

A Qualitative Analysis of the Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) Marketing Strategy for the Lembeh Strait Tourism Destination in Bitung City, North Sulawesi

Iskandar Rifai¹, Imelda W.J. Ogi², Hendra N.Tawas³, Anderson Kumenanung⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Management Doctorate Study Program, Universitas Sam Ratulangi

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 18 Dec 2024

Revised: 10 Feb 2025

Accepted: 28 Feb 2025

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Conducting proper segmentation and targeting can be done by identifying and targeting market segments that have different needs and desires for the product. Through proper positioning, a product can be known by consumers.

Objectives: To achieve the above objectives, this study was conducted to study and analyze the marketing strategy of STP Lembeh Strait Tourism Destination

Methods: This study uses a qualitative paradigm that focuses on an in-depth understanding of the marketing phenomenon of the Lembeh Strait Tourism Destination in Bitung City, North Sulawesi. The qualitative paradigm was chosen because this approach allows researchers to explore the meaning, experiences, and perspectives of tourism actors and tourists contextually and holistically

Results: Based on the results of this study, it can be stated that the Lembeh Strait positioning strategy highlights the uniqueness and competitive advantages of this destination, namely high underwater biodiversity with rare species such as nudibranchs, frogfish, and pygmy seahorses, as well as an exclusive diving experience in the form of muck diving.

Conclusions: This advantage is combined with easy accessibility from Bitung City and Manado which is relatively better compared to the main competitor destinations such as Raja Ampat and Wakatobi which have more difficult access, as well as Komodo Island which also faces access challenges.

Keywords: Tourism Destination, Marketing, Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning

INTRODUCTION

Tourism also has an important impact in helping to revitalize the local economy by providing jobs and improving community welfare. In addition, tourism can also be a part of fulfilling human needs and lifestyles, and moving millions of people to get to know nature, the environment, and culture for both domestic and global communities (Gellat, 2000). Meanwhile, tourism activities in a particular area will have an impact on the surrounding area through direct effects, indirect effects, and continued effects. Therefore, spatial planning and empowerment of communities around tourist areas must consider the paradigm of sustainable tourism development, namely: economically feasible, environmentally friendly, socially acceptable, and technologically applicable (Sari & Wibowo, 2023).

Lembah Strait Tourism Destination is one of the tourism destinations that has great potential to be developed. Located in Bitung City, North Sulawesi Province, this tourism destination is known as a paradise for divers with extraordinary marine biodiversity and unique underwater beauty. This uniqueness makes Lembah Strait a favorite destination for tourists looking for a different diving experience from other places. However, to maximize the potential of Lembah Strait Tourism Destination as a leading tourism, an effective marketing strategy is needed. For example, the Segmenting, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) marketing strategy. STP is a marketing strategy that can be used to identify and utilize the right market segment, set specific market targets, and position products in the minds of consumers (Kotler and Keller, 2016).

According to Kotler, and Keller, (2016), segmentation is the process of dividing a market into smaller groups based on certain characteristics such as demographics, geography, psychographics, and behavior. Targeting is the next step after segmentation, namely choosing market segments that will be targeted for marketing. At this stage, factors such as segment size, growth potential, and competitiveness need to be considered to ensure that marketing resources are used efficiently and effectively. Positioning is an effort to create a strong image and identity in the minds of consumers.

Conducting proper segmentation and targeting can be done by identifying and targeting market segments that have different needs and desires for the product. Through proper positioning, a product can be known by consumers. To achieve the above objectives, this study was conducted to study and analyze the marketing strategy of STP Lembah Strait Tourism Destination with the research title: "Qualitative Study: Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning Marketing Strategy of Lembah Strait Tourism Destination in Bitung City, North Sulawesi". It is hoped that this study can provide a significant contribution to the development of tourism, especially Lembah Strait Tourism Destination and assist the government and tourism industry players in formulating appropriate policies and strategies to increase the competitiveness of tourist destinations.

