



# Marketing Strategy through Spiritual Tourism : A Case Study of the Borobudur Vesak Lantern Festival

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## ABSTRACT

The Borobudur Vesak Lantern Festival is an annual event that serves as one of the main highlights in the series of Buddhist religious celebrations in Indonesia, held at Borobudur Temple. This study is of particular interest because the religious procession is not only attended by Buddhist adherents but also open to tourists from diverse religious backgrounds who wish to participate in the event. This research employs a qualitative method with a case study approach, in which data were collected through observation, interviews, and literature review. The primary objective of this study is to examine how marketing strategies are implemented within the context of an international-scale religious event. The findings reveal that the Vesak Lantern Festival at Borobudur has successfully transformed from a purely religious ceremony into a major tourism attraction. This success is supported by marketing strategies that encompass market segmentation, positioning, stakeholder collaboration, the marketing mix, and effective timing strategies, collectively enhancing tourist attraction. The impact is evident in the increase in visitor numbers, the growth of the local economy, and the strengthening of Borobudur's image as a world-class spiritual tourism destination. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how marketing principles can be aligned with spiritual values and used as a foundation for developing more effective marketing strategies that respect religious and cultural values. Future research may investigate the impact of implementing the Vesak Lantern Festival on environmental sustainability within the Borobudur World Heritage Site and develop a green event management model to strike a balance between tourism activities and ecological preservation.

*Keywords: Tourism Marketing, Spiritual Tourism, Vesak Lantern Festival*

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## ABSTRAK

Festival Lampion Waisak Borobudur merupakan event tahunan yang menjadi salah satu puncak rangkaian peringatan hari besar agama Budha di Indonesia yang berlokasi di Candi Borobudur. Penelitian ini menarik untuk diteliti karena dalam pelaksanaannya prosesi keagamaan yang diselenggarakan tidak hanya diikuti oleh penganut agama Budha, namun wisatawan dari semua kalangan agama juga dapat ikut serta dalam event keagamaan tersebut. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus dimana data-data yang didapat berasal dari hasil observasi, wawancara dan studi literasi. Tujuan penelitian ini secara khusus menelaah bagaimana strategi pemasaran diterapkan dalam konteks acara keagamaan berskala internasional. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Festival Lampion Waisak di Borobudur berhasil bertransformasi dari acara keagamaan menjadi daya tarik wisata. Keberhasilan ini ditopang oleh strategi pemasaran yang mencakup segmentasi pasar, positioning, kolaborasi stakeholder, marketing mix, dan timing strategy yang efektif dalam menarik wisatawan. Dampaknya terlihat dari peningkatan jumlah kunjungan, tumbuhnya ekonomi lokal, serta penguatan citra Borobudur sebagai destinasi wisata spiritual berkelas dunia. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dalam memperluas pemahaman tentang bagaimana prinsip-prinsip pemasaran dapat disesuaikan dengan nilai-nilai spiritual dan dapat digunakan sebagai dasar merancang strategi pemasaran yang lebih efektif dengan tetap menghormati nilai-nilai keagamaan dan budaya. Penelitian selanjutnya dapat menelaah sejauh mana pelaksanaan Festival Lampion Waisak berdampak terhadap keberlanjutan lingkungan di kawasan Warisan Dunia Borobudur, serta mengembangkan model green event management untuk menjaga keseimbangan antara aktivitas pariwisata dan pelestarian lingkungan.

*Kata Kunci: Pemasaran Wisata, Wisata Spiritual, Festival Lampion Waisak*

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## 1. Introduction

The tourism sector in Indonesia is projected to continue growing in 2025, with the government setting a target of 14.6–16 million international arrivals (Panorama Destination, 2025). Among the driving forces of this growth is religious tourism, which attracts both domestic and international visitors by offering opportunities for spiritual experience, cultural learning, and the appreciation of diverse traditions (Nasution et al., 2022). Borobudur, as one of the super-priority tourist attractions, holds outstanding historical, archaeological, and spiritual values that position it as a significant attraction for both domestic and international visitors. In recent years, Borobudur has been further developed as a center of Buddhist pilgrimage and religious tourism, aligning with national policies aimed at strengthening its role in global spiritual tourism (Sya'bani, 2024). Within the broader framework of special-interest tourism, religious tourism is often categorized as travel motivated by specific cultural or spiritual interests (Marsono et al., 2018).

