

# Journal of Islamic Tourism (JIT)

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**Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi**  
(Dec 17, 1273 Şeb-i Arus - 751st Death Anniversary)

**Volume 4 (2024), Issue 2**

**ISSN: 2791 – 7959**

PUBLISHER

**Tourism Economy and Development Association / TURKEY**

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**Contents**

Exploring Perceptions, Literacy, and Support for Halal Tourism: A Case Study from Central Java,  
Indonesia ..... 4

Eleven Domains of Challenges and Strategic Implementation of Halal Tourism - A Systematic  
Review ..... 23

Exploring Dimensions of the Chinese Halal Tourism Industry .....56

## **Exploring Perceptions, Literacy, and Support for Halal Tourism: A Case Study from Central Java, Indonesia**

**Kuat Ismanto**

Universitas Islam Negeri K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, Indonesia

[kuat.ismanto@uingusdur.ac.id](mailto:kuat.ismanto@uingusdur.ac.id)

**Talita Aulia Dewi**

Strong Research Consulting Pekalongan, Indonesia

[talita@gmail.com](mailto:talita@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

Millennials play a crucial role in the halal tourism industry due to their significant population size and active engagement in traveller activities. This study aims to explore and analyse millennial perceptions, literacy, and attitudes toward halal tourism, focusing on how these dimensions influence the potential of halal tourism destinations. Employing a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, the research first collected quantitative data through a survey of 259 respondents, followed by qualitative insights from interviews with three informants across three cities in Central Java, Indonesia. A descriptive analysis of the data reveals that millennials in these cities exhibit positive perceptions, high literacy, and strong affirmations regarding halal tourism components. Furthermore, their favourable evaluations underscore the suitability of these cities as halal tourism destinations for millennials. The findings highlight the importance of targeting Muslim millennials in developing halal tourism strategies and provide a foundation for future studies to explore this demographic group in greater depth.

**Keywords:** halal tourism; Muslim millennials, millennial perceptions; millennial literacy; millennial affirmation

### **Introduction**

Halal tourism has emerged as a significant and rapidly growing segment in the global tourism industry, expanding its influence beyond Muslim-majority countries to Muslim-minority regions (Henderson, 2016). This sector has garnered substantial attention, demonstrated by initiatives such as seminars, workshops, halal festivals, and halal tourism awards, which actively celebrate and promote halal-friendly travel. The Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), published by MasterCard-CrescentRating (2020), ranks global destinations based on their appeal to Muslim travelers, further highlighting the importance of halal tourism in the global marketplace. In Indonesia, initiatives like the 2019 Halal

Tourism Award, organized under the Indonesia Muslim Travel Index (IMTI) (CrescentRating, 2019), showcase the country's dedication to advancing halal tourism. Furthermore, regions such as Aceh, Banda Aceh, and Lombok, have implemented local regulations to guide the development of halal tourism (Saleh & Anisah, 2019; Banda Aceh Mayor, 2016; Firdausi et al., 2017). This global expansion reflects the growing relevance of halal tourism both Islamic and non-Islamic tourism contexts.

Halal tourism aligns with Islamic teachings, as referenced in verses of the Qur'an, including Surah Al-Mulk (15), Al-An'am (11), Ar-Rum (42), and Luqman (31), among others. These verses provide a foundation for tourism practices that uphold Sharia principles, ensuring permissible and beneficial activities for travellers. Millennials, particularly Muslim millennials, play a crucial role in the expansion of halal tourism. Research by Chatzigeorgiou (2017), Kowalczyk-Anio & Marek (2019), and Liu, Wu, & Li (2018) has highlighted this relationship, demonstrating that millennials are a significant demographic in the tourism sector. Pratiwi & Andarini (2020) describe millennial tourists as adaptable, tolerant, and enthusiastic travellers. Although previous studies on halal tourism, such as those by Shofi'unnafi (2020), Sunardi et al. (2021), and Pratiwi & Andarini (2020b), have contributed valuable insights, there remains a gap concerning the millennial perspective on halal tourism in Indonesia. Further research is essential to understand this demographic's influence on and participation in the halal tourism industry.

