

## Exploration of Marine Tourism in North Sumatra: An Analysis of Promoting Tourism

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### Abstract

Tourism is important because it can revive economically a community around tourist attractions. North Sumatra Province, which includes Medan, shows great potential for the development of marine tourism. However, it is not run optimally. Moreover, poor quality infrastructure and human resources are also a threat to marine tourism in Indonesia. This study's methodology involved a qualitative method and used focus group discussions (FGDs) to obtain data from 25 informant travel agent in North Sumatra Province. This study's results found that marketing strategies need consistent support from government and travel agents. The rapid development of communication and information technology has become one of the most important elements in the development of marketing strategies.

**Keywords:** *marine tourism, marketing strategy, North Sumatra marine tourism*

### Introduction

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelagic country with 17,504 islands and a total coastline length of  $\pm 81,000$  km. Indonesia has the potential to develop in ways beneficial to its people. One such way is through marine tourism (Briandana, Doktoralina, & Sukmajati, 2018). Marine tourists enjoy the unique beauty of natural tourist attractions in coastal and marine areas as well as other supporting recreational activities (Benur & Bramwell, 2015). The benefits of marine tourism must be passed on to the surrounding community (Orams, 1999). As such, marine tourism must be managed in a professional, synergistic manner. It must be developed through investments in hospitality, transportation, communication, and information. This will ensure effective corporate governance and the growth of an entrepreneurship climate (Briandana et al., 2018; Rekarti & Doktoralina, 2017; Suryanto & Grima, 2018). Although marketing opportunities have been opened

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up for other sectors, because of low levels of human resources, these opportunities have not been optimally utilized.

Tourism promotion is an essential part of the general economy. It is also important for local communities because tourism can revive these communities around tourist attractions (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015). To achieve tourism development goals, tourism must be promoted so that these tourist attractions can become better known and so attract potential tourists. However, in the case of Indonesia, tourism promotion is not yet synergistic (Dunning, 2015). This fact is considered to be one of the weaknesses of Indonesian marine tourism.

The main objective of tourism marketing is that it can provide a livelihood for people who live nearby the tourist attractions (Huang, Backman, Backman, & Chang, 2016; Olefirenko & Galuschenko, 2018). In addition to achieving tourism development goals, promotions must pay attention to the potential of tourist attractions to persuade potential tourists to visit. This requires synergy between all relevant elements (the central government, the regional government, and society in general). Such an approach does not just involve infrastructure; it also includes the provision of security and comfort to the technical order (Towner, 2016).

North Sumatra is a province on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, located between the Malacca Strait and the Indian Ocean. North Sumatra—in particular, Medan—has considerable marine tourism potential but has not been run optimally (Marpaung, 2016). It has beautiful beaches and diverse underwater treasures. North Sumatra has substantial tourism potential. As such, it has become one of the most visited destinations in Indonesia. However, in spite of the advantages afforded to it by marine tourism, North Sumatra has encountered problems regarding tourist visitations. Data from the ministry of tourism showed an average decline of 2% for overseas tourists to North Sumatra over five years. Moreover, this data showed that nautical visits nationally are 1.65% or 0.7% less frequent than the average amount of national tourist visits (Ministry of Tourism, Republic of Indonesia, 2016).

With this background in mind, this study's research question is: What kind of marketing strategy will increase domestic tourist visits to North Sumatra? The objective of this study is to analyse marketing strategies for marine tourism in North Sumatra.

## Conceptual Framework of the Study

### 1. Marine Tourism

Marine tourism is still developing in Indonesia. Marine tourism is based around the attractiveness to potential tourists of marine and marine dominated environments. The attraction of marine tourism derives from the unique natural beauty of coastal areas and their supporting recreational activities. The diverse biota of Indonesian marine ecosystems are one such tourist attraction (Kurniawan, Adrianto, Bengen, & Prasetyo, 2016); another is the length of its beaches, where the waves have come to have a special charm for surfers. On this basis, Towner (2016) argued that marine tourism leaves a meaningful impression and is not merely entertainment. Rather, it allows tourists to participate directly in the development of environmental conservation. The purpose of developing environmental conservation is to generate a deep understanding of the workings of coastal ecosystems, leading to awareness of how to behave to preserve coastal areas in the present and into the future (Kurniawan et al., 2016).

