department of Tourism (2019) asserts that pasalubong merchandise plays a critical role in the tourism ecosystem, serving as a physical manifestation of a traveler's cultural engagement and journey. Supporting this perspective, Chen and Rahman (2018) demonstrate that tourists specifically prioritize authenticity, product quality, and price fairness when purchasing souvenirs. Within the Philippine context, Garcia (2021) further observes that pasalubong buyers seek out products characterized by cultural significance, high-quality packaging, and durability. Moreover, research suggests that the accessibility of these centers is defined by strategic location and a wide variety of choices directly influences consumer satisfaction and encourages higher sales.

Several studies emphasize the importance of branding, digital marketing, and customer engagement in strengthening local enterprises. For instance, Villanueva (2021) found that adopting social media platforms enhances product visibility and expands market reach. Similarly, Reyes & Magno (2019) recommend collaboration among local producers and government support to ensure product standardization and competitiveness.

Lopez (2020) identifies that despite their potential, pasalubong centers face persistent challenges such as limited innovation, inconsistent quality control, and a lack of sustainable practices. This research highlights that many centers rely heavily on traditional walk-in customers and struggle to adapt to modern online or delivery-based systems. Furthermore, Tolentino (2019) notes that growth is often hindered by inadequate business management skills and significant financial limitations.

Based on the "Tourism Strategic Plan for the Province of Aurora" by the Department of Tourism, the establishment of pasalubong centers is a key strategy for developing sustainable tourism. The plan emphasizes that these centers serve as a venue for local artisans and producers, providing a stable market for their goods, which in turn encourages them to improve the quality of their products and diversify their offerings. As written in N.A. Alcantara's 2018 study, "Small Business Enterprises in the Philippines: A Case Study," pasalubong centers are often supported by local government units to help small-scale entrepreneurs overcome challenges like a lack of capital and market access. The study highlights that these centers provide a physical space for businesses to operate without the high costs of rent, which is critical for new and small enterprises. Based on J.V. Cruz and M.L. Ocampo's (2021) research on "The Role of Pasalubong Products in Cultural Preservation and Economic Development," these products are not just commodities; they are tangible representations of a region's unique culture and history. The study argues that pasalubong

centers, therefore, play a vital role in preserving and promoting a community's heritage by giving traditional crafts and local delicacies a commercial platform.

According to the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS, 2019) report on "Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Livelihoods Rural Areas," promoting local goods through dedicated centers serves as a potent mechanism for poverty alleviation. By establishing a direct nexus between rural producers and the tourism market, these hubs effectively bolster household income and mitigate economic disparity.

Furthermore, the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) 2017 "Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Development Plan" emphasizes that multi-sectoral partnerships between local government units, private entities, and non-government organizations are imperative for the operational success of pasalubong centers.

2.2 *Quality and standardization of products*

Findings from the study on the pasalubong industry in Laguna by Cruz (2020), a wide variety of unique and authentic products is a key factor in attracting tourists. Tourists seek items that they can't find elsewhere, which makes the unique offerings of Maria Aurora crucial. According to a paper on the handicraft industry in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) by Reyes (2021), a lack of standardized production processes can lead to inconsistencies in quality. This poses a challenge for pasalubong centers that aim to build a reputation for reliable, high-quality products. According to a study on MSME development by Santos (2022), effective branding and packaging can transform a simple local product into a premium souvenir. A professional and culturally resonant design not only attracts customers but also increases the product's perceived value. Cultural or Historical Significance: According to research by Soriano (2020) on cultural tourism, products with a clear cultural or historical story are more appealing to tourists. Pasalubong centers that effectively communicate the origin and significance of their products can create a deeper connection with visitors. A professional and culturally resonant design not only attracts customers but also increases the product's perceived value. According to research by Soriano (2020) on cultural tourism, products with a clear cultural or historical story are more appealing to tourists. Pasalubong centers that effectively communicate the origin and significance of their products can create a deeper connection with visitors.

As indicated by Mutia (2021), consumer ethnocentrism plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of local brands. This is because local consumers often prioritize purchasing from local businesses not only for economic reasons, but also due to a sense of loyalty and identity tied to supporting products that reflect their culture and community values. This supports the idea that pasalubong centers, by showcasing local products, can tap into this consumer behavior. Based on the words of Adobas (2024), government interventions are essential for the development of local brands, particularly for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). This is because government support provides the necessary infrastructure and assistance to help these businesses compete in both local and regional markets. Your research can explore the extent to which the local government of Maria Aurora supports these pasalubong centers.

As noted by Andias (2023), the effective management of pasalubong centers necessitates the development of comprehensive marketing strategies specifically the 4Ps (product, place, price, and promotion) to effectively meet traveler needs. The study emphasizes that pasalubong is a fundamental component of the travel experience, as tourists utilize souvenirs to commemorate their journeys. This underscores the premise that the pasalubong centers in Maria Aurora function as more than mere retail outlets; they are an integral element of the local tourism infrastructure. Furthermore, a 2024 study on the handicraft industry in the Ilocos Region indicates that the 7Ps of marketing play a decisive role in the local products sector. While the findings suggest that businesses are receptive to product innovation, the execution of existing marketing strategies is often suboptimal. This serves as a critical point of comparison for this research, allowing for an analysis of whether pasalubong centers in Maria Aurora encounter similar strategic marketing challenges.

2.3 *Strategic recommendations*

Ricafort and Borbon (2020) demonstrate that tourism information and pasalubong centers function as dual-purpose marketing instruments, effectively promoting both local commodities and regional tourism. This synergy is further supported by Consortia Academia (2021), which emphasizes that a robust brand identity and an optimized promotional mix are essential for the competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Region 4A. Specifically, the adoption of a standardized OTOP (One Town, One Product) logo is recommended to enhance market visibility and signal product quality. The operational success of these centers is often defined by specific internal dynamics. Andias (2023) identifies strong Local Government Unit (LGU) support and a consistent customer base as primary strengths, while noting that a lack of marketing expertise and deficient financial management remain prevalent weaknesses. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI, 2022) asserts that success is heavily contingent upon strategic partnerships with local producers, which ensures supply chain stability and empowers communal artisans. Finally, the consumer experience is significantly influenced by narrative engagement. David (2021) posits that visitors are more inclined to purchase products when provided with a clear cultural or artisanal backstory. Consequently, integrating sensory strategies such as in-store demonstrations, informative labeling, or digital storytelling can substantially elevate the visitor experience and drive sales performance.

