

SUSTAINABLE MARKETING STRATEGIES TO INCREASE VISITING INTEREST

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ABSTRACT

Background Tourism plays a crucial role in regional economic growth, but the sustainability of this sector depends heavily on effective and environmentally and socially responsible marketing strategies. The phenomenon of fluctuating visitor numbers at Waburi Park indicates that the current marketing strategy is suboptimal, unintegrated, and less sustainable, potentially reducing tourist interest. Objectives This study aims to analyze the sustainable marketing strategies implemented at Waburi Park to increase tourist interest, by examining aspects of branding, promotion, pricing, and distribution. Sample/Research Object This descriptive qualitative study took Waburi Park, Gaya Baru Village, as its object of study, involving 30 visitors as a research sample selected through a purposive sampling technique. Methods Data were collected using observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Results The results of the study indicate that the implementation of sustainable marketing strategies at Waburi Park is still weak. This is evident from branding that lacks a strong visual identity, promotions that are limited to social media without a targeted content strategy, an affordable entrance ticket price of IDR 5,000, but not supported by value-added pricing, and ticket distribution that is still manual and causes queues. These factors significantly influence tourist interest in visiting, as reflected in indicators of interest, desire, consideration, and visit intention. Conclusion: Existing marketing strategies have not fully supported sustainable tourist interest in visiting. Therefore, it is recommended that managers strengthen branding by creating a visual identity and optimizing digital promotions, as well as adopting a digital-based ticket distribution system to improve visitor accessibility and convenience.

Background Tourism plays a crucial role in regional economic growth, but the sustainability of this sector depends heavily on effective and responsible marketing strategies that consider the environment and local community. The fluctuation in visitor numbers at Waburi Park indicates that the current marketing strategy is not yet optimal, is unintegrated, and is less sustainable, potentially leading to a decline in tourist interest. Purpose This study aims to analyze the sustainable marketing strategies implemented at Waburi Park to increase tourist visiting interest by examining aspects of branding, promotion, pricing, and distribution. Sample/Research Object This descriptive qualitative research focuses on Waburi Park in Gaya Baru Village and involves a sample of 30 visitors selected using a purposive sampling technique. Method Data was collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Results The findings indicate that the implementation of a sustainable marketing strategy at Waburi Park is still weak. This is evident from the weak branding without a strong visual identity, promotion limited to social media without a focused content strategy, affordable ticket prices at IDR 5,000 but not supported by a clear value proposition, and manual ticket distribution that often leads to queues. These factors significantly influence tourist visiting interest, as reflected in the indicators of attraction, desire, consideration, and intention to visit. Conclusion The existing marketing strategy has not fully supported sustainable visitor interest. Therefore, it is recommended that management strengthen branding by creating a visual identity, optimizing digital promotion, and adopting a digital-based ticket distribution system to enhance visitor accessibility and convenience.

INTRODUCTION

One of the key industries driving economic growth is tourism, which also helps preserve the environment and cultural heritage. Globally, the competitiveness of a tourist destination is determined not only by its natural beauty but also by effective and sustainable marketing strategies (Kotler & Keller, 2018). Implementing a sustainable marketing strategy requires the integration of promotion, branding, pricing, and distribution, taking into account social, economic, and environmental aspects, to build long-term relationships with tourists (Belz & Peattie, 2018).