One of the most notable events at Borobudur is the Vesak Lantern Festival, an annual event that combines ritual Buddhist observances with the visual spectacle of thousands of lanterns being released into the night sky. The festival serves both as a commemoration of Buddhist teachings and as a symbolic expression of hope, peace, and spiritual reflection. While rooted in sacred tradition, this event has also become a cultural attraction that appeals to visitors from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. Reports have highlighted that the Vesak Lantern Festival contributes to increased visitation to Borobudur, while also generating benefits for local communities through hospitality services and small-scale enterprises (Purwanto, 2025). Given Borobudur designated as a super-priority National Tourism Strategic Area (KSPN), a marketing strategy is needed to increase visitors to Borobudur, one of which is through religious events such as the Vesak Lantern Festival. Marketing and marketing communication are two interconnected aspects; therefore, a proper marketing communication plan is necessary to ensure that marketing

activities run effectively (Sutisna et al., 2025). Tourism marketing development models generally include branding, segmenting and targeting, selling, and positioning. Marketing plays an important role in tourism development because promotion is related to efforts to communicate tourism potential to the target market. In addition, the local government should allocate a budget for promotion and collaborate with the media and private sectors to publicize religious tourism or spiritual events.

The Borobudur Vesak Lantern Festival held in 2024, coinciding with the peak of the Vesak celebration, was proven to increase tourist visits by 63% (Ambarwati, 2024). The Vesak Lantern Festival is not only attended by Buddhists but also attracts tens of thousands of visitors to Borobudur Temple. This success further strengthens Borobudur Temple's position as one of the epicenters of global Buddhism, attracting the interest of religious tourism or spiritual tourism enthusiasts from various parts of the world.

Previous studies that is relevant to this study was conducted by Faidah (2017) in Wonosobo Regency, revealing that the Wonosobo Regency Government had implemented several stages in its tourism promotion strategy, including identifying target audiences, determining tourism promotion objectives, designing messages, setting the promotion budget, selecting promotion media, measuring promotional results, and managing the communication process. However, research focusing specifically on marketing strategies for large-scale international religious events, such as the Vesak Lantern Festival at Borobudur, remains limited. Therefore, this study seeks to explore tourism marketing strategies through spiritual tourism at the Vesak Lantern Festival at Borobudur, while also providing practical contributions for destination managers and policymakers in developing effective marketing models for international-scale religious events.

Although several religious festivals have been proven to significantly increase tourist visits, the marketing strategies implemented to achieve such outcomes have not been thoroughly examined. To date, there has been no research that specifically investigates how marketing strategies are applied in the context of international religious events such as the Borobudur Vesak Lantern Festival. Previous studies have generally focused on regional tourism promotion strategies in general e.g. (Faidah, 2017). However, few have explored the implementation of tourism marketing strategies within the context of international religious events like the Borobudur Vesak Lantern Festival. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap in the literature on spiritual tourism marketing.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Spiritual Tourism**

The definition of spiritual tourism was also conveyed by Bali Travel News (2008) where spiritual tourism is categorized as a special interest tourism activity, namely travel to sacred places to carry out spiritual activities such as prayer, yoga, meditation, concentration, deconcentration, and other practices according to one's religion and beliefs (Susanti et al., 2019). Nair and Dileep (2021) define spiritual tourism as "travel to discover the goal and significance of one's life," that is, a journey aimed at finding meaning, life purpose, and experiences of self-transformation.

Spiritual tourism can provide a moment of calm reflection and it is a soul-searching process, a journey of experience. It has become a means to harmonise and reach a balance between mind, body, and soul (M. Smith et al., 2010). Many factors can lead an individual to embark on a spiritual journey and the spiritual connection or experience could happen before, during, and after the journey or visit. Furthermore, people from different cultures will have different versions, motives, and beliefs for spiritual tourism. The spiritual dimensions of contemporary tourism studies vary significantly among scholars and researchers. This section will look into the dimensions of spirituality in tourism, for instance, wellness, healing, personal development, motivation, restorative environments, spiritual transformation, self-awareness, and many others.

In the post-pandemic era, spiritual tourism has begun to gain popularity and experience significant growth, as travelers increasingly seek experiences that are not only recreational but also transformative (UNWTO, 2022). Research conducted by M. K. Smith, (2021) suggests that destinations integrating spiritual and cultural elements *tend to attract* a wider range of tourists. In Asia, India and Thailand can serve as good benchmarks. Both countries promote religious events such as the Kumbh Mela and the Yi Peng Lantern Festival by combining religious rituals, cultural attractions, and digital marketing strategies.

