Exploring Students' Perceptions of Open Trip to Lombok: Digital-Based Tourism Strategies in the Gen Z Era

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Abstract: This study aims to explore students' perceptions of the open trip program to Lombok offered during the semester break, using a qualitative descriptive approach. Open trip programs are one of the popular forms of travel among students because they offer affordable costs, short time, and meaningful social experiences. A bold survey using Google Form successfully collected data from 230 students from various universities in Indonesia. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, with open coding, axial coding, and triangulation of meaning to identify the main themes of the respondents' narratives. The results of the study revealed five main themes: (1) students' positive perceptions of Lombok's attractiveness as a tourist destination, (2) motivations and obstacles in participating in open trips, (3) expectations of the contents of the travel package, (4) effective promotional strategies based on social media, and (5) correlation of perceptions with students' demographic backgrounds. These findings indicate the importance of targeted digital marketing strategies, the preparation of tour packages that suit students' needs, and collaboration with campus organizations. This study provides practical contributions for tourism managers and open trip providers in designing programs that are more contextual and attractive to the student segment.

Keyword: Open Trip, Students, Lombok Tourism, Consumer Perception, Digital Promotion

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the open trip concept has become one of the tourism alternatives that is popular with students, especially because it offers more affordable travel and flexibility in scheduling (Fauzi, 2022). This tourism model allows participants who do not know each other to join a pre-designed travel package, thereby reducing the burden of logistics and planning that are generally burdensome for students (Utami et al., 2024). This phenomenon has developed along with the increasing need for students for recreational experiences that are still economical but socially and educationally meaningful. Lombok is one of the destinations that has a strong appeal for young people. With natural wealth such as Kuta Mandalika Beach, Gili

Trawangan, to Mount Rinjani, as well as the distinctive Sasak culture, Lombok is a destination that is not only exotic but also offers educational and spiritual value (Yuliana & Sari, 2023). However, efforts to attract the student segment as tourists to Lombok are not without challenges. Lack of specific promotion to this segment, high inter-island transportation costs, and limited packaging of student-friendly tour packages are obstacles that need to be overcome (Sutrisno et al., 2024).

On the other hand, the development of technology and social media opens up great opportunities to reach the student market with digital marketing strategies and community approaches (Arifin, 2023). Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter are effective channels for conveying information and building enthusiasm through visual content and peer-to-peer testimonials. In addition, strengthening community-based tourism (CBT) which prioritizes local community involvement in tourism activities is a special attraction for students who now tend to prefer tourism that has a social impact (Bonang et al., 2022).

Therefore, it is important to understand how students perceive the open trip program to Lombok, especially during semester breaks, so that the strategy for compiling and promoting tour packages can be more targeted. This study aims to explore students' perceptions, motivations, and expectations of the open trip program to Lombok using a qualitative approach, in order to produce contextual and applicable findings for tourism industry players and destination managers.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of exploring and deeply understanding students' perceptions, motivations, and preferences towards the open trip program to Lombok. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to capture the subjective meaning contained in respondents' answers, especially those contained in open-ended questions in the survey (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The thematic analysis approach was used as the main framework for processing qualitative data sourced from the opinion column in the questionnaire, especially in questions 7 and 8. The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions, both closed and open, covering respondents' demographic identities, travel experiences to Lombok, visiting intentions, and opinions and promotional suggestions. This survey was conducted online using Google Form, and successfully collected 230 student respondents from various universities in Indonesia, especially those domiciled or originating from the islands of Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi.

The data analyzed came from primary data and was collected through a non-probability sampling method, with a purposive sampling technique on respondents who provided complete and meaningful answers in the open opinion section. This technique was chosen to ensure that the processed narratives truly reflect the perceptions and aspirations of students (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The analysis process was carried out through several stages: first, open coding was used to identify important phrases from the respondents' narratives. Second, the codings were then grouped into thematic categories through an axial coding process that allows for the formation of relationships between categories. Third, researchers drew conclusions through a process of triangulation of meaning, namely by comparing between categories and reading narratives collectively to find general patterns that can be drawn as main themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To maintain data validity, a member checking process was carried out, namely re-reading the coding results together by two researchers to ensure that the interpretation matches the context of the original answer. In addition, collective discussions and checking between readers were carried out to avoid interpretative bias and ensure the accuracy of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
1.Perception of Lombok's Attractions as a Student Destination
Most respondents showed enthusiasm for Lombok as a tourist destination worth visiting by students. Even among those who had never been to Lombok, the perception built through social media or friends' stories was quite strong. One respondent stated, "I agree because there are many interesting and exotic tours in Lombok that would be a shame to miss, especially if there are promotions" (Respondent 217). The main attractions highlighted were the natural beauty, relatively affordable cost of living, and exoticism that is not as well-known as Bali but promises a different experience. Research by Jumriati (2024) emphasized that tourists' perceptions of tourist destinations are greatly influenced by social media content, which shapes the image and expectations of the destination. This shows that positive perceptions of Lombok as a student tourist destination can be strengthened through effective digital promotion strategies. Research by (Ilhamalimy, Suhud, et al., 2025) found that Lombok's tourist attractions have a significant impact on tourists' interest in visiting.