However, in practice, many tourist destinations still face challenges in optimally managing marketing strategies. Waburi Park in Gaya Baru Village is an example of a destination that has grown rapidly since 2020, but its marketing strategy still suffers from weaknesses such as weak branding, manual ticket distribution, and inconsistent promotions (Nura & Hasana, 2023). This situation has resulted in unstable tourist interest despite its natural attractions and relatively affordable ticket prices (Irawan & Rifki, 2021). Therefore, this research is needed to examine the sustainable marketing strategy at Waburi Park in depth.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of strengthening destination identity and modernizing marketing systems to compete with other tourist attractions that already have strong brands. Previous research tends to emphasize ecotourism potential (Djafar & Faisal, 2019) or the effectiveness of social media-based promotions (Nurhikmah & Sulasmi, 2019; Nura & Hasana, 2023), while specific studies on the integration of branding, promotion, pricing, and distribution in the context of rural tourism destinations are still limited. Therefore, our study aims to fill this gap by emphasizing the evaluation of sustainable marketing strategies based on direct visitor experiences. This research is also relevant to the results of Musrini et al. (2024) who showed that tourism marketing strategies significantly influence the income of economic actors around the Lapoili Ring Bridge tourist attraction. These findings align with the focus of this research, which emphasizes the importance of implementing sustainable marketing strategies to increase interest among visitors to Waburi Park in Gaya Baru Village. Furthermore, this study supports the findings of Kuswinton (2022), who showed that the use of adaptive marketing techniques such as digital technology, product diversification, and price adjustments can help businesses survive and compete amidst changes in the business environment. These findings reinforce the urgency of this research, which emphasizes the need for strategic sustainable marketing in increasing interest among tourists in New Style Village Waburi Park, which will benefit the local economy.

The novelty of this research lies in the m approach This analysis evaluates the effectiveness of marketing tactics from a tourist perspective. This contrasts with previous studies that focused more on economic factors, both natural and local, as key attractions. This study aims to provide more useful strategic recommendations for the management of Waburi Park by investigating actual visitor experiences, particularly related to brand enhancement and digital distribution growth.

The purpose of this study is to understand how branding, promotion, pricing, and distribution influence visitor interest in Waburi Park, in accordance with the research problem formulation. It is hoped that the findings of this study will both theoretically advance knowledge of sustainable marketing and practically assist managers in designing more successful marketing plans in the future.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative methodology to describe sustainable marketing strategies to increase tourist interest in Waburi Park. In addition to primary data collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation, secondary data drawn from government publications, literature, and visitor numbers were also used.

This study was conducted at Waburi Park in Gaya Baru Village, Lapandewa District, South Buton Regency, for two months, from June to July 2025. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique, which selects informants based on specific factors deemed most relevant to the study. The population in this study was all visitors to Waburi Park. The research sample consisted of thirty people who had visited the location in person.

Direct observation at the research sites, in-depth interviews with managers and tourists, and other approaches were used to collect data, as well as documentation in the form of notes, drawings, and other supporting materials. Using observation notes and interview procedures, the researcher served as the primary tool for this study, collecting, processing, and analyzing data.

A qualitative SWOT analysis was used to examine the collected data. This method was applied to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks of the sustainable marketing

strategy at Waburi Park. To gain a comprehensive picture of how well the marketing plan has succeeded in increasing tourist interest, the analysis findings were then evaluated descriptively.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine sustainable marketing strategies to increase tourist interest in Waburi Park in Gaya Baru Village. Based on observations and interviews with 30 respondents, it was found that the implementation of marketing strategies at Waburi Park still faces several obstacles, particularly in the aspects of *branding*, *promotion*, *pricing*, and *distribution*. *This finding aligns with the marketing mix framework proposed by Kotler & Keller (2018), where these four aspects are essential elements in building the competitiveness of tourist destinations.*

The research results show that Waburi Park's branding remains weak due to the lack of a visual identity in the form of a logo or distinctive symbol. Most visitors expressed difficulty recognizing Waburi Park as a destination distinct from other attractions. This lack of visual identity diminishes the strength of the destination's image and results in low brand recall. This aligns with Keller's (2017) opinion that strong branding serves to create differentiation and visitor loyalty. Therefore, strengthening the visual identity is a strategic step that management needs to take.

In terms of promotion, Waburi Park has utilized social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram. The majority of respondents learned about the destination through friends' posts or social media content. However, promotion is still not consistently managed with a clear content strategy. This situation indicates that promotion is more organic than programmatic. However, according to Tjiptono (2020), effective promotion must be carried out in a targeted manner with messages that resonate with the target market. This means that Waburi Park still needs to improve the quality of its digital content and expand its reach through collaborations with influencers and tourism communities.