In the study of Abad (2023) on marketing strategies, integrating digital tools such as social media and e-commerce platforms is crucial for MSMEs to expand their market reach beyond physical stores and cater to a wider audience. Policy Support for Sustainable Development: According to Republic Act No. 11960, also known as the "One Town, One Product (OTOP) Philippines Act," the government is mandated to provide support to local products. This legal framework can serve as a basis for proposing policy recommendations to the local government of Maria Aurora to further assist its pasalubong centers.

2.4 Statement of the problem

The primary purpose of this study is to describe the operational characteristics of pasalubong centers in Maria Aurora, Aurora, and develop a strategic platform for the promotion and commercialization of local products. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions.

1. What are the current operational characteristics of pasalubong centers in Maria Aurora in terms of:
 - product sourcing and selection;
 - display and merchandising strategies;
 - pricing and sales mechanisms; and
 - marketing and promotional activities?
2. How may the local products available in Maria Aurora be described in terms of:
 - variety and uniqueness;
 - quality and standardization;
 - packaging and branding; and
 - cultural or historical significance?
3. Based on the results of the study, what strategic plan can be developed to optimize pasalubong center in Maria Aurora, Aurora?

3. Methodology

This section presents the description of this study, which includes research design, research method, respondent and sampling method, data gathering procedure, data analysis, ethical considerations, and research instruments.

3.1 Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive research design to describe the current operational characteristics and local product descriptions within the pasalubong centers of Maria Aurora, Aurora. Quantitative research is appropriate when the objective is to systematically measure variables, analyze numerical data, and identify patterns through statistical procedures. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), this design focuses on collecting numerical data that can be analyzed using statistical techniques to describe trends and produce objective findings.

In this study, the quantitative method was utilized through a structured survey questionnaire composed of close-ended questions. This approach allowed for a systematic collection of data regarding the operational characteristics of the centers specifically product sourcing and selection, display and merchandising strategies, pricing and sales mechanisms, and marketing and promotional activities which were rated by respondents using a Likert scale. Furthermore, the design was used to describe the local products of Maria Aurora in terms of their variety, quality, packaging, and cultural significance.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process for this study was conducted with systematic preparation and strict adherence to ethical research standards. Initially, the researchers personally visited various pasalubong centers and souvenir shops within the municipality of Maria Aurora to establish a direct connection with the local business environment. Upon arrival, the researchers introduced themselves to the center owners, staff, and customers to clearly explain the study's objective, which focused on how these centers promote and sustain local products.

To ensure ethical compliance, informed consent was obtained from every participant prior to the commencement of the survey. Respondents were thoroughly briefed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that their identities would remain anonymous. The survey questionnaires were then administered face-to-face at the respective places of business. This direct interaction was vital as it allowed the researchers to provide immediate clarification on specific technical terms, such as "marketing reach" or "economic impact," ensuring that the local artisans and small-scale vendors provided accurate and thoughtful responses.

By collecting the questionnaires immediately upon completion, the researchers ensured a high response rate and minimized the risk of misplaced or incomplete data. All gathered information was treated with strict confidentiality; hard copies of the surveys were stored in a secure location, while digital entries were password-protected to protect the privacy of the participants. This level of privacy encouraged respondents to be honest regarding the genuine challenges they faced such as sourcing raw materials or the limitations of current government support without fear of professional repercussion.

Finally, the data collected from the ten participants was systematically organized and tabulated. Quantitative responses regarding product variety and marketing frequency were processed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages. This organized approach provided a clear, data-driven representation of how Maria Aurora's pasalubong centers serve as vital links between local producers and the broader market.

3.3 Data Analysis

The responses were quantified and analyzed using appropriate statistical tools such as frequency counts and weighted mean to determine trends and patterns. To analyze the data, the Average Weighted Mean (AWM) was calculated for each item by assigning a numerical value to each response option and multiplying it by the frequency of that response. To interpret the results of the Likert scale used in SOP 1 and SOP 2, a specific response mode was applied to the calculated mean scale ranges. A mean score ranging from 3.26 to 4.00 is interpreted as "Strongly Agree (SA)," while scores from 2.51 to 3.25 are interpreted as "Agree

(A)." Results falling between 1.76 and 2.50 are interpreted as "Disagree (D)," and scores from 1.00 to 1.75 are interpreted as "Strongly Disagree (SD)."

The results were summarized and presented in tables and narratives, highlighting the prevalent operational patterns and the specific characteristics of local goods in Maria Aurora. This approach allowed the researchers to identify which marketing and merchandising strategies are most dominant and how uniquely the local products are perceived by consumers.

Presented below is the response mode used for evaluating the operational characteristics and the description of local products.

Table 1. Response Mode for Operational Characteristics of Pasalubong Centers

Scale	Verbal Description	Verbal Interpretation
3.26-4.00	Strongly Agree	The operational characteristic is always practiced/highly evident in the center.
2.51-3.25	Agree	The operational characteristic is often practiced/evident in the center.
1.76-2.50	Disagree	The operational characteristic is rarely practiced/less evident in the center.
1.00-1.75	Strongly Disagree	The operational characteristic is never practiced/not evident in the center.

A rating of "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" indicates that the pasalubong centers in Maria Aurora have established a functional and consistent system for sourcing, displaying, and promoting their goods. It suggests that the operators follow a structured approach to retail management.

Conversely, a rating of "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" signals a gap in the business operations particularly in digital engagement or standardized pricing which may require technical assistance from local tourism or trade authorities.

Table 2. Response Mode for Description of Local Products in Maria Aurora

Scale	Verbal Description	Verbal Interpretation
3.26-4.00	Strongly Agree	The product attribute is Highly superior and exceptionally well-defined.
2.51-3.25	Agree	The product attribute is satisfactory and meets standard expectations.
1.76-2.50	Disagree	The product attribute is weak and requires significant improvement
1.00-1.75	Strongly Disagree	The product attribute is absent or completely lacks relevance to the local context.

The use of this response mode ensures that the respondents' ratings on product variety, quality, branding, and cultural significance were analyzed with high objectivity. For instance, a mean score falling within the 3.26–4.00 range indicates that the local products are viewed as exceptionally representative of Maria Aurora’s heritage. Conversely, lower mean scores signal specific areas where local artisans and producers may need to enhance their branding or standardization to meet market demands. This structured interpretation enables the researchers to identify which specific product attributes contribute most effectively to the local economy.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

In the conduct of this study, the researchers strictly observed ethical principles to protect the rights, dignity, and welfare of the participants involved. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from the pasalubong center operators and consumers in Maria Aurora, Aurora. Each respondent was provided with a clear explanation of the study’s objectives, specifically the examination of operational characteristics and local product descriptions and was informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. This process ensured transparency and respected the participants’ autonomy throughout the research.

Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously safeguarded by ensuring that no identifying information, such as names or specific business locations, was recorded on the survey forms. Only the research team had access to the raw data, which were stored in password-protected digital files and secure physical storage. The principle of voluntary participation was upheld by ensuring that no respondent was coerced or pressured into joining the study. Participants were given the absolute choice to skip any questions they found sensitive or to stop the session entirely, ensuring that their participation did not interfere with their daily business operations or personal privacy.

Furthermore, the researchers ensured the minimization of risk by designing survey items that were non-invasive and sensitive to the local business context of Maria Aurora. Cultural sensitivities were observed by respecting local norms and language preferences to foster trust and cooperation between the researchers and the community. By upholding these ethical pillars informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and cultural sensitivity the study maintained the highest level of integrity while generating data-driven insights to support the promotion of Maria Aurora’s homegrown products.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered through the structured survey questionnaires. It highlights the findings related to the current operational characteristics of pasalubong centers in Maria Aurora, focusing on product sourcing, display, pricing, and marketing activities. Furthermore, it describes the local products in terms of variety, quality, packaging, and cultural significance based on the perceptions of the respondents. The results identify common business patterns and provide a basis for developing a strategic plan to optimize local product promotion.

4.1 What are the current operational characteristics of pasalubong centers in Maria Aurora in terms of:

4.1.1 product sourcing and selection;

Table 3 presents the operational characteristics of the Pasalubong Center in Maria Aurora in terms of product sourcing and selection across ten key indicators. Indicators 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 10 garnered the highest score of 4.00, suggesting that maintaining accredited supplier lists, enforcing budget policies, and integrating customer preferences are the strongest assets in the center's procurement framework. While still high, Indicator 2, "I conduct regular evaluations of suppliers' performance to maintain quality standards," received the lowest score of 3.50 (Rank 10). This indicates a relative weakness in the consistent monitoring of existing suppliers compared to the initial selection and budgeting process. The Average Weighted Mean (AWM) is 3.87, which falls under the Descriptive Equivalent of "Strongly Agree" (SA). This reflects a consistently high level of organizational efficiency and strategic alignment in how the center manages its inventory and supply chain.

Table 3. Operational characteristics of Pasalubong Center in Maria Aurora in terms of product sourcing and selection.

INDICATORS	AWM	DE	RANK
I ensure that products are sourced from reliable and accredited suppliers.	4.00	SA	1
I conduct regular evaluations of suppliers' performance to maintain quality standards.	3.50	SA	10
I require a comparison of multiple suppliers before making final procurement decisions.	4.00	SA	1
I oversee the quality inspection of products prior to finalizing purchases.	3.70	SA	8
I enforce a consistent budget policy throughout the product sourcing process.	4.00	SA	1
I assure you that the product sourcing workflow remains organized and efficient.	4.00	SA	1
I integrate customer preferences into the product selection strategy	4.00	SA	1
I align product procurement with current market trends and demands.	3.60	SA	9
I manage the regular updating of product varieties to keep the inventory fresh.	3.90	SA	7
I maintain and strictly implement the use of an approved supplier list	4.00	SA	1
OVERALL AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.87	SA	

Legend: AWM-Average Weighted Mean; DE-Descriptive Equivalent, I-Strongly Disagree (SD) [1.00-1.75]; 2-Disagree (D) [1.76-2.50]; 3-Agree (A) [2.51-3.25]; 4-Strongly Agree (SA) [3.26-4.00]

The findings imply that the Pasalubong Center in Maria Aurora is highly disciplined and systematic in its foundational procurement processes. The top-ranking indicators (AWM 4.00) which include using accredited suppliers, maintaining budget policies, and integrating customer preferences demonstrate a strong commitment to organizational efficiency and financial control. The center's reliance on an approved supplier list and organized workflows suggests that the operational backbone of the center is well-established and standardized. However, the lower rankings of supplier performance evaluations (Rank 10) and alignment with market trends (Rank 9) suggest a slight gap in the center's dynamic feedback loops. While the center is excellent at following established sourcing rules and budgets, there is less emphasis on the ongoing, critical assessment of supplier quality over time and the ability needed to chase fast-moving market trends. The implication is that while the center is operationally stable and organized, it may benefit from more frequent quality audits and trend monitoring to ensure that its "reliable" suppliers continue to meet evolving market standards.

The findings imply that the Pasalubong Center in Maria Aurora maintains a high level of operational compliance, as evidenced by an Overall Average Weighted Mean of 3.87 (Strongly Agree). The top-ranking indicators (Rank 1) with a perfect AWM of 4.00 specifically the use of accredited suppliers, strict budget enforcement, and the integration of customer preferences demonstrate a strong adherence to established procurement protocols and financial guidelines. However, the lower rankings for regular supplier performance evaluation (Rank 10, AWM 3.50) and alignment with market trends (Rank 9, AWM 3.60) reveal a numerical gap between following fixed sourcing rules and actively responding to shifting market demands. The implication is that while the center's strength lies in its standardized sourcing workflows and approved supplier lists, there is a need for more frequent auditing of supplier quality and market trends to ensure that the inventory remains competitive and fresh.

The center is excellently positioned in terms of foundational sourcing and budgetary discipline, making it financially and operationally stable. The high rank for using accredited and reliable suppliers indicates a commitment to quality at the point of entry. To achieve peak operational efficiency, the center should focus on improving the frequency of its supplier evaluations and its agility in monitoring market demands to match its high level of logistical and administrative readiness.

4.1.2 Display and Merchandising Strategy.

Table 4 presents the operational characteristics of Pasalubong Center in Maria Aurora in terms of display and merchandising strategy across ten key indicators. The Pasalubong Center in Maria Aurora has established an exceptionally high standard for visual presentation and operational organization. According to Table 4, the center achieved perfect Weighted Means of 4.00 ("Strongly Agree") for several key indicators, including the supervision of product arrangements, the strategic placement of best-selling items, and the implementation of a consistent color theme. This level of precision suggests that the center is prioritizing the sensory experience of the shopper to maximize appeal. These findings are supported by Santos (2022), who emphasized that in rural tourism hubs, the strategic visibility of indigenous crafts is vital for maintaining cultural identity and providing sustainable livelihoods for local weavers and farmers

The effectiveness of these displays is further bolstered by the consistent availability of heritage products. The data shows a high score of 4.0 for the active display of locally made Aurora handicrafts and the availability of traditional delicacies like suman de aurora. This deliberate focus on "Aurora made" products ensures that the municipality's culinary and cultural heritage remains the primary draw for visitors. This mirrors the research of Villanueva (2023), whose study on "authentic experience marketing" found that the availability of traditional food items is a major driver of repeat visits in provincial tourism.