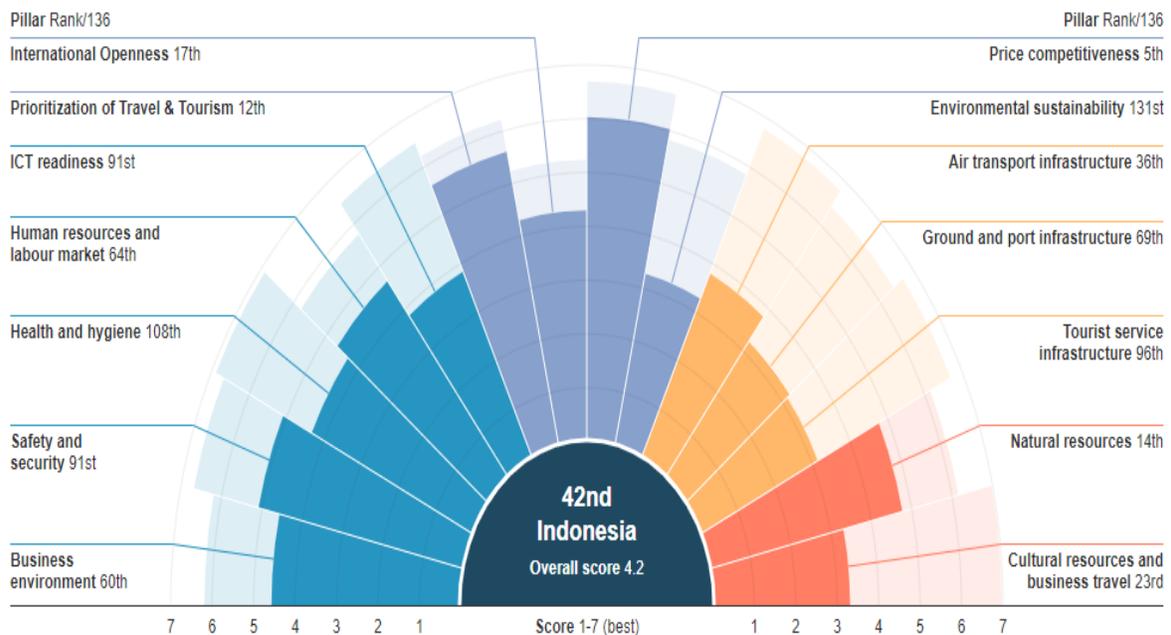


Figure 1: Rank of Indonesia in the world tourism

Source: <http://reports.weforum.org> (2017)

According to Figure 1, Indonesia is ranked 42nd in the world in tourism. When looked at in detail, it becomes clear that Indonesia has great tourist potential that has yet to be maximised. However, there are several obstacles that must be overcome in the future.

Most regions in Indonesia are surrounded by bodies of water that play important roles with regards to basic human needs. Along the 81,000 km coastline of Indonesia, coastal areas that are directly in contact with the sea have sufficient potential resources (Walpole & Goodwin, 2000). In the development of a region, especially with regards to regional income, various important conditions must be met. For the development of regional revenue in coastal areas, one of these conditions involves the development of the tourism sector.

Nowadays, many local and non-local tourists are interested in nature tourism (Mikulić, Krešić, & Kožić, 2015). One type of nature tourism that currently produces many local and foreign tourists is marine tourism. One understanding of marine tourism is that it is a kind of nature tourism related to water based resources. Marine tourism can also be understood as a travel based activity that includes enjoyment of natural sea environments (Laitamaki et al., 2016).

The identification of tourism components was carried out through a descriptive analysis of several theories (Gössling, Ring, Dwyer, Andersson, & Hall, 2016). In its analysis of the development of marine tourism, this study used a specific theory of marine tourism components, namely the theory of Potential Components in Tourism (Liu & Chou, 2016). In essence, theories of tourism components state that tourism consists of a variety of potential resources contained in a particular area that can be developed into tourist attractions (Mowforth & Munt, 2015, Weaver, 2006). Therefore, in the context of managing marine tourism areas, the basic principles that must be developed are (1) the principle of co-ownership, (2) the principle of co-operation, and (3) the principle of co-responsibility (Valentine, 1993).

These three principles are implemented in an integrated manner, so that coastal sustainability is achieved by actively encouraging the participation of coastal communities (Mkono & Tribe, 2017). Therefore, for the community to be able to participate, it is necessary to empower economic, social, and educational forces. To improve the welfare of coastal communities, government action is needed to (Mkono & Tribe, 2017).

Marine tourism area development is a form of tourism area management that seeks to provide beneficial outcomes, especially regarding efforts to protect and preserve marine environments and to make use of their potential resources and services (Marpaung, 2016). On the other hand, the local community can directly benefit from tourism through the expansion of employment and business opportunities, which in turn increase the income of the community and of the government. Infrastructure development can encourage growth between regions through a priority system for the development of marine tourism areas based on the type, potential, and nature of each specific region (Walpole & Goodwin, 2000).