The appeal of halal tourism to millennials is shaped by a mix of religious, social, and environmental factors, all reflecting their desire for travel experiences that align with their values. Religious motivations, such as the desire for spiritual experiences and fulfilling religious duties, are key drivers (Kalyan & Ekka, 2024). Additionally, the availability of Islamic destination attributes, including halal certification and appropriate facilities, significantly impacts their decision to visit halal destinations (Saifudin & Puspita, 2020). Social influences, such as the desire to connect with Muslim communities and engage in shared cultural practices, also contribute to the popularity of halal tourism (Kalyan & Ekka, 2024). Moreover, halal tourism strengthens family bonds, as many activities cater to family values (Kalyan & Ekka, 2024), making it particularly appealing to millennials.

The millennial generation, known for their love of travel and familiarity with social media (Cavagnaro et al., 2018; Ketter, 2021; Monaco, 2018), continues to grow in number globally. In Indonesia, the 2020 Population Census by BPS revealed that millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) constitute a significant portion of the population, totalling 25.87% of the 270.02 million people. Millennials are characterized by their adaptability, achievement orientation, confidence, and openness, but they are

also easily bored and need constant engagement (Richardson, 2019). With their strong digital presence and influence, millennials present significant opportunities for tourism, both as consumers (Bernardi, 2018) and influencers (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). However, there is still a lack of Islamic content tailored to this demographic (Standard, 2020). This study aims to provide a regional halal tourism development map for millennials, offering insights for local governments to develop tourism strategies targeting this key demographic.

Millennials in Central Java, Indonesia, show a significant interest in halal tourism, driven by Islamic attributes that influence their choice of destination and increase tourist satisfaction and repeat visits (Suryawardani et al., 2024). Despite being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, this interest remains high, demonstrating strong market resilience and the need for a targeted marketing strategy (Susilawati et al., 2022). Knowledge about halal tourism and personal religiosity is also the main determining factor that shapes their intention to visit halal destinations, so effective education and involvement from tourism providers is very important (Sudarsono et al., 2021). However, to expand its appeal, a balanced approach is needed that focuses on niche markets and considers diverse preferences among millennials.

This study examines millennial perceptions, literacy, and affirmation of halal tourism, emphasising their role in shaping the industry future. Understanding millennial attitudes toward halal tourism is crucial, given their increasing travel frequency, their influence as trendsetters, and potential to foster sustainable tourism practices (Sowwam et al., 2018; Shofi'unnafi, 2020). With 126.8 million millennials actively participating in the Islamic economy, they are key stakeholders in the continued development of halal tourism in Indonesia (Nirwandar, 2021). Exploring their perspectives will provide essential insights for fostering sustainable growth in this vibrant sector.

## **Literature Review**

### **Concept of Halal Tourism**

Halal tourism is a model of tourism that adheres to Islamic law and is specifically designed to meet the unique needs of Muslim travelers (Battour et al., 2021). Its key features include access to places of worship, halal-certified food, and accommodations that align with Islamic principles (Oktadiana et al., 2016). These destinations are carefully structured to ensure attractions comply with Islamic guidelines, providing environments free from immorality and alcohol while fostering peace and harmony

(Njoroge, 2016). Rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith, halal tourism places significant emphasis on adhering to sharia in all aspects of life, including travel. Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:3) instructs Muslims to consume goods that are both halal and thayyib (pure and wholesome), reinforcing the importance of ethical and lawful consumption. Similarly, the Hadith states: "Indeed, Allah is good and only accepts the good" (HR. Muslim), underscoring the centrality of morality, cleanliness, and ethical standards in all activities, including tourism.

### **Perceptions of Halal Tourism**

Millennial perceptions are essential for the development of halal tourism, as perception shapes social behavior and decision-making in various life aspects. This process starts with sensory inputs, where individuals receive and interpret stimuli through their senses. In the context of halal tourism, perception refers to how individuals form opinions based on their experiences at halal destinations. These perceptions play a crucial role in influencing attitudes and travel decisions (Corrêa & Gosling, 2020). Understanding millennial perceptions is vital for evaluating the appeal of halal tourism, as it helps identify the factors that attract or deter this demographic. By addressing these perceptions, stakeholders can better align halal tourism offerings with millennial expectations, ultimately enhancing the sector's growth and sustainability.