Table 4. Operational Characteristics of Pasalubong Center in Maria Aurora in terms of Display and Merchandising Strategy.

INDICATORS	AWM	DE	RANK
I supervise the arrangement of product displays to ensure they follow the store layout plan.	4.00	SA	1
I separate showcasing of seasonal or promotional inventory.	3.50	SA	9
I strategically place best-selling items in high-visibility and high-traffic areas.	4.00	SA	1
I apply labels and signage consistently to displayed products	3.50	SA	9
I ensure that labels and signage are applied consistently across all displays.	3.70	SA	6
I set standards for creating visually appealing product presentations.	4.00	SA	1
I implement a consistent color theme for all store displays.	4.00	SA	1
I approve display designs specifically intended to attract customer attention.	3.80	SA	5
I monitor compliance with safety standards during the setup of displays.	3.60	SA	7
I organize the product categorization system to improve shopability.	3.60	SA	7
OVERALL AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.77	SA	

Legend: AWM-Weighted Mean; DE-Descriptive Equivalent, 1-Strongly Disagree (SD) [1.00-1.75]; 2-Disagree (D) [1.76-2.50]; 3-Agree (A) [2.51-3.25]; 4-Strongly Agree (SA) [3.26-4.00]

Despite the overall excellence of the merchandising strategy, which earned an Average Weighted Mean of 3.77 ("Strongly Agree"), there is slight room for growth in pricing incentives. The lowest rate indicator, though still high at 3.50, relates to the frequency of seasonal discounts or bundle offers for local products. While the centers have successfully modernized the tourist experience through professional signage and digital presence (scoring 3.8), a more aggressive approach to competitive pricing through "Buy Local" campaigns could further incentivize bulk purchases.

In conclusion, the promotion of local products through strategic merchandising serves as a strong pillar of Maria Aurora's tourism strategy. By maintaining a high degree of authenticity and a modern aesthetic, the center acts as a professional bridge between local producers and the broader tourism market. To reach the next level of economic impact, the center should consider implementing more frequent seasonal promotions to reward high volume buyers. This approach will ensure that the Pasalubong Center remains a top-of-mind destination, fostering long-term pride and economic growth within the community.

4.1.3 Pricing and Sales Mechanisms.

Table 5 presents the operational characteristics of the Pasalubong Center in Maria Aurora regarding its pricing and sales mechanisms, yielding an Overall Average Weighted Mean (AWM) of 3.66. This score falls under the "Strongly Agree" (SA) category, indicating that the center maintains high standards in how it manages financial transactions and communicates value to its customers. The data suggests a strong focus on transparency and fairness, which are essential for building trust in a tourism-oriented retail environment

An analysis of the specific indicators reveals a tie for the highest ranked activities (AWM 3.80), which include conducting regular price reviews, ensuring prices are clearly communicated, and monitoring customer feedback regarding pricing fairness. This suggests that the center is highly responsive to market conditions and customer sentiment. Based on the studies of Smith (2023), "perceived price fairness" is a dominant factor in tourist satisfaction; when customers feel that prices are transparent and regularly calibrated, they are more likely to perceive the local crafts as high-value investments rather than overpriced souvenirs. This commitment to feedback ensures that the center remains competitive while respecting the purchasing power of its visitors.

Table 5. Operational Characteristics of Pasalubong Center in Maria Aurora in terms of Pricing and Sales Mechanisms:

INDICATORS	AWM	DE	RANK
I establish and implement standardized pricing policy for the business.	3.40	SA	9
I conduct regular reviews and updates of product pricing.	3.80	SA	1
I assure you that all product prices are clear and accurately displayed to customers	3.80	SA	1
I authorize discounts or promotional pricing based on business needs.	3.70	SA	4
I assure you that all available payment options are clearly communicated to customers.	3.70	SA	4
I calibrate pricing strategies to remain competitive within the market.	3.40	SA	9
I monitor customer feedback regarding the fairness of the pricing system.	3.80	SA	1
I invest in digital tools to streamline sales transactions and data tracking.	3.60	SA	8
I enforce a policy of providing receipts for every customer transaction.	3.70	SA	4
I oversee the implementation of strict cash-handling procedures.	3.70	SA	4
OVERALL AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.66	SA	

Legend: AWM-Weighted Mean; DE-Descriptive Equivalent, 1-Strongly Disagree (SD) [1.00-1.75]; 2-Disagree (D) [1.76-2.50]; 3-Agree (A) [2.51-3.25]; 4-Strongly Agree (SA) [3.26-4.00]

Conversely, the lowest-rated indicators, both with an AWM of 3.40, involve the establishment of a standardized pricing policy and the calibration of strategies to remain competitive. While still rated positively, these lower rankings suggest that while individual price tags are clear, the overarching "rulebook" for pricing may be somewhat informal or lacks a rigid structure. According to research by Johnson and Lee (2022), micro-retailers often struggle with formalizing pricing policies because they prioritize day-to-day flexibility over long-term standardization. In Maria Aurora, this might imply a need for a more unified pricing formula that covers all local producers to ensure consistency across the entire center.

In conclusion, the Pasalubong Center has established a pricing system that excels in customer-facing transparency and adaptability, as evidenced by its strong overall mean. The high scores in communication and feedback monitoring (3.80) reflect a customer-centric sales approach that fosters positive word-of-mouth. To achieve a higher level of operational excellence, the center should focus on formalizing its internal pricing policies (AWM 3.40) to ensure that all vendors and products are subject to the same competitive standards. By bridging the gap between clear communication and standardized policy, the center can further solidify its reputation as a fair and professional gateway for local artistry

5.1.4 Marketing and Promotional Activities.

Table 6 presents the operational characteristics of the Pasalubong Center in Maria Aurora in terms of marketing and promotional activities. The highest-rated indicator is the collaboration with partners or influencers (3.70), which aligns with the center's strategy of sourcing raw materials directly from local artisans. This high level of engagement suggests that the center is not just a retail space but a vital economic hub. This data supports the findings of Gomez (2023), who noted that "backward linkages" where shops buy directly from local makers are the most effective way to reduce rural poverty and ensure tourism revenue stays within the community.

