



Analysis of Challenges and Barriers to the Integration of a Promotional Mix in Tlocor Marine Tourism Sidoarjo

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The study concludes that leveraging Tlocor Marine Tourism's potential requires strategic planning, enhanced training, consistent digital engagement, and administrative support to overcome operational, financial, and regulatory challenges. Addressing these barriers will help attract a broader audience, improve visitor experience, and support sustainable tourism development. This study provides practical insights for local tourism managers and policymakers to enhance promotional strategies and optimize tourism development.

Abstract: *Tlocor Marine Tourism in Sidoarjo Regency, East Java, offers significant potential through its coastal scenery, mangrove ecotourism, boat trips to Lusi Island, and the local fishing community. Despite these attractions, the site remains underrecognized due to limited and inconsistent promotional efforts. This study analyzes the challenges and barriers in implementing the promotional mix at Tlocor Marine Tourism. A qualitative descriptive approach was used, collecting data through in-depth semi-structured interviews with managers, community members, and government officials, supplemented by field observations and documentation. Findings reveal that while the five elements of the promotional mix advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations, and direct marketing are applied, they are neither integrated nor consistent. Digital advertising, particularly via social media, is sporadic and reaches a limited audience; sales promotions are restricted to discounts; personal selling lacks standard procedures and systematic training; public relations efforts are reactive; and direct marketing has ceased due to past misuse of visitor databases. Key barriers include post-pandemic human resource shortages, budget constraints, psychological trauma from prior database misuse, and bureaucratic obstacles regarding land ownership and legal permits.*

These factors hinder the establishment of a structured and sustainable promotional

Kata Kunci: *Promotional Mix; Promotional Barriers; Marine Tourism; Tlocor Marine Tourism; Tourism Marketing*

Introduction

Tourism is a strategic sector that makes a significant contribution to regional development, whether through increased revenue, job creation, or the strengthening of local cultural identity (Dewi & Ma'ruf, 2025). In the process of developing tourist attractions, promotion plays a crucial role as it serves to introduce these attractions to the general public in a planned and sustainable manner (Kotler et al., 2017). Promotion is not merely about conveying information but also about how managers effectively communicate the unique value of a tourist attraction. Therefore, promotional efforts serve as a critical indicator for assessing the quality of management of a tourist attraction. Without adequate promotion, significant tourism potential may remain underutilized and fail to develop to its fullest potential (Gato et al., 2022).

Sidoarjo Regency possesses a variety of tourism potentials that can be developed, one of which is marine tourism. A prominent tourist attraction is Tlocor Marine Tourism, located in Tlocor Hamlet, Kedungpandan Village, Jabon Subdistrict, Sidoarjo, East Java. This destination offers a combination of natural beauty and the local wisdom of coastal communities, creating a unique and authentic tourism character. Tlocor Marine Tourism offers various exciting activities, such as boat trips to Lusi Island, mangrove forest exploration, traditional fishing activities, as well as recreational facilities like camping areas and free fishing spots ([Putra, 2025](#)).

The uniqueness of Tlocor Marine Tourism lies not only in its coastal scenery but also in the diversity of its ecosystems. This area is home to mangrove forests that play a vital role as habitats for various species, including the Australian pelican (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*), which seasonally becomes a rare wildlife attraction ([Widyatama et al., 2025](#)). The presence of these pelicans, along with various mangrove species such as *Avicennia marina* and *Rhizophora mucronata*, can serve as an educational draw for tourists. However, this potential remains largely untapped and could become a niche market segment for specialty tourists seeking unique and educational experiences.

Furthermore, Tlocor's appeal is deeply rooted in the local wisdom of the fishing community. The lives of the fishermen here are not only fascinating to observe but also illustrate the harmonious relationship between humans and the coastal environment. Traditional activities such as pond farming, fishing techniques, and the processing of seafood into local products represent experiential attractions that could be packaged more effectively. However, this local wisdom currently operates as an economic routine and has not been developed into a culturally valuable tourism package, thereby missing the opportunity to provide visitors with a more immersive experience.

Nevertheless, this significant potential has not yet been fully maximized. This is evident from the still-low number of tourist visits, indicating a gap between the abundant natural potential and management and promotion that are not yet optimal. This issue suggests that the appeal of Tlocor Marine Tourism has not yet been fully packaged as a tourism product ready to be offered. Weak promotion results in unclear, unfocused messaging that fails to highlight the attractions' unique strengths. Without adequate promotion, the strengths of this tourism product remain unknown, unremembered, and unchosen by tourists ([Arista, 2023](#)).