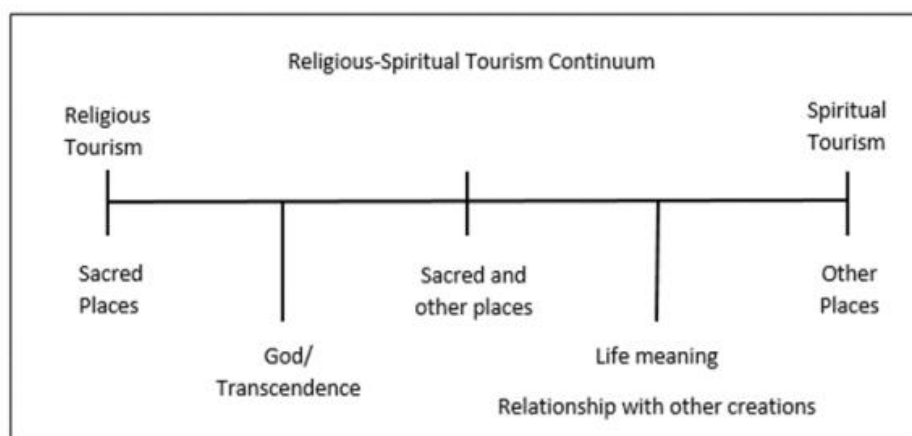
Bali Travel News (2008), as cited in Susanti et al. (2019), states that spiritual tourism includes religious tourism, meditation tourism and spiritual sport tourism. Religious tourism refers to travel related to a belief system (a particular religion), such as visiting sacred sites, historical places, or consuming foods associated with holy figures. Meditation tourism involves visiting quiet, serene, and peaceful places for self reflection and mental purification, such as natural caves, temples, or ashrams. Spiritual sports tourism refers to practices such as yoga.

## 2.2. Religious Tourism

Religious tourism is a type of tourism that is closely related to the religious or spiritual aspects embraced by human beings. It is defined as a travel activity to places that hold special significance for believers, usually involving places of worship with certain distinctive qualities. These qualities may be historical, supported by legends or myths associated with the site, or reflected in unique architectural features. Religious tourism is also characterized by the intention and purpose of tourists often motivated by the search for blessings or wisdom, alongside cultural and historical interests. Through religious tourism, visitors can enrich their religious knowledge and experiences while deepening their spiritual awareness (Chotib, 2015).

Heidari et al. (2017) defined religious tourism as a visit/pilgrimage to sacred places and to participate in religious ceremonies that will fulfil religious duties. A similar definition is given by Rinschede, (1992) and M. K. Smith, (2021), who defined religious tourism as visits to a sacred or religious sites, monuments or other destinations from religious motives related to a specific faith. From a contemporary standpoint, religious tourism may be related to individual spirituality that is, a tourist may not be religious but will visit holy or sacred places for personal meaningfulness.

Figure 1. Religious – Spiritual Tourism Continuum



Source: Halim, Tatoglu, & Hanefar (2021).

Rahman et al. (2021) conducted a study on the Tabuik Festival in Pariaman, and the findings revealed that religious festivals can effectively attract tourists when packaged with strong cultural narratives and supported by proper promotional efforts. The phenomenon of interfaith tourist participation in religious tourism has recently gained increasing attention. According to (Idris et al., 2023), the openness of destinations to welcome tourists from diverse backgrounds can expand

market segments and foster a positive image of the destination. This openness is also observed at the Vesak Lantern Festival, which allows participation regardless of religious background.

The journey between religious tourism and spiritual tourism leads to a continuum of religious – spiritual tourism, as illustrated in Figure 1. There could be overlaps, for instance, a person visiting a religious site is able to find the meaning of life and increase his/ her spirituality. While for other persons who visit ‘other places’, they could gain God-consciousness and self-transcendence (Halim et al., 2021).

### **2.3. Marketing Strategy**

Kotler & Armstrong, (2023) define marketing strategy as the marketing logic through which a business unit seeks to create value and gain profit from its relationship with consumers. Boone and Kurtz (2008) define marketing strategy is the overall program of a company in determining its target market and satisfying consumers by developing a combination of marketing mix elements: product, distribution, promotion, and price.

Marketing strategy can also be defined as a series of efforts undertaken by a company to achieve certain objectives, as the potential to sell a proposition is limited to the number of people who are aware of it. In this regard, the organizers of the Vesak Lantern Festival should consider appropriate steps to reach potential visitor segments.

