

Exploration of Consumer Behavior Patterns in Marine Tourism in Tlocor Sidoarjo

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ABSTRACT

Marine tourism has great potential as a pillar of the creative economy and community welfare; however, its sustainability depends on consumer behavior. This study is important because the marine tourism destination of Tlocor, Sidoarjo, has experienced a decline in visits after the pandemic despite the unique appeal of Lusi Island. This research employed a descriptive design with a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews and observations with six tourists. The findings indicate that tourist motivation is mainly driven by the need for family togetherness and curiosity about natural phenomena. However, negative perceptions regarding cleanliness, limited facilities, and a lack of activity variety reduce satisfaction and loyalty. This study emphasizes that a holistic experience—covering physical, social, emotional, and aesthetic aspects—is crucial in shaping satisfaction and revisit intention. The findings highlight the importance of consumer-oriented tourism development strategies to ensure the sustainability of marine destinations.

INTRODUCTION

Marine tourism in Indonesia holds significant potential as a driver of the creative economy and improving the well-being of coastal communities. With the growing trend of nature-based tourism, marine tourism destinations have become a popular alternative for both domestic and international tourists (UNWTO, 2021). This is driven by increasing tourist awareness of the importance of environmental sustainability and the need for recreation that offers authentic experiences and connects with nature. Marine tourism is seen not only as a means of entertainment but also as a medium for education and coastal environmental conservation. One destination that has attracted attention is Lusi Beach in Tlocor, Sidoarjo, an island formed from Sidoarjo mudflows that offers a unique experience for visitors. The uniqueness of this destination lies in the natural formation of the island due to the Lapindo mudflow, creating a unique attraction for tourists curious about both this natural phenomenon and this social tragedy. Lusi Beach has since developed into an alternative tourist destination in the Sidoarjo area, offering attractions such as boat tours, views of the mangrove ecosystem, and unique ocean panoramas.

P In 2019, tourist numbers peaked at 100,000 per year, driven by public curiosity about the formation of Lusi Island. This increase in visits was also influenced by social media-based promotions showcasing the island's uniqueness, as well as local community involvement in managing simple tourist facilities such as boat rentals, food stalls, and tour guides. This surge in tourism not only had a positive economic impact on local residents but also presented challenges in managing the destination to ensure its sustainability and maintain its appeal amidst competition from other marine destinations in East Java.

However, this trend did not continue. After the COVID-19 pandemic, visitation numbers declined significantly, even though social restrictions were lifted and tourism reopened. Field data shows that post-pandemic visitor numbers have not returned to pre-2019 levels, and destinations often appear deserted (Hardika & Riyadh, 2023). This situation raises concerns because various revitalization efforts have been implemented, but the impact has not been significant in increasing visitation.

Various interventions have been implemented by village governments, tourism managers, and local communities. These include branding strategy training programs (Iskandar & Islam, 2021), seafood processing to support culinary tourism (Azizah et al., 2022), community-based marine tourism destination development (Rian et al., 2023), and strengthening the role of village-owned enterprises (BUMDES) as driving forces behind tourism villages (Hardika & Riyadh, 2023). However, the effectiveness of these programs remains low due to insufficient attention to the consumer dimension, namely tourist preferences, needs, and behavior.

In the context of consumer behavior, tourists' decision-making is greatly influenced by their perceptions of the experiences offered by the destination. (Engel, et al. (2015) emphasize that consumer behavior is the result of the interaction between internal and external factors that shape attitudes, perceptions, and interests in purchasing or using a product/service. In the realm

of tourism, holistic experiences are key in determining the level of visitor satisfaction and loyalty (Coudounaris, 2017). This indicates that understanding the behavior of marine tourism consumers in Tlocor can be a solution in dealing with stagnation in visits.

Furthermore, previous research shows that tourist perceptions are closely related to expectations and service quality. (Giardino et al., 2017) found that more than 90% of tourism businesses fail to survive within the first five years due to an inability to meet consumer preferences. These findings reinforce the urgency of exploring more deeply the behavioral patterns of marine tourism consumers, particularly in destinations experiencing a decline in visits. Therefore, this study examines not only the supply-side aspects of destination management but also the consumer demand side.

The research gap is evident in the limited studies on consumer behavior in marine tourism in Indonesia, particularly in unique local destinations like Lusi Beach. Most studies focus on tourism development strategies, the role of village governments, and branding innovations, while the consumer behavior dimension receives little attention. Yet, a deep understanding of consumer needs is crucial for designing targeted marketing and tourism development strategies.