OBJECTIVES

Many studies have discussed the concept of STP in marketing in general, but few have applied it specifically to tourist destinations such as the Lembah Strait. According to Camilleri (2018), although the concept of STP is widely discussed in marketing literature, its application in the context of tourism, especially in lesser-known destinations, is still rarely explored. Local community participation is key to the success of sustainable tourism development, but research that integrates this aspect into STP marketing strategies is still lacking. According to Timothy (2002), local community involvement is often overlooked in the development of tourism destination marketing strategies. While the use of digital technology is increasingly common in tourism marketing, studies on the application of digital technology in local tourism destinations such as the Lembah Strait are still limited. According to Buhalis and Law (2008), the use of digital technology in local tourism marketing still requires further research to fully understand its potential. The concept of Segmenting, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) marketing strategy is very relevant to be applied in the development of Lembah Strait Tourism Destination. The right marketing strategy is not only limited to promoting tourism products, but also compiling segmentation based on customer targets, targeting specific markets, and positioning the destination in the minds of tourists (consumers).

This study also reviews the results of previous research with the following objectives: First, Providing a Strong Theoretical Basis. Previous research provides a strong theoretical basis for this study. By referring to previous research, researchers can understand relevant concepts and theories, such as Tourist Satisfaction Theory, Tourism Experience Theory, and tourism marketing strategies. This theoretical basis helps in forming the conceptual framework of this study (Oliver, 2010) (Chen & Chen, 2010). Second, Identifying Research Gaps. By reviewing previous literature, researchers can identify research gaps that have not been explored or have not been adequately answered. This helps researchers determine the unique contribution of this study and ensure that the study has added value (Yoon & Uysal, 2005) (Gursoy, Chen, & Chi, 2014). Third, Utilizing Proven Methodology. Previous research often presents a methodology that has been tested and proven effective in collecting and analyzing data. By adopting or modifying the methodology used in previous research, researchers can increase the validity and reliability of this study. It also helps researchers avoid methodological errors and increases the credibility of research findings (Creswell, 2014) (Yin, 2014). Fourth, Improve Data Analysis and Interpretation.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative paradigm that focuses on an in-depth understanding of the marketing phenomenon of the Lembah Strait Tourism Destination in Bitung City, North Sulawesi. The qualitative paradigm was chosen because this approach allows researchers to explore the meaning, experiences, and perspectives of tourism actors and tourists contextually and holistically (Creswell, 2014). In a marketing strategy that involves segmentation, targeting, and positioning, a qualitative approach is very relevant to understanding how the strategy is formulated, implemented, and perceived in real practice in the field.

The case study method was chosen as a research strategy to obtain a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of the Lembah Strait Tourism Destination marketing. According to Yin, (2018) case studies allow researchers to explore in depth various aspects that influence the success of marketing strategies in a particular context. By using case studies, this study examines in detail the process of market segmentation, market target determination, and destination positioning carried out by tourism stakeholders in Bitung City. This approach also allows researchers to collect data from various sources, such as in-depth interviews, observations, and related documents, resulting in a rich and contextual understanding. This qualitative approach with a case study method is expected to provide a significant contribution in developing an effective and sustainable marketing strategy for the Lembah Strait Tourism Destination, as well as being a reference for the development of tourism in other areas with similar characteristics. According to Sugiyono (2016), a sample is part of the number and characteristics of the population. Therefore, samples are taken using certain techniques so that they can represent the population. In this study, samples were taken in the following ways:: Using Purposive Sampling Techniques. Researchers selected respondents based on certain criteria, namely: tourists who have visited the Lembah Strait at least once in the last 6 months or tourists who actively use local tourism services. Using Snowball Sampling Techniques. Snowball sampling is used by researchers starting with several key informants who are known to be active or have insight into tourism in the Lembah Strait, then asking them to recommend other relevant residents to be interviewed. Using Purposive Sampling and Maximum Variation Sampling Techniques. In addition to purposive sampling to select business actors operating in the tourism sector (hotels, restaurants, tourism service providers, etc.), maximum variation sampling was used to obtain rich data variations from business actors with different scales and types of businesses. Researchers selected respondents from various business categories to obtain a comprehensive picture of marketing strategies. This study used a variety of primary and secondary data collection methods to gain comprehensive and in-depth insights. A combination of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, open-ended surveys, document analysis, and literature studies were used to explore various aspects of marketing strategies, understand tourist experiences and perceptions, and identify areas for improvement and innovation.