Tlocor Marine Tourism, encompassing the unique Lusi Island, emerged from the sedimentation of the Sidoarjo mudflow disaster, transforming a catastrophic event into a potential eco-educational destination ([Latifaturrohmah & Junarto, 2023](#); [Rian et al., 2023](#)). The management of this destination heavily relies on the synergy between the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) and the Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDes) Mitra Abadi ([Ramadhan & Sukmana, 2023](#)). BUMDes plays a dual role as both a commercial and social entity, driving rural economic independence through tourism ([Aditya et al., 2023](#); [Cahyadi & Basyari, 2023](#)). However, effective tourism development requires strong coordination among stakeholders. Previous studies indicate that imbalanced authority and weak

coordination among local actors, including the government and the community, often hinder the optimization of tourist destinations. Therefore, a well-coordinated promotional strategy and clear tourism policies are essential to overcome these governance and operational barriers.

Current promotion of Tlocor Marine Tourism still relies on word-of-mouth and social media, such as Instagram. While this can reach a limited audience, it is unable to reach a broader audience, particularly outside the local area. Additionally, the management has not yet utilized structured and comprehensive promotion, which could encompass various promotional elements to create greater awareness. Therefore, an analysis of the promotional mix is crucial to understand how promotional messages can be communicated more clearly, attractively, and consistently to a broader market.

Furthermore, the transition to a robust promotional mix in Tlocor Marine Tourism often encounters systemic hurdles. According to ([Priatmoko et al., 2021](#)), successful tourism promotion requires not only local enthusiasm but also sustained managerial capacity to package tourism products effectively. When this capacity is lacking, destinations struggle to formulate clear marketing policies and often fall into the trap of ad-hoc promotional planning. Therefore, identifying these underlying structural and managerial barriers is a critical step before implementing any comprehensive promotional framework.

In recent years, promotion in Sidoarjo, including in Tlocor, has been one of the main factors contributing to the decline in visitor numbers. The lack of structured promotion and challenges such as limited resources and a lack of innovation in attractions have made Tlocor Marine Tourism struggle to compete with other more popular tourist destinations ([Ningtyas & Rosdiana, 2025](#)). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the promotional mix at Tlocor Marine Tourism to identify challenges and obstacles, as well as improvements, so that promotions can run more optimally and sustainably.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive qualitative research design, chosen for its ability to deeply describe phenomena, particularly within the context of community-based marine tourism promotion dynamics. This approach is relevant for capturing the social context and unique characteristics of Tlocor Marine Tourism in Sidoarjo. The research subjects consist of the managers of Tlocor Marine Tourism, the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), the local government or the Youth, Sports, and Tourism Office, as well as local residents selected through purposive sampling to obtain accurate information regarding the challenges and obstacles in implementing the promotional mix. To collect data, this study relied on three main techniques: in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore operational details and informants' experiences; field observations to verify the promotional activities carried out; and documentation to strengthen the validity of the findings. After the data was collected, data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consists of three simultaneous processes: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions to analyze the challenges and

obstacles faced in the implementation of the promotional mix at Tlocor Marine Tourism ([Miles et al., 1994](#)).

Result and Discussion

The research findings indicate that the implementation of the promotional mix at Tlocor Sidoarjo Marine Tourism has encompassed five main elements: advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, and direct marketing. However, the implementation of these elements has not been carried out in a unified and integrated manner. Social media, particularly Instagram, is used to promote tourist attractions, but its use remains inconsistent and limited to a local audience. Sales promotions are limited to discounts and price negotiations without the development of clear tour packages. Personal selling, conducted by tour guides and management staff, aids in interaction with tourists, but lacks support from standard procedures and regular training. Public relations appears active through the organization of events and media collaborations, but it is reactive and has not yet fully engaged a broader audience. Direct marketing, such as via WhatsApp and phone, is used to respond to tourist inquiries, but it is not supported by adequate database management.