According to (Haque et al., 2022) in their book on Marketing Strategy, there are five key concepts in marketing strategy, namely:

1. Market Segmentation, Each tourist has different needs and habits. Organizers must classify a heterogeneous market into homogeneous market units.
2. Market Positioning, No organizer can dominate the entire market. This is why event organizers need a specific approach to secure a strong market position, by choosing the most profitable segment.
3. Market Entry Strategy, Strategies employed to enter a particular market segment. Common methods include internal development and collaboration with other organizations.
4. Marketing Mix Strategy, A collection of variables utilized by event organizers to influence prospective visitors.
5. Timing Strategy, The selection of the right time for marketing activities. Event organizers must prepare adequately in terms of production and determine the most appropriate time to distribute their products to visitors.

In addition to general marketing theories, the literature on event marketing also provides relevant references for analyzing religious festivals. Allen, Harris, & Jago, (2022), in their book *Event Marketing Mix Model*, emphasize the importance of integrating event product elements, visitor experiences, and digital promotion. Meanwhile, Schmitt, (2011), through his *Experiential Marketing Theory*, explains that the success of event marketing is also highly influenced by the creation of experiences that combine sensory, emotional, and symbolic values.

Research conducted by Faidah, (2017) found that the promotion of religious tourism requires audience identification, the design of appropriate messages, and the selection of suitable media. Another study by Suphaphong & Rungwitoo, (2020) on the Yi Peng Lantern Festival in Chiang Mai, Thailand highlighted the importance of utilizing social media and online marketing to attract international tourists.

### **2.4. Digital Marketing**

Digital marketing offers several significant advantages compared to traditional marketing strategies. First, through digital marketing, companies can reach a broader and more segmented audience at a more efficient cost. The Internet and social media enable firms to access potential consumers across various geographical locations without the constraints of time and space

(Ahmad et al., 2022). Second, digital marketing facilitates two-way interaction between companies and consumers, allowing for more dynamic engagement. Third, digital marketing provides a high degree of flexibility in modifying and adapting marketing strategies. In a rapidly changing business environment, companies must be able to adjust to evolving trends, consumer preferences, and market conditions. Digital marketing allows companies to quickly test and modify promotional features, optimize performance, and tailor their strategies as needed. This adaptability provides a competitive advantage for companies capable of responding swiftly to changes in the dynamic era of Society 5.0 (Nasrulloh et al., 2023).

The development of technology has transformed the nature of interaction in marketing communication into a *screen-to-face* approach, commonly referred to as internet marketing. This transformation has contributed to the increasing number of internet and social media users in Indonesia, which in turn has led to a rise in online shopping interest. Digital marketing serves as a tool for facilitating marketing communication, widely utilized through social media platforms to introduce products or services in the modern world, particularly by leveraging these media as promotional instruments. One of the key assets for a company in sustaining its business operations is customer loyalty (Hidayah, 2018).

### 3. Method

Considering the limited number of previous studies that specifically discuss marketing strategies based on spiritual tourism in international-scale religious events, this research is designed to explore the phenomenon in depth through a qualitative approach. The qualitative method emphasizes an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, particularly the marketing strategies carried out through spiritual events such as the Vesak Lantern Festival.

The data for this study were collected using three techniques, observation, interview and document review. Observation was conducted through active participation at the Vesak Lantern Festival spiritual event at Borobudur, Magelang Regency in May 10-11, 2025. One semi-structured interview was carried out with a member of the organizing committee in charge of field coordination and Chairperson of the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI), selected purposively due to their central role in the event's operational management. The interviews were conducted from May 10 to May 15, 2025. Several interviews were carried out online via telephone, while one in-depth interview was conducted face-to-face. Literature review was conducted through analysis of relevant documents, including local government publications, official reports, and reputable media coverage, to complement primary data.

Data analysis employed in this study consisting of (1) filtering and summarizing key data from interviews, observations, and documentation (reduction data); (2) organizing the data into descriptive narratives, tables, or direct quotations (presentation data); and (3) drawing conclusions based on major themes such as the effectiveness of marketing strategies, the role of spiritual values, visitor responses, and the impact on tourism visits (conclusion drawing).