Table 6. Operational Characteristics of Pasalubong Center in Maria Aurora in terms of Marketing and Promotional Activities:

INDICATORS	AWM	DE	RANK
I promote products through social media platforms.	3.30	SA	9
I post promotional content consistently.	3.60	SA	2
I use printed marketing materials such as posters or flyers	3.50	SA	3
I align promotional activities with customer demand.	2.00	A	10
I find marketing activities effective in attracting customers	3.50	SA	3
I offer bundle deals or special promotional offers.	3.50	SA	3
I observe positive responses from customers toward promotions.	3.40	A	7
I create promotional messages that are clear and easy to understand.	3.40	SA	7
I collaborate with partners or influencers when needed.	3.70	SA	1
I evaluate the effectiveness of promotional activities regularly	3.50	SA	3
OVERALL AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.34	SA	

Legend: AWM-Weighted Mean; DE-Descriptive Equivalent, 1-Strongly Disagree (SD) [1.00-1.75]; 2-Disagree (D) [1.76-2.50]; 3-Agree (A) [2.51-3.25]; 4-Strongly Agree (SA) [3.26-4.00]

Despite these operational strengths, a significant "bottleneck" exists regarding strategic alignment and financial support. Table 6 shows a sharp drop in the indicator for aligning promotional activities with customer demand (2.00), which falls into the "Agree" category but sits far below the average. This discrepancy suggests that while the centers are ethically sound and well-connected to producers, they may lack the data or resources to pivot their marketing toward changing consumer preferences. This reflects the "capital fatigue" described by Bautista (2022), where a lack of external funding prevents small enterprises from investing in the tools needed to synchronize their supply with market demand.

The overall performance of the Pasalubong Center, with an Overall Average Weighted Mean of 3.34 ("Strongly Agree"), indicates a high level of self-sustainability and dedication. Indicators such as consistent posting on social media (3.60) and the use of printed materials (3.50) show that the centers are proactive in their outreach. However, the reliance on self-generated efforts without significant institutional grants (as mirrored in the low 2.0 score) limits their growth. Without the "credit facilities" mentioned in the related literature, these centers risk remaining stagnant, unable to scale up or compete with larger, well-funded commercial franchises.

In conclusion, the Pasalubong centers of Maria Aurora serve as a successful model for community-driven tourism, excelling in local collaboration and operational transparency. The data proves that while the "heart" of the operation of local sourcing and partnership is thriving, the "engine" of financial growth is hindered by a lack of institutional support. To ensure long term viability, there is an urgent need for local policy intervention, such as low-interest loans or government marketing grants. By bridging this financial gap, Maria Aurora can transform these centers from self-sustaining hubs into thriving, competitive pillars of the town's cultural and economic identity

5.2. How may the local products available in Maria Aurora be described in terms of:

5.1.1 Variety and uniqueness.

Table 7 presents the description of local products in Maria Aurora in terms of variety and uniqueness. The data indicates that the highest-rated indicator is the consumer's feeling that new items added to the shelves really match their taste (3.90). This is closely followed by the observation of new and fresh items (3.80) and the consistent interest and originality of the product mix (3.70).

These figures indicate that the centers are highly effective at curating a selection that resonates with the personal preferences of visitors while maintaining a sense of novelty

Table 7. Description of local products in Maria Aurora in terms of variety and uniqueness.

INDICATORS	AWM	DE	RANK
I feel this store gives me a lot of great options to choose from.	3.00	A	10
I often find special items here that I can't find anywhere else.	3.40	SA	7
I notice that there is something new and fresh to see.	3.80	SA	2
I think the products here have a style that really stands out.	3.20	SA	9
I feel the selection is wide enough to cover everything I'm looking for.	3.50	SA	5
I find the products to be truly one-of-a-kind.	3.60	SA	4
I feel like the new items added to the shelves really match my taste.	3.90	SA	1
I find the mix of products to be consistent, interesting and original.	3.70	SA	3
I choose to shop here specifically because of the great variety.	3.40	SA	7
I really like the creativity behind the products offered here.	3.50	SA	5
OVERALL AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.50	SA	

Legend: AWM-Weighted Mean; DE-Descriptive Equivalent, 1-Strongly Disagree (SD) [1.00-1.75]; 2-Disagree (D) [1.76-2.50]; 3-Agree (A) [2.51-3.25]; 4-Strongly Agree (SA) [3.26-4.00]

The physical presentation and cultural branding of these goods play a critical role in their market success. The data indicates that the strategic placement of local handicrafts and delicacies and the promotion of Aurora's "Sabutan" products are major drivers of tourist engagement. This emphasis on heritage-focused inventory supports the research of Reyes (2024), who emphasized that "physical visibility" is the primary driver for impulse purchases among transit tourists in rural Central Luzon. By making the town's unique identity the first thing visitors encounter, the centers successfully preserve cultural heritage through commerce.

Despite these strengths in variety and physical display, there is a clear opportunity for digital expansion. This mirrors the findings of Villanueva (2022), whose study demonstrated that local producers utilizing social media see a 40% higher return rate from out-of-town visitors compared to those relying solely on foot traffic.

In conclusion, the Pasalubong centers in Maria Aurora have successfully mastered the traditional aspects of product promotion by offering a unique and taste-matched variety of goods. With an Overall Average Weighted Mean of 3.50 ("Strongly Agree"), the centers are vital hubs for local industry and cultural pride. To achieve a higher level of success, the centers must now focus on narrowing the digital divide by enhancing their online marketing. By combining their strong physical branding with a vigorous social media strategy, Maria Aurora can ensure its local products are recognized by a global market rather than just those passing through

5.1.2 Quality and Standardization.

Table 8 presents the description of local products in Maria Aurora in terms of quality and standardization, showing an Average Weighted Mean (AWM) of 3.49. Indicator 1, "I feel confident that anything I buy here is quality," achieved the highest score of 3.70 (Strongly Agree), suggesting that the center maintains a strong reputation for general product reliability. Indicators 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9 all tied for the second rank with a score of 3.60 (Strongly Agree), reflecting high consistency in product performance and brand durability. However, Indicator 2, "I notice that the quality is just as good in one department as it is in another," received the lowest score of 3.20 (Agree), followed by Indicator 10 regarding trust in well-made items at 3.00 (Agree). These lower relative scores indicate that while individual products are viewed favorably, there is a quantitative gap in maintaining uniform quality standards across different product categories or departments.

Table 8. Description of Local Products in Maria Aurora in Terms of Quality and Standardization.