1. Managerial and Budgetary Constraints (Zero Budget)

The root cause of the disruption in the promotional mix, particularly regarding the advertising component, stems from managerial issues and the absence of a budget (zero budget). Based on field findings, the lack of a dedicated marketing budget is not solely due to a shortage of cash, but rather a result of past financial management transparency dynamics in the village that forced the promotional funding program to be discontinued. Currently, tight financial conditions are forcing the management of BUMDes Mitra Abadi to implement extreme cost-cutting measures. All operational revenue from WBT, derived from ticket fees and boat rentals, is exclusively allocated to cover the costs of maintaining the boat fleet, daily staff wages, and area cleaning. As a result, the management lacks the financial cushion to conduct market penetration, produce outdoor media such as brochures and X-Banners, or launch paid digital advertising campaigns (digital ads).

2. Human Resource and Digital Literacy Crisis

The stalled promotional infrastructure at WBT is also driven by a crisis in the capacity and quantity of Human Resources (HR). The daily operational machinery, which was initially driven by approximately 63 staff members working in shifts, has drastically shrunk post-COVID-19 to just 15 to 17 active staff members. This reduction in personnel has created a double workload. The remaining staff were focused solely on physical operational services in the field, managing ticket counters and operating boats, leaving strategic tasks such as digital marketing completely neglected. Furthermore, the initial creation of WBT's digital assets, such as an Instagram account, was previously handled by an external party, namely students from the Community Service Program (KKN) in 2020. After the students' service

period ended, local managers were unable to continue these tasks due to the lack of a dedicated administrator and the scarcity of young talent with adequate digital literacy.

3. Bureaucratic Barriers and Land Status

One of the most unique findings in this study is that sales promotion and public relations efforts are hindered by land jurisdiction issues. WBT's main attractions, mangrove ecotourism and the journey to Lusi Island, are situated on land whose ownership status falls under the authority of the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (KKP). These legal limitations prevent the operator, BUMDes, from building permanent infrastructure, leading to the deterioration of facilities such as wooden bridges that are beginning to rot. This situation directly hinders the operator from conducting business promotions or signing formal Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with travel agents or major investors. This was emphasized by Mr. Kasiono, Chairman of BUMDes:

" Before the pandemic, there was actually an opportunity for cooperation with the travel agency Odifa Tour. They planned to invest a significant amount, around Rp1.8 billion. Additionally, there was also an investor from China who was interested in collaborating. However, the cooperation did not proceed because the prospective investor requested proof of land legality and permits. At that time, the management could not provide those documents because the land being used is state-owned..."

4. Direct Marketing Challenges

In terms of direct marketing, the management has actually utilized WhatsApp and phone calls to handle tourists' inquiries and reservations. Administratively, the management also records visitor data through a passenger manifest book. However, the potential of this database is not utilized at all for follow-up marketing efforts or the periodic sending of promotional offers. This reluctance appears to be rooted in information security concerns. Based on an interview with Ms. Alfina, the Public Relations Officer for Pokdarwis, the management has experienced trauma due to data misuse:

" Back then, we actually used to diligently record guests' phone numbers in the manifest, then we'd contact them one by one if there was any info. But now we just don't dare to do it anymore, because we're really traumatized. There was an incident before where Ms. Ina's number was misused by outsiders to scam people, the orders were fake, sis, and Ms. Ina lost millions of rupiah. Ugh, we're just done with it, sis, whenever we think about that incident."

This fact reveals just how fragile the direct marketing infrastructure at WBT is. Instead of establishing data security protocols, management took a reactive approach by completely halting the use of the database. This paradox has caused WBT to lose its cheapest and most promising promotional tool for building long-term relationships with its customers.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that the implementation of the promotional mix at Tlocor Marine Tourism has not yet functioned as an integrated system. The main obstacles identified align with the research by ([Putri & Fauzan, 2025](#); [Tirtayani et al., 2024](#)), which confirms that promotion of local-scale tourist attractions is often hindered by limited human resources, a lack of digital literacy, and the absence of promotional innovation. In the case of WBT, the reduction in staff numbers following the pandemic resulted in digital marketing functions, such as Instagram management, being completely neglected, as the remaining staff were focused solely on on-site physical services.

Furthermore, the absence of a dedicated marketing budget (zero budget) prevents managers from maintaining advertising elements. This situation forces Public Relations (PR) and Personal Selling to become the main pillars of WBT promotion. This aligns with the findings of Febrianti and ([Febrianti & Suryaningsih, 2023](#)), who found that in community-based tourism destinations, public relations often takes a more prominent role because it is supported by social relationships, local cultural activities, and community engagement, such as local SMEs. Nevertheless, the absence of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and consistent communication training means that these services remain highly dependent on the individual capabilities of staff, thus failing to become a consistent promotional strategy.