RESULTS

The competitive advantages of Lembah Strait Tourism Destination are identified through key attributes such as high marine biodiversity with rare species such as nudibranchs, frogfish, and pygmy seahorses; exclusive muck diving experience; and the friendliness of the local community that adds a cultural dimension to the tourism experience. The recommended promotional strategy focuses on marketing campaigns that highlight the unique biodiversity and muck diving experience through social media, videos, photos, diver testimonials, and collaboration with diving operators and travel agents. In addition, underwater photography events and competitions are also proposed to attract the global diving community, while local cultural elements are integrated into the tour packages to enrich the tourist experience.

The positioning statement of Lembah Strait Tourism Destination is formulated as a leading destination in North Sulawesi that offers unmatched underwater adventures with rich marine biodiversity, challenging underwater currents, and historical dive sites. Lembah Strait is a paradise for experienced divers and adventure tourists who value authentic experiences enriched by local cultural interactions and sustainable conservation efforts. This destination is internationally recognized and recommended by professional divers as a unique and unforgettable experience. The implementation of the positioning strategy is carried out by communicating the desired position through social media, websites, brochures, and tourism events, as well as collaborating with influencers and the diving community. Consistency of messages and visual branding is maintained by emphasizing the uniqueness of biodiversity, muck diving experiences, and the friendliness of the local community using attractive slogans and uniform graphic designs. This strategy aims to strengthen the image of Lembah Strait as a unique and accessible diving destination, while increasing its competitiveness in the domestic and international markets through investment in facilities and integrated marketing campaigns.

Based on the results of this study, it can be stated that the Lembah Strait positioning strategy highlights the uniqueness and competitive advantages of this destination, namely high underwater biodiversity with rare species such as nudibranchs, frogfish, and pygmy seahorses, as well as an exclusive diving experience in the form of muck diving. This advantage is combined with easy accessibility from Bitung City and Manado which is relatively better

compared to the main competitor destinations such as Raja Ampat and Wakatobi which have more difficult access, as well as Komodo Island which also faces access challenges. Thus, the position of the Lembah Strait as a leading destination in North Sulawesi that offers a unique and authentic diving experience with strong local cultural values is clear and well-defined. The discussion also integrates a SWOT analysis that realistically identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the destination. The main strengths in the form of high biodiversity and friendliness of the local community, opportunities from global ecotourism trends and government support, and threats from new destination competition and environmental risks are a strong foundation for building a relevant positioning strategy. However, weaknesses such as relatively difficult accessibility and less than massive international promotion are also acknowledged, so the positioning strategy is directed at overcoming this through marketing campaigns that highlight the uniqueness of biodiversity and diving experiences through social media, videos, diver testimonials, and collaboration with diving operators and travel agents.

This positioning strategy also emphasizes consistency in communication through social media, websites, brochures, tourism events, and collaboration with influencers and diving communities. The use of uniform slogans and graphic designs strengthens the image of Lembah Strait as a unique and easily accessible diving destination, while increasing competitiveness in the domestic and international markets. This approach is in line with the phenomenon of the marketing gap which has been the main obstacle, namely the lack of promotion and international exposure.

DISCUSSION

Geographic and psychographic segmentation is a very relevant and potential approach for the Lembah Strait Tourism Destination. The main segments include international tourists from Europe and North America with high purchasing power and a special interest in diving and underwater photography activities, as well as middle to upper class domestic tourists from big cities in Indonesia who are increasingly aware of ecotourism and looking for adventure experiences and environmental education.

The right targeting is done by offering premium and exclusive tour packages for international tourists, as well as affordable and educational tour packages for domestic tourists. The diving and underwater photographer community as a psychographic segment is also very important with the offer of exclusive diving experiences and technical support facilities.

The Lembah Strait Tourism Destination is positioned as a leading destination in North Sulawesi that offers a unique diving experience in the form of muck diving with high marine biodiversity and easy accessibility compared to the main competitor destinations. This uniqueness is supported by the friendliness of the local community and strong cultural values. The use of social media, influencers, digital platforms, and participation in global tourism exhibitions are key promotional strategies to increase the visibility and attractiveness of the destination. Suggestions that can be given to implement effective marketing strategies for the target segments of the Lembah Strait Tourism Destination are as follows:

1. Develop tour packages that suit the needs of market segments, such as premium packages for international tourists and educational and adventure packages for domestic tourists.
2. Improve supporting facilities such as diving and underwater photography equipment rentals, technical training, and professional guide services to enhance the tourist experience.
3. Maximize the use of social media, collaborate with influencers, and actively participate in international exhibitions to expand market reach.
4. Provide family-friendly and group tour packages to attract domestic segments who want to vacation with family or friends.
5. Integrate conservation education values into every tour package to support sustainable tourism.