INDICATORS	AWM	DE	RANK
I feel confident that anything I buy here is quality.	3.70	SA	1
I notice that the quality is just as good in one department as it is in another.	3.20	A	10
I almost never see items that are broken or damaged on the shelves.	3.50	SA	7
I find that the quality stays the same every single time I visit.	3.60	SA	2
I feel that the products always live up to what I expect.	3.50	SA	7
I can tell the store works hard to keep its standards high.	3.60	SA	2
I find that the products work exactly that way they are supposed to.	3.60	SA	2
I feel the quality of the brand hasn't dropped over time.	3.60	SA	2
I find the items I buy here to be long-lasting and dependable.	3.60	SA	2
I trust this store only sells items that are well-made.	3.00	A	9
OVERALL AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.49	SA	

Legend: AWM-Weighted Mean; DE-Descriptive Equivalent, 1-Strongly Disagree (SD) [1.00-1.75]; 2-Disagree (D) [1.76-2.50]; 3-Agree (A) [2.51-3.25]; 4-Strongly Agree (SA) [3.26-4.00]

The findings imply that the local products in Maria Aurora are highly regarded for their initial quality, with the top-ranking indicator (Rank 1) showing that consumers feel confident that anything they buy is quality (AWM 3.70). The consistent high

scores across several indicators, such as products working as intended and the brand quality remaining stable over time (all at AWM 3.60), suggest that the center maintains a strong level of reliability and consumer trust. However, the lower rankings for uniform quality across different departments (Rank 10, AWM 3.20) and the store only selling well-made items (Rank 9, AWM 3.00) indicate a gap in standardization. The implication is that while individual products are perceived as dependable, there is a lack of consistency in quality control across all product categories, suggesting a need for more uniform standards to ensure that every department meets the same high-level criteria as the top-performing goods.

According to research on consumer behavior, product quality is a primary driver of customer trust and repeat patronage in local markets. The data shows that consumers in Maria Aurora have the highest level of confidence in overall product quality (Rank 1, AWM 3.70), which aligns with the standard that local enterprises must maintain high-quality benchmarks to compete with commercial brands. However, the lower ranking of inter-departmental quality consistency (Rank 10, AWM 3.20) and the trust in stores to sell only well-made items (Rank 9, AWM 3.00) suggests a variance in how quality is managed across different product categories. This reflects a common challenge in local markets where standardization can be uneven depending on the specific supplier or department.

The results lead to the conclusion that while the products in Maria Aurora are perceived as high-quality and dependable, there is a lack of uniform standardization across all sections of the market. The high scores in product durability and performance (Rank 2) indicate that the items are well-made, but the lower scores in consistency suggest that quality control measures need to be more strictly applied across all departments to ensure an "Agree" (A) rating shifts toward a "Strongly Agree" (SA) across the board.

5.1.3 Packaging and Branding.

Table 9 presents the description of local products in Maria Aurora in terms of packaging and branding achieving an Overall Average Weighted Mean (AWM) of 3.33, with a Descriptive Equivalent of "Strongly Agree" (SA). The highest-ranking indicator is Indicator 7, "I feel the nice packaging shows that the product inside is high quality," which received an AWM of 3.60 (Rank 1). This suggests that consumers strongly associate the visual appeal of packaging with the intrinsic value of the product. In contrast, Indicator 1, "I find the packaging does a great job of keeping my items safe," and Indicator 9, "I appreciate when the packaging is easy to open or carry," received lower scores of 3.00 (Rank 7) and 3.20 (Rank 9) respectively. While still categorized as "Agree," these relatively lower scores indicate that while the aesthetic and psychological impact of the branding is high, the functional aspects such as durability and ease of handling are perceived as slightly less effective.

The results imply that local producers in Maria Aurora are successful in using packaging as a marketing tool to convey quality and attract buyers. The high scores for the "quality-packaging" link (3.60) and the likelihood of picking up a product based on looks (3.50) show that visual branding is a primary driver for consumer interest. However, the lower numerical values for item safety (3.00) and ease of carrying (3.20) suggest a gap between form and function. This indicates that while the packaging is visually appealing enough to secure a sale, the physical materials or design may need improvement to ensure better product protection and user convenience.

Table 9. Description of Local Products in Maria Aurora in terms of Packaging and Branding.

INDICATORS	AWM	DE	RANK
I find the packaging does a great job of keeping my items safe.	3.00	A	7
I think the way the products are wrapped or boxed looks very nice.	3.50	SA	4
I can easily find the brand name and important info in the labels.	3.30	SA	7
I find the packaging always looks clean, professional, and neat.	3.20	A	4
I am more likely to pick up a product if the packaging looks good.	3.50	SA	2
I can recognize this brand immediately, no matter which product I'm looking at.	3.30	SA	6
I feel the nice packaging shows that the product inside is high quality.	3.60	SA	1
I think the logos and tags look modern and well-designed.	3.30	SA	9
I appreciate it when the packaging is easy to open or carry.	3.20	A	9
I notice and like it when the store updates its look to stay modern.	3.40	SA	2
OVERALL AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.33	SA	

Legend: AWM-Weighted Mean; DE-Descriptive Equivalent, 1-Strongly Disagree (SD) [1.00-1.75]; 2-Disagree (D) [1.76-2.50]; 3-Agree (A) [2.51-3.25]; 4-Strongly Agree (SA) [3.26-4.00]

According to packaging research, effective branding must balance "shelf appeal" with "functional utility." The data for Maria Aurora shows a preference for aesthetic success over structural performance. Under the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) programs for MSMEs, packaging is often the first point of intervention; the high scores in visual perception align with successful branding initiatives in the province. However, the lower scores in safety and portability highlight a common challenge for local producers: the high cost of specialized food-grade or heavy-duty packaging materials that provide both beauty and superior protection.

The local products in Maria Aurora are highly effective at making a strong first impression through well-designed labels and modern looks. The high ranking of packaging as a signal for high quality suggests that consumers trust the brand's image. These results highlight a need for local producers to focus on the technical engineering of their packaging specifically enhancing the durability and "easy-to-carry" features to match the high standard of their visual branding and ensure the product remains safe until it reaches the consumer's home.