This study employs a case study approach with the aim of gaining an in-depth and contextual understanding of how marketing strategies are designed and implemented within the framework of spiritual tourism, taking into account the interrelated cultural, social, religious, and economic dimensions present in the Borobudur Vesak Lantern Festival.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Vesak Lantern Festival

The Vesak Lantern Festival at Borobudur Temple draws inspiration from the lantern-release traditions in Thailand, which are an important part of the local community's cultural and spiritual celebrations. According to Fatmawati, the head organizer of the festival, she first witnessed and directly participated in this tradition in Thailand. Her first-hand experience motivated the introduction of a comparable lantern activity at Borobudur, with the stated aim of

preserving the spiritual meaning of Vesak while encouraging broader community participation (Berutu, 2022). Existing research on lantern festivals indicates that ritual spectacles can be adapted into tourism attractions while retaining symbolic significance, but such adaptation requires careful management to avoid commodification and to protect cultural authenticity (Shen, 2013; Suphasiri, 2025).

Based on the research findings of (Widjaja & Sarudin, 2025), The Borobudur Vesak Lantern Festival possesses numerous advantages, particularly in terms of its location within the Borobudur Temple complex. The visual spectacle of the lantern release, conducted at night, enhances the event's aesthetic appeal. High levels of social media engagement also serve as a significant strength in digital promotion, as evidenced by the enthusiasm of tourists in purchasing tickets. From the perspective of opportunities, tourists' interest in spiritual and cultural tourism is expected to increase. Moreover, there are considerable opportunities for partnerships with tourism industry stakeholders, corporations, and international communities.

Tourism marketing in Borobudur prior to the Vesak Lantern Festival focused mainly on the temple's appeal as a historical and religious site, as well as the beauty of its architecture. Visitors to Borobudur Temple typically spent only about one to two hours exploring the site. In Indonesia, the tradition of releasing Vesak lanterns was first introduced at Borobudur Temple in 1966. Since then, this tradition has become one of the main highlights of the Vesak celebration at Borobudur and has attracted the attention of tourists from around the world.

Digital promotion was also carried out through several social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. The organizers additionally provided an online ticket booking service through the official InJourney website at [ticket.injourneydestination.id](http://ticket.injourneydestination.id) and [Loket.com](http://Loket.com).

**Figure 2.** Promotion for purchasing tickets for the Borobudur Lantern Festival via Loket.com



Source : <https://www.instagram.com/p/DGvgHULSeuB/> (2025)

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Vesak Lantern Festival had not received significant attention from tourists, as it was still primarily centered on religious ceremonies. According to Ruri Agastya, an employee of PT Taman Wisata Candi Borobudur, Prambanan, and Ratu Boko as well as the field coordinator of the 2025 Vesak Lantern Festival committee, visitor number have shown an upward trend during the festival. Visitor numbers at the Vesak Lantern Festival have increased over the past two years, with the most notable growth occurring in the post-pandemic period (Injourney, 2025). This steady growth highlights the increasing role of the Vesak Lantern Festival as a catalyst for visitation to Borobudur Temple, beyond the regular daily tourist flows.



**Figure 3.** The Atmosphere of Lantern Lighting by the Participants



Source : Author (2025)

The data detailed in **Table 1** below shows the level of visits to Borobudur Temple during the Vesak Lantern Festival over the past three years.

**Table 1.** Tourist Visit Data at Borobudur Temple during the Vesak Lantern Festival (2023–2025)

No	Years	Number of Visitors
1	2023	5.400
2	2024	34.436
3	2025	45.914

Source: Injourney (2025)

To accommodate the growing interest of tourists, the Vesak Lantern Festival was later relocated to the Marga Utama Field at Borobudur Temple, as it provides a larger capacity to host thousands of participants, compared to its previous location at Aksobia Field, Borobudur Temple. The festival has since evolved into an annual event eagerly anticipated by many, featuring two lantern release sessions held during each Vesak celebration. Each session is attended by more than 4,000 participants, not only from the Buddhist community but also from domestic and international tourists seeking to experience the spiritual atmosphere and the beauty of the festival. Such relocation aligns with heritage site management strategies to protect physical integrity while accommodating higher visitation.

Interviews were also conducted with the Head of the Magelang Regency Branch of the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI), Usep Syarifudin, who stated that the impact of the Vesak Lantern Festival was felt not only at Borobudur Temple but also on accommodations in Magelang Regency, particularly in the Borobudur area. Hotel occupancy rates in Magelang Regency even reached 100% before the event began. On average, guests stayed for two days, with most visitors coming from Jakarta, West Java, and Central Java. These findings illustrate broader community economic benefits and align with models of community-inclusive tourism, where events stimulate local enterprise and market activity.