This research aims to address this gap by exploring consumer behavior patterns for marine tourism in Tlocor, Sidoarjo. This approach is expected to provide both theoretical contributions to consumer behavior literature and practical contributions for tourism managers in formulating strategies based on market needs. By understanding the factors influencing visit decisions, managers can design experiences that align with tourist expectations.

The benefits of this research are twofold. Academically, this research enriches the study of consumer behavior for marine tourism, particularly in the context of local destinations based on unique ecosystems such as Lusi Island. Practically, the research findings can serve as the basis for recommendations for tourism managers, village-owned enterprises (BUMDES), and local governments in designing more consumer-oriented marketing programs and strategies (Kotler, 2017).

Based on this background, the purpose of this research is to explore consumer behavior patterns for marine tourism in Tlocor, Sidoarjo, with a focus on motivations, perceptions, experiences, and factors influencing visit decisions. Thus, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of tourist needs and preferences, which are key to the sustainability of tourist destinations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature on the motivations and experiences of marine and coastal tourists, various studies have shown that internal motivational factors play a crucial role in driving tourist visits. Factors such as family values, curiosity about the uniqueness of nature, and the need to establish and expand social connections have proven to be key drivers in choosing marine and coastal tourist destinations. Research in Lampung Province, for example, revealed that experiential quality, encompassing aspects of entertainment, aesthetics, and sensation, significantly influenced tourists' revisit intentions, with interesting

differences based on gender (Fahlevi, 2025). This finding confirms that personal and emotional tourism experiences are crucial elements in determining tourists' satisfaction and decisions to return.

Similarly, studies in Indonesia, such as those conducted by (Meidina, et al., 2022) and (Sartika et al., 2023), reinforce the view that service and facility quality are key determinants of marine tourist satisfaction. This satisfaction, in turn, acts as a mediating factor influencing revisit intentions. Environmental cleanliness also consistently emerges as a crucial variable determining tourist satisfaction. For example, a study on beach cleanliness in Prigi Bay (Syamsuddin et al., 2025) confirmed that tourist perceptions of coastal cleanliness and sustainability are key indicators in assessing a destination's attractiveness. Research in Taro Tourism Village also found that services, facilities, and environmental cleanliness directly influence tourists' overall satisfaction and experience (Pinaria et al., 2021).

In addition to motivational dimensions and environmental quality, several recent studies highlight the importance of holistic experiences and social interactions in shaping tourist satisfaction and loyalty. A study titled "Loyalty Dynamics in Mangrove Ecotourism" by (Seperi and Sakti, 2023) showed that attitudes, perceived benefits, costs, and environmental freedom play a significant role in determining tourist loyalty, particularly in the context of mangrove ecotourism, which demands emotional and social engagement between visitors and nature. This suggests that marine tourist loyalty is determined not only by physical aspects such as facilities, but also by the social, emotional, and ecological experiences experienced during a visit.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive design with a qualitative approach to explore the behavioral patterns of marine tourism consumers at Lusi Beach, Tlocor, Sidoarjo. The research focused on tourists' decision-making processes when selecting, consuming, and evaluating their tourism experiences. The choice of a qualitative approach was based on the research objective, which emphasized an in-depth understanding of tourists' motivations, observations, and learning processes during their visits. The results provided a more comprehensive description of consumer behavior dynamics.

The study subjects consisted of six visitors selected based on the criteria of direct involvement in tourism activities at Lusi Beach. Participants ranged in age from young to middle-aged, men and women considered representative of a potential visitor segment. Participants were selected purposively, considering they could provide relevant information regarding their experiences and perceptions of visiting this marine tourism destination.

The research instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide. This instrument was developed based on aspects of consumer behavior according to Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard (2015), namely motivation, observations, and learning processes. The interview guide included open-ended questions that allowed participants to respond freely, allowing the researcher to capture the meaning of the experience in greater depth. In addition to interviews, researchers

also conducted field observations to directly observe visitor interactions with the tourist environment, facilities, and available services.