5.1.4 Cultural or Historical Significance.

Table 10 presents the description of local products in Maria Aurora in terms of cultural or historical significance, measured through the Average Weighted Mean (AWM), Descriptive Equivalent (DE), and Rank. Indicator 3, "I value products that come with a story or a sense of history," and Indicator 4, "I find the cultural ‘vibes’ of the products is a big reason why I buy them," achieved the highest scores of 4.00 (Strongly Agree). This suggests that consumers in Maria Aurora are highly motivated by the narrative and atmospheric appeal of local goods. Conversely, Indicator 5, "I am drawn to items that celebrate our history," received the lowest score of 3.00 (Agree). Despite being the lowest rank, it still falls within the positive spectrum, though it indicates that general historical celebration is a weaker draw compared to specific storytelling or cultural aesthetics. The Overall Average Weighted Mean (AWM) is 3.41, with a Descriptive Equivalent of "Strongly Agree."

Table 10. Characteristics of Local Products in Maria Aurora Aurora in terms of Cultural or Historical Significance.

INDICATORS	AWM	DE	RANK
I love that these products reflect meaningfully Traditions.	3.50	SA	3
I enjoy buying items that represent our local Area or culture.	3.20	A	9
I value products that come with a story or a sense of history.	4.00	SA	1
I find the cultural “vibes” of the products is a big reason why I buy them.	4.00	SA	2
I am drowning to items that celebrate our history.	3.00	A	10
I like products that are made using traditional Designs or skills.	3.20	SA	7
I feel like the cultural symbols are used in a Respectful and correct way.	3.20	A	8
I believe buying these products helps keep us History alive.	3.30	SA	3
I appreciate how these items show the heritage or our community.	3.30	SA	6
I feel that the history behind a product makes It is worth more to me.	3.40	SA	3
OVERALL AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.41	SA	

Legend: AWM-Weighted Mean; DE-Descriptive Equivalent, 1-Strongly Disagree (SD) [1.00-1.75]; 2-Disagree (D) [1.76-2.50]; 3-Agree (A) [2.51-3.25]; 4-Strongly Agree (SA) [3.26-4.00]

The results imply that local products in Maria Aurora are successful in leveraging their "storytelling" and "cultural vibes" to attract buyers. High scores in valuing the history behind a product (Rank 3, 3.40) and believing these products keep history alive (Rank 3, 3.30) show that consumers perceive a strong link between their purchases and heritage preservation. However, the lower rankings for items representing the local area/culture (Rank 9, 3.20) and the respectful use of cultural symbols (Rank 8, 3.20) suggest a slight disconnect; while buyers love the idea of a story, they may feel the specific local branding or the symbolic execution is less distinct or compelling. This implies that while the "cultural vibe" is a powerful selling point, the actual representation of Maria Aurora’s specific local identity and the precision of its cultural symbols could be further enhanced to match the high consumer demand for heritage-driven products.

According to research on cultural tourism and product marketing, the "story" behind a product often acts as a unique selling proposition that adds perceived value beyond the physical item itself. The data aligns with the trend where modern consumers seek "authenticity" through traditional designs and respectful use of cultural symbols. The high ranking of Indicator 3 (4.00) supports the idea that in Maria Aurora, the historical narrative is a primary factor that makes a product "worth more" to the buyer, confirming that cultural preservation is effectively integrated into the local marketplace.

The local products are highly effective at capturing interest through their cultural identity and historical narratives. The high ranking of product stories and cultural "vibes" indicates that the community successfully uses its heritage to drive consumer interest. The results highlight a need for local producers to continue focusing on the specific stories and traditional skills behind their crafts to maintain this competitive advantage in the local economy.

5.1.3 Strategic plan to optimize pasalubong center in Maria Aurora, Aurora

Table 11 presents the strategic plan to optimize pasalubong centers in Maria Aurora, Aurora. The culmination of this study is the formulation of a comprehensive Strategic Plan, meticulously designed to address the developmental gaps identified in the preceding analysis of Maria Aurora’s local commerce. Recognizing that the town’s pasalubong centers serve as the primary gateway for regional tourism and economic exchange, this roadmap seeks to elevate these enterprises from fragmented, traditional stalls into high-performing retail destinations.

Table 11. Proposed Strategic Plan to optimize Pasalubong Centers in Maria Aurora.

Strategies	Objectives	Activities	Personal/Involved	Time Frame
Product Standardization & Branding	To ensure all products meet quality standards and carry a cohesive “Maria Aurora” brand identity.	Conduct quality control workshops for local MSMEs. Design unfinished packaging/labeling reflecting Maria Aurora’s heritage.	LGU Tourism Office, DTI Representatives, Local Producers	Month 1

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Inventory & Supply Chain Management	To prevent stock-outs of popular items and manage perishable goods (e.g., suman) efficiently.	Implement a digital Inventory Tracking System. Establish a "Consignment Agreement" framework with local farmers/artisans.	Center Manager, IT Specialist, Local Artisans.	Month 2
3. Financial Digitalization	To modernize payment options and improve transparency in daily sales recording.	Integrate GCash/Maya/QRPH payments terminals.	Rural Bank Reps, Center Staff, LGU Finance.	Month 2-3
4. Tourism Linkage & Marketing	To increase foot traffic by positioning the center as a mandatory stop for tourists entering Aurora.	Install road signage at the border of Nueva Ecija and Aurora. Launch "Tatak Maria Aurora" social media campaign.	Tourism Officers, Marketing Consultants, DPWH (for permits)	Continuous / Quarterly
5. Facility Enhancement	To improve customer experience and ensure product safety through better storage.	Install proper shelving and climate-controlled displays for food items Set up a "Tasting Corner" for local delicacies	Engineering Office, Center Staff	Month 4
6. Supply Chain Optimization	To stabilize the availability of local farm goods and handmade products.	Create a centralized database of local suppliers and establish a regular delivery schedule for raw materials	Supply Chain Managers, Local Farmers, Artisans	Month 4
7. Resource & Capital Access Program	To mitigate operational challenges such as lack of capital and raw material sourcing	Facilitate dialogue between local producers and institutional partners for grants and micro-financing.	LGU Officials, Financial Institutions, Cooperative Leaders.	Month 3
8. Digital Marketing & Social Media Integration	To expand the market reach and visibility of local products beyond physical store locations	Expand the market reach and visibility of local products beyond physical store locations	Marketing Specialists, Center Managers, Local Entrepreneurs	Month 2
9. Skills Enhancement & Innovation	To improve product quality and competitiveness in the regional market.	Organize "Product Innovation Labs" to help artisans modernize traditional designs while maintaining heritage.	TESDA Representatives, Design Consultants, Local Makers.	Month 8
10. Raw Material Sourcing Network	To solve the struggle of sourcing raw materials for handmade crafts and native food	Establish a "Supplier-Producer Cooperative" to ensure a steady, bulk-priced supply of local raw materials.	Local Farmers, Artisans, Cooperative Development Authority.	Month 6

The strategic plan for Maria Aurora represents a holistic shift toward professionalization, digital integration, and brand identity, ensuring that local micro-entrepreneurs are not merely surviving but competing in a broader regional market. By prioritizing Product Standardization and Branding, the LGU and its partners aim to transform local crafts and delicacies into premium "Tatak Maria Aurora" goods. Research by Santos and Rivera (2024) suggests that a unified regional brand identity significantly boosts consumer trust and allows MSMEs to command higher price points. This strategy ensures that every product, from suman to handmade crafts, serves as a high-quality ambassador for the town's cultural heritage.