The impact of the Vesak Lantern Festival was also experienced by local residents. Homestays and the Village Economic Halls were fully booked during the festival. In addition to homestays and Balkondes, the presence of Pasar Medang became an integral part of the Vesak Festival series at Borobudur Temple. This event created the atmosphere of a traditional village market featuring local cuisine, handicrafts, and cultural performances. According to Bian Tamara Putra, manager of the Borobudur Tourism Village, Pasar Medang lasted for three days, and its presence significantly supported local MSMEs in Borobudur Village by providing opportunities to



showcase and sell their products. This integration of local markets within festival frameworks exemplifies community-based tourism, where local stakeholders directly benefit from increased visitation (Su & Wall, 2024).

#### 4.2. Marketing Strategy of The Vesak Lantern Festival

There are five concepts for reviewing tourism marketing strategies through spiritual tourism at the Vesak Lantern Festival in Borobudur. The first concept is market segmentation, which is based on the varying needs of tourists. Initially, the Vesak Lantern Festival was intended solely for Buddhists conducting religious rituals during the Vesak holy day, however, since the event was considered to have strong potential to attract tourists, the Vesak Lantern Festival was opened to the public. The highlight of the event is the lantern release, which carries a profound meaning symbolizing the release of inner darkness and the hope for enlightenment and peace. The lantern release is interpreted by organizers as symbolizing peace and hope, which allows the ritual to resonate beyond the Buddhist community. Consequently, the lantern release procession at the Vesak Lantern Festival can be embraced by people of all religions, fostering a desire among many to participate. Over time, the festival was opened to everyone, regardless of religious affiliation. As a spiritual event carrying a theme that resonates across faiths, the Vesak Lantern Festival is naturally positioned to attract tourists. This tendency for religious rituals to gain broader, including secular, appeal is consistent with study that describes a continuum between pilgrimage, religious tourism and broader spiritual/cultural experiences (Collins-Kreiner, 2020).

**Table 2.** Market Segmentation of The Vesak Lantern Festival

Aspect	Indicator	Description
Demographics	Age	Dominatrd by 18 – 30 age group
	Gender	Male and Female / Couple
	Income	Upper-middle class
	Country	Domestic Visitor
Psychographics	Interest	Spiritual, Visual beauty
	Lifestyle	Enjoys interacting with culture
	Values	Tourist who appreciate togetherness and peace

Source : Indonesian Ministry of Tourism (2025)

Many younger participants reported being drawn to the festive atmosphere and visual aesthetics of the event, which they considered highly shareable on social media. In addition, many attendees are couples, as they consider the act of releasing lanterns not only a sacred moment but also a romantic one. By releasing lanterns together, they believe that their prayers and wishes may be fulfilled. Furthermore, participants of the festival predominantly come from middle to upper-income families, as reflected in the ticket price of the Vesak Lantern Festival, which reaches IDR 750,000 per person, with a total of 2,569 tickets sold. Based on psychographic aspects, festival participants have an interest in spirituality through art, music, as well as spiritual events or festivals that offer visual beauty. Research on contemporary cultural/festival tourism shows that visually engaging events tend to attract younger cohorts who value shareable experiences, so the VLF's visual positioning plausibly contributes to its market appeal (Richards, 2021).

The second concept is market positioning, in which event organizers seek to establish the strongest position in the market. The abundance of similar lantern festivals may dilute tourist interest. In 2018, the Vesak Lantern Festival was not yet accessible to tourists, as visitors could not directly participate in the Vesak Day religious procession. At that time, a similar event the Dieng Culture Festival, which highlighted the release of 5,000 lanterns and the ritual of cutting dreadlocks achieved great success. The Dieng case shows how distinctive local ritual elements can support festival branding; Borobudur's approach combines its religious heritage with accessible participation to form a differentiated offering (Getz & Page, 2016; Setiawan, 2016).

In the last two years, from 2023 to 2025, the Borobudur Vesak Lantern Festival has experienced a significant increase in visitors. This growth is attributed not only to worshippers attending the religious ceremony but also to tourists interested in learning about different religious rituals. Another advantage of the Borobudur Vesak Lantern Festival is the week-long religious procession and MSME (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) exhibition, which encourages tourists to extend their stay in Borobudur. In addition, the festival venue is highly accessible, whether by private or public transportation, and is located near Yogyakarta, the primary gateway for tourists visiting various destinations in Yogyakarta and Central Java. Accommodation options meeting at least the minimum standards are also widely available near the venue, ranging from homestays and private villas to resorts and five-star hotels. These advantages further strengthen the Vesak Lantern Festival’s position as a religious event that attracts a large number of tourists. In addition, accessibility and supporting infrastructure are widely recognized in destination competitiveness literature as important drivers of visitor choice (Getz & Page, 2016).