REFERENCES

- [1] Aaker, D. A., & McLoughlin, D. (2010). Strategic Market Management (9th ed.). Wiley.

- [2] Ahn, Y.-j., & Kim, K.B. (2024). Understanding the Interplay between Wellness Motivation, Engagement, Satisfaction, and Destination Loyalty. *Behavioral Sciences*, 14(239).
- [3] Ashley, C., De Brine, P., & Wilde, H. (2007). *The Role of the Tourism Sector in Expanding Economic Opportunity*. Harvard University.
- [4] Baker, S. (2020). Ecotourism and Sustainability. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 45(3), 234-245.
- [5] Becker, A., & Ulrich, K. (2018). *Niche Tourism and Special Interest Tourism*. Routledge.
- [6] Bramwell, B., & Lane, B. (2000). *Tourism Collaboration and Partnerships: Politics, Practice and Sustainability*. Channel View Publications.
- [7] Buckley, R. (2012). Sustainable Tourism: Research and Reality. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(2), 528-546.
- [8] Buhalis, D., & Amaranggana, A. (2015). Smart Tourism Destinations Enhancing Tourism Experience Through Personalisation Of Services. In I. Tussyadiah & A. Inversini (Eds.), *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism* pp. 377-389. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- [9] Buhalis, D., & Law, R. (2008). Progress In Information Technology and Tourism Management: 20 Years On And 10 Years After The Internet –The state of eTourism research. *Tourism Management*, 29(4), 609-623.
- [10] Buhalis, D. (2000). Marketing the competitive destination of the future. *Tourism Management*, 21(1), 97-116.
- [11] Camilleri, M. A. (2018). *Travel Marketing, Tourism Economics And The Airline Product: An Introduction To Theory And Practice*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- [12] Castillo-Canalejo, A. M., Sánchez-Cañizares, S. M., Santos-Roldán, L., & Muñoz-Fernández, G. A. (2020). Food Markets: A Motivation-Based Segmentation of Tourists. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(2312).
- [13] Chaffey, D., & Ellis-Chadwick, F. (2019). *Digital Marketing: Strategy, Implementation and Practice*. Pearson.
- [14] Chen, C.-F., Chen, P.-C., & Lee, H.-T. (2011). A study of the relationships among destination attractiveness, destination image, and behavioral intentions of tourists: A case study of Sabah, Malaysia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 16(3), 213-233.
- [15] Chen, C.-F., & Chen, F.-S. (2010). Experience quality, perceived value, satisfaction and behavioral intentions for heritage tourists. *Tourism Management*, 31(1), 29-35.
- [16] Choi, G., Kim, J., Sawitri, M. Y., & Lee, S. K. (2020). Ecotourism Market Segmentation in Bali, Indonesia: Opportunities for Implementing REDD+. *Land*, 9(186).
- [17] Cooper, H. (2010). *Research Synthesis and Meta-Analysis: A Step-by-Step Approach* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- [18] Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. Sage Publications.
- [19] Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- [20] DeVellis, R. F. (2017). *Scale Development: Theory and Applications*. Sage Publications.
- [21] Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, L. A. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. *Public Relations Review*, 37(1), 90-92.
- [22] *Frontiers in Psychology*. (2023). Editorial: Individual and cultural differences in sustainable consumer behavior. *Frontiers in Psychology*.
- [23] Garrod, B., Leask, A., & Fyall, A. (2001). Scottish Visitor Attractions: Managing Visitor Impacts. *Tourism Management*, 22(5), 605-617.
- [24] Gellat, C. (2000). *The Impact of Tourism on Local Economies and Communities*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- [25] Green, P., & Jones, L. (2021). Diving Destinations and Biodiversity. *Marine Tourism Journal*, 33(1), 112-130
- [26] Gössling, S., Scott, D., & Hall, C. M. (2020). Pandemics, Tourism And Global Change: A Rapid Assessment of COVID-19. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 29(1), 1-20.
- [27] Gretzel, U. (2018). Influencer marketing in travel and tourism. In *Advances in Social Media for Travel, Tourism and Hospitality* (pp. 147-156). Routledge.
- [28] Gretzel, U., Fesenmaier, D. R., & O'Leary, J. T. (2006). The transformation of consumer behaviour. In D. Buhalis & C. Costa (Eds.), *Tourism Business Frontiers: Consumers, Products and Industry*. Elsevier.