Data collection was conducted through face-to-face interviews with each participant, lasting approximately 30–45 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and then transcribed verbatim to facilitate analysis. Field observations were recorded in the form of field notes containing descriptions of situations, behaviors, and spontaneous responses of tourists during their stay at the research location. Additional data, such as photographic documentation and tourism promotional brochures, were also used to supplement the research findings.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The analysis process consisted of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction stage, researchers sorted information relevant to the research focus, particularly regarding tourist motivations. Next, the data was presented in the form of categories and thematic patterns that comprehensively describe consumer behavior. Conclusions were drawn gradually by comparing the results of interviews and observations, thus obtaining a comprehensive picture of consumer behavior patterns in marine tourism in Tlocor, Sidoarjo.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study involved six participants: three men and three women who had visited Tlocor Marine Tourism in Sidoarjo. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 45, with diverse occupational backgrounds, including students and private sector employees. This selection of participants was intended to obtain a representative perspective from tourists from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, allowing for more varied and in-depth information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All participants provided information regarding their motivations, observations, and experiences of visiting Lusi Beach, which were then analyzed using a thematic approach.

From the interviews, the main themes that emerged regarding motivation were family as a priority, activities that can be enjoyed together, and the need for uniqueness. Most participants stated that their visits were for family vacations, so togetherness was a dominant factor. Activities such as boating, taking photos together, and enjoying local seafood were seen as ways to strengthen family relationships (Chen & Chen, 2010). Furthermore, the appeal of Lusi Island as a mud-covered island also served as a motivation, offering a unique experience compared to other marine tourism destinations.

However, several participants emphasized that uniqueness alone is insufficient without adequate facilities. This means that, although initial motivation is driven by curiosity, continued visits still depend on the quality of the experience offered (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). These findings suggest that tourist motivation is dynamic, where internal factors, such as family needs, interact with external factors, such as the destination's attractiveness.

Three main themes related to the observations were the quality of facilities and attractions, cleanliness and comfort, and the availability of special

activities. Most participants considered facilities at Tlocor to be limited, particularly regarding seating areas, public restrooms, and places of worship. This situation creates discomfort, especially for families with small children. Assessments of cleanliness also varied; some felt it was quite clean, but several participants mentioned the presence of plastic waste on the beach. This perception of cleanliness significantly determines the destination's image, as stated by Lee et al. (2015) that the perception of a clean environment directly influences tourist satisfaction.

Furthermore, tourists expect additional, more engaging activities, such as cultural festivals, local music performances, or children's play areas. This indicates that tourists seek not only natural beauty but also a variety of experiences that can enrich their visit (Getz & Page, 2016). Therefore, limited facilities and a limited variety of activities are factors that limit tourist satisfaction.

Tourist experiences in Tlocor tend to be varied. Some participants stated that the boat trip to the island was quite interesting, but others felt the trip was unsafe due to the condition of the simple boats without adequate safety standards. Furthermore, negative experiences arose from a lack of friendly service from the management, long waiting times for transportation, and a lack of information available to tourists. As stated by Pine and Gilmore (1999), a tourism experience should encompass dimensions of entertainment, education, aesthetics, and emotional engagement. Unfortunately, only some of these dimensions were experienced by tourists in Tlocor.

This unsatisfactory experience is a significant factor in low repeat visit rates. According to Chen et al. (2014), satisfaction during a first visit significantly determines tourist loyalty and positive recommendations. If the experience does not meet expectations, tourists are unlikely to return.

This study's findings align with the framework of Engel et al. (2015), which emphasizes that consumer behavior is influenced by motivation, observation, and learning experiences. Tourists' initial motivation to visit Tlocor was driven by curiosity and social needs (family bonding), but negative perceptions regarding cleanliness, facilities, and variety of activities diminished the value of the experience. This indicates a gap between motivation and the perceived tourist experience, which impacts the decision not to revisit. Iskandar and Islam (2021) state that branding strategies alone are insufficient to increase tourist visits without adequate facilities. Similarly, Azizah et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of integrating local product development with the tourist experience to create added value. Cleanliness is a crucial issue in this study's findings. A study (Lee et al., 2015) confirmed that perceived cleanliness is directly related to destination image. A similar finding was reported by (Ramkissoon and Mavondo, 2015), who highlighted the relationship between environmental conditions and tourist loyalty. In the context of Tlocor, despite the unique appeal of Lusi Island, cleanliness issues diminished tourist satisfaction.