The third concept is the market entry strategy, which highlights collaboration with other businesses. Since the series of Vesak celebrations lasts for several days, proper accommodation is essential to meet tourist demand. During the 2025 Borobudur Vesak Lantern Festival, occupancy rates in Magelang reached 100%. Hotel and lodging bookings were made weeks prior to the event, leaving tourists who arrived on the festival day at risk of not finding accommodation. Therefore, it is crucial to align the quota of festival participants with the number of available rooms in Magelang Regency, especially in the Borobudur tourism area. Such concentrated demand during hallmark events is consistent with the ‘rising tide’ effect described in festival research, where major events raise accommodation occupancy and regional demand (Litvin et al., 2013).

WALUBI (the Indonesian Buddhist Representatives) as the event organizer collaborates with several stakeholders. **Table 3** presents the stakeholders involved and the forms of collaboration. Multi-stakeholder collaboration is a recognized best practice in sustainable event management because it helps coordinate logistics, conservation concerns, community benefits and promotional reach (Getz & Page, 2016).

**Table 3.** Stakeholder Involved in the Vesak Lantern Festival

No	Stakeholder	Forms of Collaboration
1	Central Java Provincial Government and Magelang Regency	Material and non-material support, licensing, coordination and security, marketing
2	Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy	Material and non-material support, marketing
3	Ministry of Religious Affairs	Material and non-material support, marketing
4	In Journey Destination Management (IDM)	Material and non-material support, marketing, creating a sustainable tourism ecosystem, ensuring the event generates social and economic impacts
5	MSMEs, Borobudur Tourism Village	Selling various home industry products, traditional food, and promotion
6	Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI)	Accommodation coordinator
7	General Public	Committee participation, security, and provision of parking and accommodation for participants

Source : Author (2025)

The fourth concept is the marketing mix strategy, a strategic framework used by event organizers to coordinate and optimize various marketing elements to ensure the product or service effectively reaches consumers. This concept can be analyzed through product offerings, pricing, event location, promotion, or a combination of all five marketing strategy elements. The concept of the marketing mix is a combination of marketing elements used by companies to

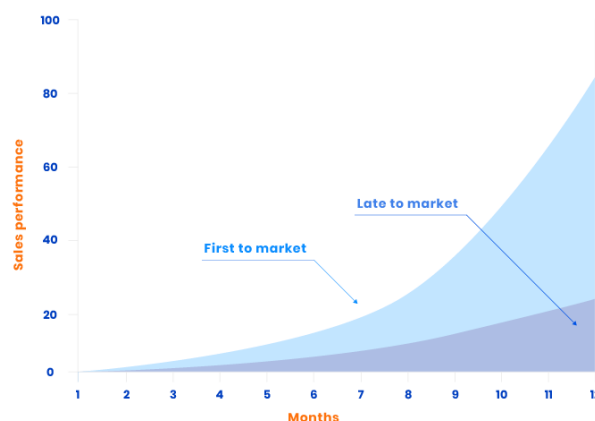
achieve their marketing objectives. Initially known as the 4Ps (Product, Price, Place, Promotion), it later evolved into the 7Ps with the addition of People, Process, and Physical Evidence. The product determined by the organizers is unique and has distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from other products. The Vesak Lantern Festival is certainly different from similar festivals such as the Dieng Culture Festival and the Jogja Lantern Festival. Although these festivals are also part of religious rituals, what distinguishes them are the processions, participant involvement, pricing, and the venue of the event. The 7P framework is widely used in services and event marketing to structure operational and promotional choices for experiential products (Kotler et al., 2009).

In terms of promotion and the stakeholders involved, the Borobudur Vesak Lantern Festival also differs from other similar festivals, as it is an annual event supported by the central government and the broader community. It is recognized as one of the spiritual events attended by Buddhists from around the world. Physical evidence encompasses everything tangible that can be seen or experienced by consumers, such as physical buildings (exterior and interior), layouts, furniture, decorations, colors, lighting, music, staff uniforms, and even product packaging design (Candemir, 2017). The Borobudur Vesak Lantern Festival is held at night for several reasons: first, for spiritual reasons, as the lantern light symbolizes the light of life and hope for humanity; second, for lighting purposes, as the lanterns appear more beautiful at night, creating an enhanced visual experience that can be documented through photos or videos.