## **2. Tourism Market Development Strategy**

The development of the tourism sector is aimed at improving quality of life and wellbeing and can provide benefits for meeting community needs (Liu & Chou, 2016). Development of the tourism sector is also expected to contribute to the administration of the government, especially in terms of financing the implementation of government duties and functions (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016).

In the modern era, tourism involves Information and Communication Technology (ICT). ICT offers information about places of interest and efficient methods for organising and ordering trips (Avdimiotis & Christou, 2008; Giaoutzi, 2017). This also poses a dilemma for countries pursuing tourism in the global market, where the globalisation process is complex, changeable, and not evenly distributed (Torres & Momsen, 2004). According to Weeks et al. (2014), tourism development success is determined by five factors: (1) the need for multi-stakeholders and related institutions, (2) the integration of science skills with local knowledge and community based management, (3) the building up of local capacity, (4) the implementation of multiuse zoning to balance competing goals, and (5) participation in learning and governance networks. Tourism demands are closely related to users or consumers (i.e., tourists). Tourists are considered to be markets because tourists are targets or targets to be addressed by tourism offers. As such, the market demands made by tourists are highly influential on tourism development.

Marketing strategy is a promotional activity that emphasises the provision of information regarding tourism activities at a tourist destination (Mowforth & Munt, 2015). Promotions can be conducted through media such as crisis centres (press conferences, press releases, and website services), media centres (personal services, informal sector correspondence, TV coverage), and

information services (print promotions, audio–visual promotions) promotions (Ayeh, Leung, Au, Law, & others, 2012; Schegg & Stangl, 2017; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Product development strategies can be developed according to two principles: namely, the development of tourism based on population economies, and an emphasis on the locality and authenticity of tourism products (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015). Population Economy Based Tourism must be able to improve the welfare of the community, especially that of the underprivileged, so that they can enjoy the improved living standards.

According to Marpaung (2016), tourism development aims to provide benefits to both tourists and local residents. Through the economic benefits obtained from tourist destinations, tourism can improve standards of living for local residents. Recreational and infrastructure facilities benefit both tourists and local residents. However, the most important element in tourism development is the provision of tourist destinations. This is realised by maintaining local culture, history, and levels of economic development, which preserve the uniqueness of local tourist attractions, thereby making them a source of tourist income (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015). There are also values that bring about tourism development. In accordance with these guidelines, tourism development can increase profits while minimising existing problems.

### **Method**

This study's research design used a qualitative approach with a case study method. The research focus was the role of travel agencies. Case studies are used to investigate a past event or problem by collecting various kinds of information. This information is then analysed to identify individual problems and to propose solutions (Creswell & Miller, 1997).

This study's primary data came from FGDs with 25 travel agents in North Sumatra. This study used two data collection techniques: FGDs and observations. There were a total of 86 travel agents in North Sumatra; however, 25 travel agents were chosen because they were registered with the Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies (ASITA).

The purpose of using FGDs was to explore specific problems related to marine tourism promotion strategies. This technique was used to prevent the researcher from misunderstanding the problems being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Observations were used to observe the interactions of travel agents while they were promoting marine tourism on social media. Thus, in examining the

factors that influenced the promotion of marine tourism marketing strategies (as shown in Figure 2), the researchers obtained data from the participants (The Travel Agent, Association of Travel, Employee Government of North Sumatra) in order to grow the Characteristics of Indonesian Marine Tourism Products and Market.