The limited variety of unique activities at Tlocor was a major limiting factor. (Getz and Page, 2016) stated that modern tourists seek holistic experiences that are not merely passive but also interactive. This discrepancy indicates that

Tlocor remains trapped in the conventional nature-based tourism model, without providing added value in the form of cultural attractions or entertainment. As emphasized (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), experience is the core of the tourism industry. This study found that the experiential aspect at Tlocor was not fully met, both in terms of transportation safety, friendly service, and available information. This research contributes to the consumer behavior literature by emphasizing that tourist motivation does not automatically guarantee loyalty if the actual experience does not support it. This extends the findings of (Engel et al, 2015) by emphasizing the importance of destination environmental factors in influencing tourist decision-making.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research explains that consumer behavior patterns for marine tourism in Tlocor, Sidoarjo, are formed through a complex interactive process involving tourists' initial motivations, perceptions of the destination, and experiences gained during the visit. These three aspects are inseparable, as motivation is the starting point driving the decision to visit, perceptions serve as a filter for evaluating the destination, and actual experiences ultimately determine tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, tourist behavior in Tlocor is not static, but rather the result of a dynamic interplay of internal and external factors.

The motivations of tourists coming to Tlocor are largely influenced by the need to strengthen family togetherness and the unique appeal of Lusi Island, formed by a natural phenomenon. Lusi Island's uniqueness as a new destination provides added value in the form of curiosity and a unique experience unlike other marine tourism destinations. However, this strong motivation does not automatically guarantee loyalty. This is because loyalty is heavily influenced by the quality of the actual experience tourists experience. When expectations do not align with reality, the initial motivation loses its power to sustain repeat visits.

The research results show that tourist perceptions of facilities, cleanliness, and the variety of activities at the destination are significant determinants in shaping Tlocor's image as a tourist destination. Adequate facilities, clean tourist areas, and the availability of additional activity options are important indicators used by tourists to assess a destination. Conversely, limited supporting facilities, negative perceptions of environmental cleanliness, and a lack of additional attractions create a significant gap between expectations and experiences. This gap directly impacts satisfaction and, ultimately, loyalty.

These findings demonstrate that tourist satisfaction is determined not only by the main attraction, namely Lusi Island, but also by the quality of the accompanying physical and social environment. The physical environment includes the availability of facilities, cleanliness of the area, and accessibility to the destination. Meanwhile, the social environment relates to the quality of service from management, the friendliness of the local community, and interactions between visitors. The combination of these physical and social factors shapes the overall experience, ultimately determining whether tourists are satisfied and have the intention to return.

From a theoretical perspective, this research strengthens understanding in the consumer behavior literature, particularly in the context of community-based marine tourism. The results show that the tourism experience cannot be reduced to simply consuming natural attractions, but must be viewed as an interactive process encompassing psychological, aesthetic, emotional, and social dimensions. In other words, destinations that focus solely on natural uniqueness without considering non-material factors will struggle to create memorable experiences. This emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to tourism destination management.

Another scientific contribution of this research is its emphasis on the match between expectations and the reality of the experience as a key driver of tourist loyalty. While many previous studies have emphasized the role of initial motivation in determining tourist behavior, this finding suggests that motivation serves only as a gateway. The decision to revisit is much more influenced by the extent to which the reality of the experience meets or exceeds expectations. Thus, loyalty is not solely related to the uniqueness of a destination's appeal, but also to the management's ability to ensure consistent positive experiences.

Practically, this research contributes to the development of local destinations like Tlocor by highlighting the importance of non-material factors, such as perceived cleanliness, variety of activities, and service quality. These aspects play an equally important, if not more significant, role than the natural attractions themselves in shaping tourist satisfaction. Therefore, Tlocor's development strategy as a marine tourism destination requires attention to improving the quality of facilities, sustainable cleanliness management, and providing additional attractions that can enrich the tourist experience. In this way, the destination will not only attract first-time visitors but also foster loyalty that encourages tourists to return and recommend the destination to others.

Based on the research findings, marine tourism managers in Tlocor need to design development strategies that are more oriented toward the consumer experience. Improving cleanliness, improving basic facilities, and strengthening transportation safety aspects should be prioritized to enhance tourists' positive perceptions of the destination. Furthermore, innovations in the form of interactive additional attractions based on local culture are needed to provide tourists with a more varied and immersive experience.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Academically, further research could broaden the focus by involving a larger number of participants and incorporating quantitative approaches to more comprehensively measure the relationship between motivation, perception, and experience with tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Cross-destination studies are also important to examine differences in consumer behavior patterns across contexts, thereby enriching the literature on consumer psychology.

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