A critical pillar of this roadmap is the Digitalization of Operations, spanning both financial systems and inventory management. The transition to a "Digital Inventory Tracking System" and the integration of QRPH payments address the long-standing issues of stock-outs and lack of transparency. According to Reyes (2025), the adoption of fintech in rural commerce is the single most effective way to bridge the gap between local producers and the modern consumer. Furthermore, the Supply Chain Optimization and the establishment of a "Supplier-Producer Cooperative" ensure that artisans and farmers are no longer vulnerable to seasonal

raw material shortages. This collaborative model aligns with the findings of Garcia (2023), who posits that centralized sourcing networks reduce operational costs for micro-enterprises by up to 15-20% through bulk-pricing advantages.

The plan's focus on Tourism Linkage and Facility Enhancement highlights a proactive approach to market positioning. By transforming the center into a "mandatory stop" with a dedicated "Tasting Corner" and strategic border signage, Maria Aurora leverages its geographical position as a gateway. This physical presence is bolstered by Digital Marketing Integration, ensuring that the visibility of local products extends beyond the physical store to a national audience. As noted by Lopez (2025), "Phygital" marketing the blending of physical experiences with digital accessibility is essential for the sustainability of rural tourism hubs.

Ultimately, the successful implementation of this 10-point strategy hinges on Skills Enhancement and Resource Access. By facilitating dialogues for micro-financing and launching "Product Innovation Labs," the plan empowers locals to modernize their designs without losing their cultural soul. This structured roadmap provides a sustainable framework for economic resilience, ensuring that the community of Maria Aurora can withstand economic fluctuations while safeguarding their traditional livelihoods.

In summary, this strategic plan provides a strong and scalable blueprint for the economic revitalization of Maria Aurora. By addressing technical gaps in the supply chain and embracing digital financial tools, the plan creates a fertile environment for MSME growth. Its emphasis on heritage-based branding ensures that modernization does not come at the cost of local identity. If executed with the outlined multisectoral cooperation, this plan will not only increase the income of local producers but also serve as a gold standard for LGU-led economic development in the province of Aurora.

5 Conclusions

The current operations of pasalubong centers in Maria Aurora are defined by a strong reliance on traditional sourcing and informal sales mechanisms. While the centers successfully aggregate local goods, they face systemic hurdles in inventory consistency and digital integration. Current merchandising remains functional rather than experiential, and promotional activities are largely restricted to word-of-mouth or passive physical presence. Transitioning these operations into a professionalized framework incorporating digital tracking and modernized payment terminals is essential to reduce stock-outs and improve the overall transparency of daily sales.

Local products in Maria Aurora possess high cultural and historical significance, yet they struggle with technical gaps in quality standardization and branding. While the variety of items like suman and handmade crafts is a point of pride, the lack of cohesive "Maria Aurora" branding and professional packaging limits their competitiveness in the regional market. Strengthening the "Tatak Maria Aurora" identity through unified labeling and strict quality control workshops is vital. This will ensure that the innate uniqueness of these products is matched by a professional presentation that appeals to modern tourists and high-end consumers. The proposed strategic plan for the Maria Aurora pasalubong center provides a comprehensive roadmap to bridge the gap between traditional production and modern market demands. By integrating "Product Innovation Labs" and "Supply Chain Optimization," the plan moves beyond simple retail into a proactive ecosystem of support for MSMEs. This strategy streamlines the relationship between local farmers, artisans, and the LGU, creating a resilient network that ensures steady raw material sourcing and better financial access. Ultimately, the successful implementation of this plan empowers local entrepreneurs to scale their businesses, safeguarding their livelihoods while positioning Maria Aurora as a premier cultural and commercial gateway in Aurora.

6 Recommendations

To modernize the operational backbone of the pasalubong centers, it is recommended that the LGU and center managers transition from manual to digital systems by implementing a cloud-based Inventory Tracking System and integrating QR-based payment terminals (such as GCash, Maya, or QRPH). This shift is hoped to eliminate the recurring issue of stock-outs for high-demand items and provide real-time sales data for more transparent financial reporting. Furthermore, the physical layout of the centers may be redesigned into "Experiential Hubs" that include tasting corners and heritage-themed displays, moving away from simple functional shelving toward an engaging retail experience that encourages longer tourist stays.

The enhancement of local product competitiveness may also be addressed by establishing a "Unified Branding and Quality Control Office" that provides standardized labeling under the "Tatak Maria Aurora" banner. It is suggested that the LGU Tourism Office, in collaboration with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), organize regular workshops to help MSMEs transition from generic or unfinished packaging to professional, heritage-inspired designs. By enforcing a "Gold Standard" for product quality, local producers can ensure their goods meet the expectations of modern travelers and high-end consumers, effectively bridging the gap between cultural value and commercial appeal.

For the successful execution of the proposed strategic plan, the LGU should institutionalize "Product Innovation Labs" and "Supply Chain Optimization" programs to ensure long-term resilience and creative growth for MSMEs. It is recommended that a "Supplier-Producer Cooperative" be established to stabilize the availability of raw materials through a centralized database and a regular delivery schedule. By facilitating a "Resource and Capital Access Program," the LGU can connect local artisans and farmers with institutional partners for grants and micro-financing, reducing their dependence on informal credit and positioning the pasalubong center as a sustainable economic gateway for the municipality.

Future researchers are encouraged to adopt a longitudinal research design to evaluate the multi-year impact of the "Tatak Maria Aurora" branding on the actual revenue growth and market expansion of local MSMEs. By tracking the progression of specific micro-entrepreneurs from manual inventory to digital tracking systems over a 24-month period, scholars can quantify the "Digital Dividend" the specific percentage increase in efficiency and reduction in stock-outs. Additionally, an opportunity exists to conduct shelf-life and packaging studies on perishable goods like suman, providing a technical blueprint for how vacuum-sealing and climate-controlled displays affect the distribution radius of Maria Aurora's native delicacies.

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