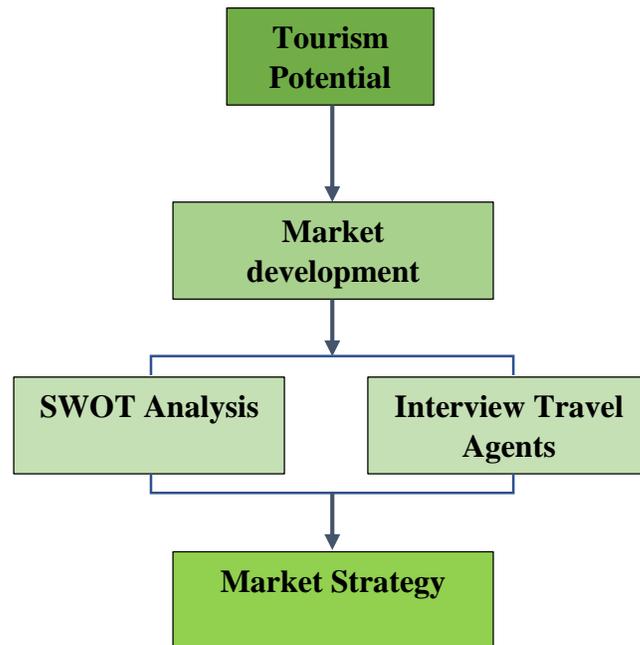


Figure 2. The conceptual framework of the study

Based on this conceptual framework, it can be seen that market development requires that a SWOT analysis be conducted and its results confirmed with tourism stakeholders (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2016). The results of the SWOT analysis need to be confirmed with those stakeholders who are closest to consumers: namely, travel agents. By bringing together the results of the SWOT analysis and the FGDs, this study will provide the principle factors needed in successful marketing strategies to attract tourists to visit tourist attractions.

## Findings and Discussion

### 1. Characteristics of Indonesian Marine Tourism Products

The results of data collection through FGDs with travel agents in North Sumatra showed several underlying factors involved in the selection of marketing strategies regarding Indonesian marine tourism products and markets.

Products refer to various things that can be sold. A product can be either material or abstract. Services are an abstract product. In the context of the tourist industry, products come in the form of tourist attractions or goods and services used during travel activities. According to Buhalis & Amaranggana (2015), marine tourist attractions can be analysed as products.

This study's SWOT analysis showed that North Sumatra marine tourism conditions are seen as products involving strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The three main strengths of the Indonesian marine tourism market were: natural resources, culture, and cuisine. The weaknesses were the following: poor facilities and infrastructure, no standard price, and a lack of promotion of marine tourism. This study identified opportunities in the following areas: social media, communication, purchasing power, the tropical climate, and the number of travel agents.

In general, avenues for positive development lie in technological development, the amount of the market share with various characteristics of tourist, as well as support from the operating sector—especially travel agents—in the effort to promote marine tourism. Each of these potential avenues of development can be reduced to the formulation of an integrated marketing communication strategy for marine tourism in Indonesia (Marpaung, 2016). Meanwhile, Marpaung's (2016) state the view of market strategy was considered to offer the most appropriate alternative strategy. This was because marine tourism in North Sumatra comes in the form of coastlines, islands, and oceans, all of which satisfy the requirements to be considered “competitive products”. By and large, these weaknesses (like poor infrastructure, the convenience of the traveller, etc.) can be handled in the short term. If it can be repaired, then North Sumatra Province's marine products are already acceptable, the level of quality and maximum reach through the appropriate handling of existing weaknesses.

## **2. Characteristics of the Indonesian Marine Tourism Market**

This study found that the factors that most influence the current North Sumatra marine tourism market both positively and negatively are related to (1) supporting physical factors (infrastructure and superstructure); (2) the development of ICT; (3) the existence of the tourism operations sector, especially travel agents; and (4) market segment size. These four points are the key success factors in marketing tourist attractions.

Indonesian marine tourism has a promising market share, especially for domestic tourists. This is indicated by the number of visits—over six million—that occurred from 2010 to July 2016 (Ministry of Tourism, Republic of Indonesia, 2016). However, archipelago tourism visits experienced a significant decline over the same period, from 7.63% to 0.16%. This demonstrates the need for market share to be maximised through market penetration strategies. The resources owned by the government and the various stakeholders involved in the tourism industry need to be directed to regain existing market share. This is possible because, as the data of this study shows, the marine tourism market share in Indonesia has enormous potential.

Specifically, market penetration strategies for North Sumatra marine tourism can be implemented by establishing two main objectives (like figure 3), namely (1) increasing awareness and (2) increasing visits. These two objectives will then be achieved by applying pricing strategies for services and products in conjunction with advertising and promotion.