- [29] Gurel, E., & Tat, M. (2017). SWOT analysis: A theoretical review. *Journal of International Social Research*, 10(51), 994-1006.
- [30] Gursoy, D., & McCleary, K. W. (2004). An Integrative Model of Tourists' Information Search Behavior. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(2), 353-373.
- [31] Gursoy, D., Chen, J. S., & Chi, C. G. (2014). Theoretical examination of destination loyalty formation. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 26(5), 809-827.
- [32] Hall, C. M., & Lew, A. A. (2009). *Understanding and Managing Tourism Impacts: An Integrated Approach*. Routledge.
- [33] Hall, C. M. (2008). *Tourism Planning: Policies, Processes And Relationships* (2nd ed.). Harlow: Prentice Hall.
- [34] Hawkins, J. P., Roberts, C. M., Hof, T. V., de Meyer, K., Tratalos, J., & Aldam, C. (2005). Effects of recreational scuba diving on Caribbean coral and fish communities. *Conservation Biology*, 13(4), 888-897.
- [35] Hidayat, C., & Zeng, Y. (2023). Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning of The Tourism Industry before, during The Covid-19 Pandemic and After for The Tourism Industry in Indonesia. *Tourism Research Journal*, 7(2).
- [36] Holliman, G., & Rowley, J. (2014). Business to business digital content marketing: marketers' perceptions of best practice. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 8(4), 269-293.
- [37] Honey, M. (2008). *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise?* Island Press.
- [38] Hosany, S., & Gilbert, D. (2010). Measuring tourists' emotional experiences toward hedonic holiday destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 49(4), 513-526.
- [39] Hotjar. (2023). How to Use Psychographics in Marketing + Examples. Retrieved from <https://www.hotjar.com/blog/psychographics-in-marketing/>
- [40] Noy, C. (2008). Sampling knowledge: The hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(4), 327-344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701401305>
- [41] Oliver, R. L. (2010). *Satisfaction: A Behavioral Perspective on the Consumer*. M.E. Sharpe.
- [42] PADI (2018). *The Professional Association of Diving Instructors' Guide to Diving in Lembeh Strait*.
- [43] Palmatier, R. W., Dant, R. P., Grewal, D., & Evans, K. R. (2006). Factors influencing the effectiveness of relationship marketing: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(4), 136-153.
- [44] Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*. Sage Publications.
- [45] Pike, S., & Page, S. J. (2014). Destination Marketing Organizations and Destination Marketing: A Narrative Analysis of the Literature. *Tourism Management*, 41, 202-227.
- [46] Pike, S. (2012). *Destination Marketing: An Integrated Marketing Communication Approach*. Oxford: Routledge.
- [47] Pine, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (1999). *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theater & Every Business a Stage*. Harvard Business School Press.
- [48] Pizam, A., & Mansfeld, Y. (2000). *Consumer behavior in travel and tourism*. Routledge.
- [49] Plummer, R., Kulczycki, C., & Stacey, C. (2005). Outdoor adventure tourism, participant characteristics, and preferences. *Tourism Review International*, 9(2), 143-158.
- [50] Prideaux, B. (2005). *Marketing Destinations: A Strategic Perspective*. Routledge.
- [51] Richards, G., & Wilson, J. (2004). *The Global Nomad: Backpacker Travel in Theory and Practice*. Channel View Publications.
- [52] Ries, A., & Trout, J. (2001). *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*. McGraw-Hill.
- [53] Ritchie, J. R. B., & Crouch, G. I. (2003). *The Competitive Destination: A Sustainable Tourism Perspective*. CABI Publishing.
- [54] Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2016). *Research Methods for Business Students*. Pearson Education.