The final concept is the timing strategy. The Borobudur Vesak Lantern Festival serves as the peak event of the Vesak holy day celebration, and its scheduling follows the predetermined dates in the Buddhist calendar. Tourists can more easily remember the event since it coincides with public holidays. Within this concept, organizers typically begin promoting the festival at least three months prior to the event, thereby allowing tourists sufficient time to arrange their participation. Ideally, promotions should begin three to four months in advance, with the primary focus on raising awareness and gradually introducing the festival's branding. Research on festival marketing emphasizes that early and well-timed promotional campaigns significantly enhance attendance, visitor satisfaction, and destination image, since tourists need sufficient lead time to plan their travel (Yolal et al., 2012).

To determine the right timing for marketing a product, the concept of Time to Market (TTM) is applied. Time to Market is a key metric for increasing the likelihood of success for a new product. A faster time to market can generate competitive advantages, brand recognition, and higher revenue, while also achieving the desired outcomes. The predetermined date of the Vesak Lantern Festival facilitates the organizers in initiating their marketing efforts. If the Vesak Lantern Festival is scheduled to be held in the following year, then the marketing activities should ideally begin one year in advance.

**Figure 4.** Time to Market Graph



Source : <https://www-revuze-it.translate.goog> (2025)

The graph above illustrates the relationship between marketing time and sales performance. When marketing begins earlier, sales performance tends to be higher. Conversely, if marketing is initiated late, sales performance will be lower, even if the marketing activities are conducted over an extended period. For the upcoming Vesak Lantern Festival, early publication would provide certainty and build trust among tourists, as they also require sufficient time in advance to plan their participation in the event. This includes arranging leave from work, securing accommodation, and estimating the expenses needed to attend the Vesak Lantern Festival.

Overall, the results indicate that the Vesak Lantern Festival at Borobudur not only contributes to the growth of tourism but also demonstrates how spiritual events can be strategically marketed to generate broader socio-economic impacts. The findings further highlight that stakeholder collaboration, accessibility, and cultural authenticity are critical to sustaining the festival's attractiveness in the long term

## **5. Conclusions**

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that the Vesak Lantern Festival at Borobudur Temple is not only a spiritual celebration but has also successfully transformed into an international tourist attraction with significant impacts on the tourism sector and the local economy. Initially focused on religious aspects, the festival has, over time and with the application of appropriate marketing strategies, attracted cross-religious visitors as well as younger generations who are interested in spiritual experiences presented through visual and aesthetic forms. The post-pandemic increase in visitor numbers suggests the effectiveness of these strategies, particularly the relocation to a larger venue, more intensive promotion, and the adoption of segmentation targeting diverse tourist groups.

The presence of the Vesak Lantern Festival has generated tangible economic benefits for the communities surrounding Borobudur, as evidenced by the rise in hotel, homestay, and Balkondes occupancy rates reaching full capacity, as well as the creation of economic opportunities for local SMEs through the Medang Market. The synergy between organizers, government bodies, tourism stakeholders, and local communities has made the festival not only a religious ritual but also a tourism marketing instrument capable of creating a sustainable ecosystem.

From a marketing perspective, the application of five key concepts; market segmentation, market positioning, market entry strategy, marketing mix, and timing strategy, has been the driving force behind the festival's success in attracting visitors. Inclusive segmentation, strong positioning compared to similar festivals, collaboration with various stakeholders, distinctive tourism product packaging, and effective timing strategies have established the festival as one of the leading spiritual events favored by both domestic and international tourists. Thus, the Vesak Lantern Festival at Borobudur has proven its ability to integrate spiritual values with modern marketing strategies, creating sustainable tourism appeal while strengthening Borobudur's identity as a world-class cultural and spiritual destination.

The government, through the Ministry of Tourism, needs to develop specific policies on spiritual tourism and incorporate them into the master plan for sustainable tourism development. Furthermore, it is essential to establish success indicators for spiritual tourism that are not solely oriented toward the number of visitors but also emphasize the preservation of cultural and spiritual values. In addition, the government can promote an inclusive economic partnership model in which small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and tourist villages receive a greater share of the benefits.

Future research may examine the extent to which the implementation of the Lantern Festival affects the environmental sustainability of the Borobudur World Heritage Site and develop a model of green event management to maintain a balance between tourism activities and environmental conservation

## 6. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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