The operational and financial setbacks experienced by Tlocor Marine Tourism align with global tourism vulnerabilities during crises. As noted by ([Gössling et al., 2020](#)), the COVID-19 pandemic caused severe structural disruptions in local and community-based tourism, leading to drastic workforce reductions and the rapid depletion of operational funds. This condition inevitably forces local destination managers to prioritize basic survival and physical maintenance over strategic marketing investments, effectively stalling long-term promotional innovation.

The zero-budget constraint and human resource crisis identified in this study are consistent with the broader challenges of local tourism governance. ([Agustina et al., 2021](#)) highlight that limited funding and sub-optimal promotional initiatives are the primary inhibiting factors hindering the growth of Tlocor Marine Tourism. This is exacerbated by a lack of skilled human resources capable of executing digital marketing strategies. To resolve this, continuous community assistance and capacity-building programs, particularly in digital literacy and marketing, are urgently needed ([Insani et al., 2019](#)). The urgency of adopting digital tools is further supported by ([Mason et al., 2021](#)), who highlight that social media marketing has become an indispensable strategy for tourism and business recovery post-COVID-19. Destinations that fail to maintain their active digital presence or upgrade their digital literacy are at a significant disadvantage, as they lose their primary, cost-effective channel to reach a broader audience and rebuild tourist engagement in a highly competitive digital landscape. Furthermore, analyzing these constraints through the 7Ps marketing mix approach reveals that while the physical 'Product' and 'Place' elements of Tlocor are strong, the 'Promotion' and 'People' elements remain critically underdeveloped,

requiring intensive training and community empowerment to increase tourist arrivals ([Yudhiasta et al., 2025](#)).

On the other hand, this study identified a novelty in the form of structural and psychological barriers that are rarely highlighted in tourism marketing literature. First, bureaucratic obstacles related to the land status owned by the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) directly hinder the managers' ability to conduct large-scale sales promotions, as the lack of permanent infrastructure limits their ability to enter into formal contracts (MOUs) with travel agencies. Second, the failure of direct marketing elements at WBT is not due to a lack of technological knowledge, but rather the result of managers' "psychological trauma" stemming from past scams involving visitor databases. This paradox demonstrates that, in the context of local tourism, information security and the legality of physical assets have a direct correlation and a highly significant impact on the success of integrated promotional strategies. This jurisdictional challenge aligns with the findings of ([Rodiyah et al., 2022](#)), who noted that the central government's ownership of the land restricts local government and community interventions in Lusi Island. Resolving this complex issue requires cross-sectoral collaboration and a clear legal framework that empowers local entities like BUMDes and Pokdarwis to manage and promote the area without violating national asset regulations ([Umar et al., 2019](#)).

Moreover, the hesitancy to utilize visitor databases due to prior scams highlights a critical vulnerability in local tourism marketing. ([Rita et al., 2019](#)) assert that establishing trust and ensuring strict data security are foundational for maintaining long-term consumer relationships and executing effective direct marketing in the tourism sector.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the implementation of the promotional mix at Tlocor Marine Tourism and identified the main challenges in its execution. The findings indicate that while the five elements of the promotional mix advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations, and direct marketing have been applied, they are not integrated or consistently executed. Key barriers include limited human resources, post-pandemic staff shortages, budget constraints, psychological trauma from prior misuse of visitor databases, and bureaucratic obstacles related to land ownership and permits. The implications of these findings are significant for both practice and research. Practically, they highlight the need for structured promotional planning, the development of standard operating procedures for personal selling and public relations, and the implementation of secure and efficient database management for direct marketing. For local tourism managers and policymakers, addressing budgetary and regulatory constraints is crucial to enabling more consistent and effective promotional activities, which can enhance visitor engagement, increase tourism revenue, and support sustainable community-based tourism development. For future research, studies could investigate the effectiveness of specific digital marketing strategies in overcoming human resource and budgetary limitations, explore innovative community-based promotional approaches, or examine the impact of legal and bureaucratic frameworks

on tourism promotion. Such research could provide actionable insights to enhance the strategic implementation of promotional mixes in similar local tourism destinations.

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