Price is considered a key competitive advantage. With an entrance fee of IDR 5,000, almost all respondents stated that the price was very affordable and commensurate with the facilities provided. This low price is a driving factor for visits, especially among families and groups of tourists. This aligns with the theory of Kotler & Armstrong (2019) that the right price can create a positive perception of value in the minds of consumers. However, even with low prices, pricing should be accompanied by additional service packages so that the value provided is not simply based on low costs.

Furthermore, regarding distribution, the ticket sales system is still manual at the entrance. This leads to long queues when visitor numbers increase and is considered impractical by respondents. The majority of visitors hope for digital innovations such as online ticket ordering. According to Chopra & Meindl (2021), effective distribution must provide easy access for consumers. Therefore, digitizing the ticket distribution system is an urgent solution to make the visitor experience more convenient and modern.

Respondents who expressed interest in visiting cited the serene atmosphere, natural beauty, and visually appealing content widely shared on social media as key attractions. This demonstrates how social media significantly influences people's opinions and travel plans. These findings support research by Nura & Hasana (2023), which asserted that social media-based promotions can increase tourist interest in visiting. However, unlike previous research that only emphasized the promotional aspect, this study shows that branding, price, and distribution also play a significant role in shaping interest in visiting.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that sustainable marketing strategies at Waburi Park are not yet fully optimized. Branding remains weak, promotions are inconsistent, manual distribution is inefficient, and prices, while affordable, need to be supported by added value. The novelty of this study lies in the experience-based assessment of engaging visitors, which provides a more accurate picture of techniques that need improvement. Therefore, practical consequences of this research include the need to develop service packages that can enhance visitors' perceptions of Waburi Park's value, strengthen its visual identity, professionally manage digital promotions, and innovate technology-based distribution channels.

Strengths Ticket prices are very cheap and affordable. Almost all respondents stated that the entrance fee of only Rp5,000 is very suitable for all groups. Some even said the price is very friendly for family or group visits. Affordable tickets are a key factor for visitors, as they are considered value *for money*. Respondents noted the unique natural attraction of Waburi Park, which offers ocean views from high cliffs and stunning sunsets. The photo spots atop the cliffs are a major draw, drawing

visitors in and drawing them back. Promotion through social media is already running. Many respondents learned about Waburi Park from Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram. Social media has proven effective in generating interest, especially visual content (photos, reels, and short videos). This factor is a strength because visitors come based on social recommendations (friends, posts, stories). The location is quite easy to reach. Some visitors consider the distance from Baubau relatively short (about an hour or so). This makes Waburi Park a popular alternative destination with low costs and a short journey.

Weaknesses Weak branding (no visual identity/logo) Respondents stated that Waburi Park lacks a logo or distinctive symbol. This makes it difficult for the tourist attraction to stick in the minds of visitors. Weak branding makes Waburi Park less prominent than other destinations that already have a visual identity. **Despite digital** promotions, respondents felt the content was still limited. Some noted the need for more varied content and offline promotions (banners and billboards) to increase public awareness. This means promotions are still simple and inconsistent. Ticket distribution is still manual, **with** many respondents complaining that tickets are only sold on-site. This often results in long queues during peak hours and is considered impractical. Some even suggested online sales or through partners to make it more accessible to out-of-town tourists. Interviews revealed that despite the natural beauty, supporting facilities such as ticketing systems, promotions, and official identification are still limited. This can reduce visitor comfort.

Opportunities Social media travel trends With a price of Rp5,000, Waburi Park has the potential to become a top choice. Nearly all respondents learned about Waburi Park from social media, meaning there's a significant opportunity to optimize creative content, reels, and short videos to reach a wider audience. Affordable prices are a key attraction for families, school groups, and community groups. This opportunity can be exploited by offering tour packages or special activities. Unique photo and sunset spots Many respondents were attracted to the panoramic ocean views from above. The growing trend of photography and digital content tourism presents a significant opportunity to promote the beauty of Waburi Park as "the best photo and sunset destination in South Buton." Potential local and out-of-region tourism markets The relatively close proximity to Baubau makes it highly likely to attract regular visitors. If online ticket distribution is developed, even out-of-town tourists could more easily plan their visits.