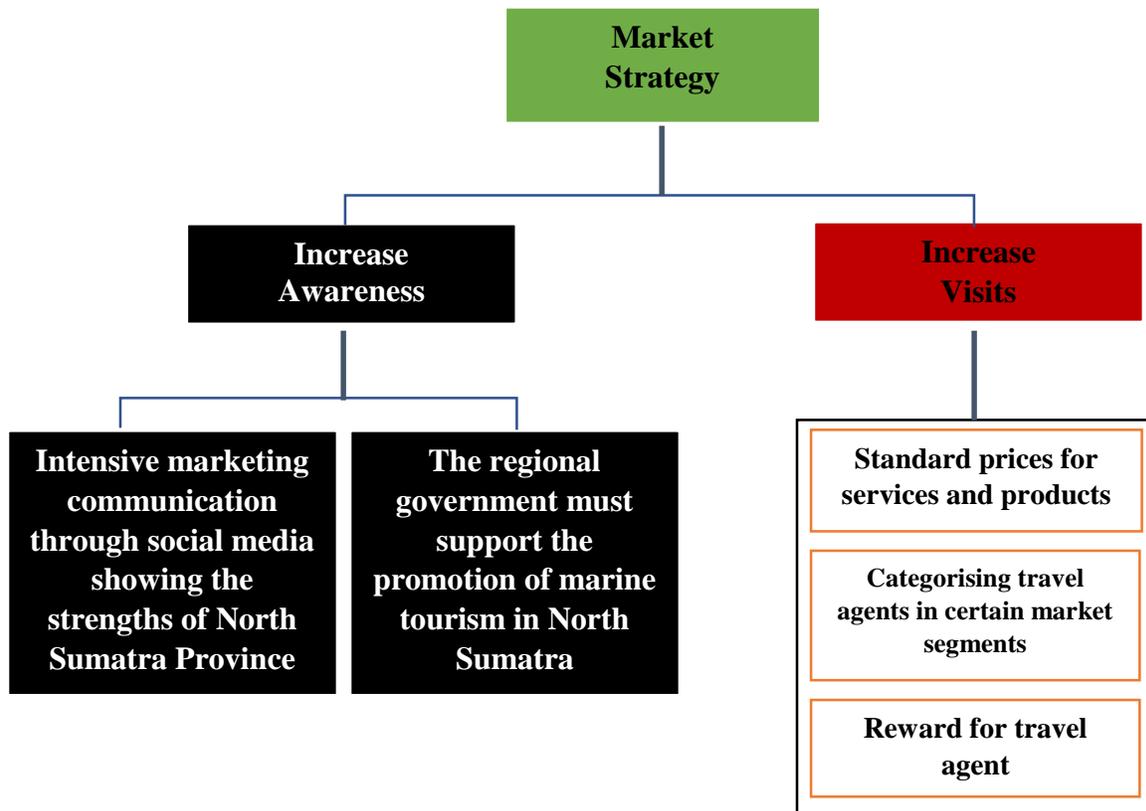


Figure 3. Market strategy for North Sumatra marine tourism

In tourism related decisions, it is important to have an awareness of products and their advantages; this is especially the case for potential tourists. Efforts to increase awareness can be achieved only by using various promotional and advertising tools. To increase tourism visits to North Sumatra, the advertisements and promotions that have been carried out so far need to be increased. It is expected that North Sumatra marine tourism will be the principle choice for potential tourists. Increased advertising and promotion can be through various media, whether conventional media, social media, or through community based channels.

Shifting the use of public media can be used as a guide to determine the selection of the most effective and efficient media to reach domestic tourists throughout North Sumatra. According to Jaafar and Rasoolimanesh (2015), the rapid development, spread, and ease of access of ICT and the internet provides every marketer and agency/organization with opportunities to deliver their promotional messages. According to Dwityas and Briandana (2017), social media has become an important part of the daily life of most people, being used primarily as a source of information. For this reason, proper planning is needed. To do this, there must be a focus on placing North Sumatra marine tourism promotions on various social media platforms. Although social media provides many opportunities for the implementation of tourism advertising and promotion strategies, the role of conventional media cannot be ignored (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2017). In addition to utilising various forms of conventional media and new media, the role of the operating sector—which has direct knowledge of conditions on the ground—also needs to be considered. This can be accomplished, for example, through a travel agency acting as a liaison between tourist service providers and tourists.

Furthermore, a price and service strategy needs to be implemented in collaboration with the government to formulate rules regarding standard prices for services and products appropriate for all tourists, both foreign and domestic. In doing this, the hope is to increase tourist visits to the various North Sumatra marine tourism destinations. Moreover, a further goal behind standardised pricing for services and products is that this would help prevent tour operators from selling their products at the highest possible prices. Therefore, through the laying down of clear rules, it is expected that price competition between travel agents will be minimised.

## Conclusion and Implications

The aim of this study was to improve the marine tourism industry in North Sumatra. On the basis of its findings, this study makes the following recommendations. First, certain stakeholders must take notice of the importance of travel agents, who must be responsible for the dissemination of information and for actively encouraging marine tourism activities to prospective domestic tourists. Second, in order to bring more tourists to marine tourism destinations, there should be a provision of tour packages tailored to the class based needs of domestic tourists. Third, policies for standardised prices for the Indonesian marine tourism industry must be devised. Lastly, it is necessary to increase the intensity of marine tourism promotional activities on the part of the tourism ministry and travel agents.

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