2.Motivations and Barriers to Participating in Open Trips
The main motivations for participating in open trips include promotions, ease of travel, and togetherness with friends. Students like the concept of "cheap but quality vacations". Respondent 199 wrote, "Agree with the existence of open trip promo prices, according to student pockets". However, several respondents also conveyed obstacles such as limited funds, inflexible time, and concerns about the safety or comfort of mass trips. This finding is in line with a study by (Sari et al., 2018) which identified that the main motivations for young tourists in choosing tourist destinations are to rest, take time to relax, spend time with family, find sensations and joy, and gain experiences that cannot be had at home. In addition, an article by IDN Times (2024) stated that open trips offer advantages such as lower costs, definite travel plans, and the opportunity to meet new friends, which are attractive to students.

3. Expectations of Open Trip Package Contents
Respondents have high expectations of the open trip packages offered. They expect the package to include transportation, accommodation, meals, and tours of popular destinations in Lombok. Documentation facilities, tour guides, and schedule flexibility are also desired. Some expressed the hope for a "meal bonus" or "free photos" which they think could be a lure. This shows the importance of value creation in compiling student tour packages. According to research by (Sari et al., 2018), young tourists tend to look for unique and different experiences from their daily routines, so providing tour packages that offer added value can increase their interest in participating.

4. Promotional Strategies Considered Effective
The most frequently suggested promotional strategy is through social media. Respondent 126 said, "You can promote through social media such as content," while other respondents added the importance of creating visual content such as short videos, infographics, and friends' testimonials. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are considered effective in reaching students. Strategies such as campus socialization, collaboration with BEM, and giving prizes for high GPAs also emerged. Research by Abidin (2025) shows that social media has a significant influence in shaping tourist preferences, with factors such as visualization, reviews, influencers, and interactive content playing an important role in attracting tourists' interest in open trips. In addition, an effective promotional strategy in local tourism development involves the use of social media to build the identity and branding of tourist destinations (Ciputra University, 2023).

5. Correlation of Perception with Student Demographic Background

The analysis shows that positive perceptions and high interest in open trips are more dominant among respondents aged 20–24 years, mostly female, and currently studying for a bachelor's degree. They are also dominated by management study programs who may be more familiar with the concept of digital marketing. This background is relevant to the Gen Z market segment which is known to be digital-savvy and budget-conscious. A study by (Lusianawati & Widaningsih, 2024) confirmed that Gen Z tourists have a preference for tourism services that are easily accessible, affordable, and can be customized according to their needs. In addition, research by (Sihotang et al., 2025) shows that effective promotional strategies to attract young tourists involve the use of social media and visually appealing content.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully identified five main themes that reflect students' perceptions of the open trip program to Lombok. First, students view Lombok as an attractive destination because of its natural beauty and cultural richness, although some have never visited it directly. This positive perception arises from social media exposure and peer narratives. Second, students' motivation to participate in open trips is driven by the desire to gain new experiences at an affordable cost, but they also face obstacles such as budget and time constraints. Third, students have high expectations of the contents of the open trip package such as complete facilities, documentation, and travel comfort. Fourth, promotional strategies that are considered effective by students include the use of social media, attractive visual content, and personal approaches such as collaboration with campus organizations. Finally, perceptions and interest in open trips tend to be stronger among students aged 20–24 years, who are unemployed, and come from management study programs, which shows the importance of market segmentation in tourism marketing strategies.

Based on these findings, several practical recommendations can be submitted to open trip program organizers. First, tour packages need to be designed specifically for the student segment, with competitive prices and facilities that suit their needs. Second, promotions should be done digitally through social media and accompanied by engaging content such as travel videos, testimonials, and transparent information about itineraries and costs. Third, establishing cooperation with campuses or student organizations can expand reach and increase trust in trip organizers. Fourth, consider using a referral system and collective discounts as incentives for students who invite friends to join.

For further research direction, it is suggested to conduct in-depth interviews or Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to dig deeper into students' preferences, concerns, and suggestions towards the open trip concept. In addition, comparative studies with other popular destinations among students such as Yogyakarta or Bali can strengthen the understanding of Lombok's competitive position in the youth tourism market. This advanced qualitative approach is important to develop a tourism marketing strategy that is based on empathy and in accordance with the dynamics of young consumer behavior.

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