Threats Competition with other destinations Without strong branding, Waburi Park risks losing out to other tourist attractions that have a clear identity and more massive promotions. Visitor inconvenience due to manual systems and long queues for manual ticketing can detract from the visitor experience and discourage them from returning. Inconsistent promotions If social media content isn't updated regularly, visitors can quickly forget or lose interest. This is dangerous because most visitors learn about Waburi Park solely through social media.

The SWOT analysis results show that Waburi Park's sustainable marketing strategy has the strengths of affordable ticket prices, unique natural attractions, and social media promotions that are quite effective in reaching visitors. However, its weaknesses lie in the lack of a visual identity, inconsistent promotions, and manual ticket distribution. This condition aligns with the theory of Kotler & Keller (2018), which emphasizes that a sustainable marketing strategy encompasses aspects of branding, promotion, pricing, and distribution. Of these four indicators, Waburi Park only excels in the aspects of pricing and some promotions, while branding and distribution remain weak. This finding differs from the research of Nurhikmah & Sulasmi (2019), which emphasized product excellence and location as the dominant factors in attracting visitors, because at Waburi Park, affordable prices and social media play a greater role. On the other hand, the main opportunities that can be exploited are social media-based tourism trends, the potential for unique photo spots and sunsets, and friendly prices for families and groups.

Emerging threats include competition with other destinations that already have strong branding, inconsistent promotions, and manual distribution that could potentially reduce visitor comfort. These findings support research by Nura & Hasana (2023) which emphasizes the importance of social media in attracting tourists, but also show similarities with research by Irawan & Rifki (2021) stated that affordable prices can increase visits. Therefore, the SWOT analysis concludes that Waburi Park's sustainable marketing strategy still requires strengthening, particularly in branding and distribution, to better align with theory and compete with other destinations, as demonstrated by previous research.

CLOSING

The purpose of this study was to examine sustainable marketing techniques to increase tourist interest in Waburi Park in Gaya Baru Village. According to the study's findings, sustainable marketing tactics, including branding, promotion, pricing, and distribution, have not been fully optimized in attracting tourists. First, the *branding aspect* is still weak due to the lack of a strong logo or visual identity, making it difficult for visitors to recognize Waburi Park as a distinct destination. Second, promotions have been conducted through social media such as *Facebook*, *TikTok*, and *Instagram*, but are still organic without a consistent content strategy. Third, the entrance ticket price of IDR 5,000 is considered very affordable by most respondents and is a key driver of interest in visiting. Fourth, ticket distribution is still manual at tourist sites, which results in queues when visitor numbers increase. These findings indicate that although affordable prices are a competitive advantage, weaknesses in branding and distribution aspects remain obstacles to increasing tourist interest sustainably.

Overall, this study confirms that the implementation of a more integrated sustainable marketing strategy through strengthening visual identity, professional digital promotion management, technology-based distribution innovation, and the development of value-added packages will be able to increase the attractiveness and interest of tourists visiting Waburi Park.

This study has several limitations. First, data collection was conducted only over a specific period of time, so not all variations in conditions and situations at Waburi Park could be observed in depth. This makes the research results more representative of conditions at the time of the study, rather than the overall long-term dynamics. Second, interviews were only conducted with a few managers and a limited number of visitors. This may result in a limited perspective and not encompassing the full perceptions of all visitors and related parties. Third, this study only focuses on sustainable marketing strategies with indicators of branding, promotion, pricing, distribution, and how these relate to visitor interest (attractions, desires, considerations, and intentions to visit). Fourth, this study used a qualitative methodology, emphasizing the researcher's interpretation of field data in the results. Therefore, the research findings cannot be broadly applied to all tourists or other tourist destinations. The research results more closely reflect the specific conditions and context at Waburi Park at the time of the study. Fifth, The branding aspect has not been maximized in the field. U Because Waburi Park lacks a clear logo or brand identity, there is currently no information available on how visitors perceive the park's brand. To generate more comprehensive results, it is recommended that future research use quantitative methodologies with larger sample sizes and incorporate other external variables.

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