### **Halal Tourism Literacy**

Literacy refers to an individual's capacity to read, write, and comprehend ideas, particularly through visual means. At its core, literacy involves the ability to decode written symbols and derive meaningful understanding from them. Reading entails interpreting language symbols into cognitive concepts, while writing focuses on arranging these symbols to express thoughts and convey meaning (Démuth, 2012). In the context of halal tourism, literacy goes beyond fundamental reading and writing skills. It encompasses an understanding of halal principles and practices, as well as their application to travel and tourism experiences. This expanded literacy is crucial for both travelers and providers, enabling them to engage meaningfully with halal tourism offerings.



## **Millennial Generation**

The millennial generation, typically defined as individuals aged 25 to 40, represents a substantial potential market for halal tourism. As the first generation to grow up with advanced technology—including television, radio, and digital devices (Maddison, 2001)—millennials are highly engaged with gadgets, particularly smartphones. This demographic is uniquely positioned to disrupt the tourism industry, leveraging their digital proficiency, innate curiosity, and altruistic tendencies (Veiga et al., 2017b). Aligned with the growing adoption of a halal lifestyle, millennials actively participate in its various expressions, including halal tourism. Muslim millennials, in particular, have demonstrated remarkable adaptability in engaging with halal tourism, even in contexts where facilities are not yet fully optimized (Pratiwi & Andarini, 2020b). As digital natives, their involvement in halal tourism is poised to play a transformative role in shaping the sector's future, especially as demand for halal-compliant destinations continues to rise.

## **Method**

This study focuses on millennial perceptions, literacy, and affirmations of halal tourism in three cities in Central Java province, Indonesia: Pekalongan City, Semarang City, and Surakarta City. These cities were chosen due to their readiness to become halal tourism destinations, based on their respective development models. Central Java has been recognised as a leading halal tourism destination by the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia, as reflected in the Indonesia Muslim Travel Index (IMTI) (CrescentRating, 2019). The research records Muslim millennial perceptions, literacy, and affirmations of halal tourism in relation to infrastructure components.

- Perceptions evaluate the readiness of halal tourism elements, including attractions, access, amenities, communication, environment, and community empowerment.
- Literacy examines the level of knowledge Muslim millennials have about halal tourism.
- Affirmations explore the actions of Muslim millennials towards cities implementing halal tourism practices.

This study uses three cities in Central Java as case studies. A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. Mixed methods research is a planned, systematic, structured, and measurable effort to combine both quantitative and qualitative research

methods to leverage the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of each (Keptner, 2011). In this study, the specific mixed-methods design used is sequential explanatory, which involves conducting research in two stages: first, quantitative research, followed by qualitative research (Khotari, 2004). In this way, the results from the quantitative research are further explained and elaborated upon through qualitative research.

This study data was obtained through questionnaires and in-depth interviews with informants in three cities. The perception aspect is addressed to the six components forming halal tourism, which include: attractions, access, amenities, communication, environment, and supporting facilities, which are summarised by Andriani (2015), CrescentRating (2020), and Ismanto (2022). In this study, there were three questions on the attraction aspect, four on the access aspect, four on the amenity's aspect, four on the communication aspect, four on the environmental aspect, and four on the supporting facilities aspect. The literacy aspect is focused on the extent to which millennials understand halal tourism, and the affirmation aspect focuses on the actions and recommendations of millennial tourists. So, quantitative data and qualitative data for the three aspects are used simultaneously to answer research questions.

A total of 259 respondents were obtained from distributing questionnaires in three cities (see Table 1). The respondents' profiles include gender, age, religion, and profession. To further explore the data, both questionnaire and interview methods were utilized. Nine Muslim millennial informants were selected through purposive sampling (Khotari, 2004), specifically targeting millennials who had traveled to one of the three cities. These informants were interviewed to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perspectives on halal tourism.

**Table 1. Respondent Data**

Aspect	Sub	Pekalongan	Semarang	Surakarta	Total
Gender	Male	40	57	35	132
	Female	40	48	39	127
Age	Under 30 years	58	54	42	154
	26-30 years	22	51	32	105
Religion	Islam	80	105	72	257
	Protestan	-	-	-	-
	Katholik	-	-	2	2
	Hindu	-	-	-	-
	Budha	-	-	-	-
	Lainnya	-	-	-	-
Profession	Student	33	28	20	81
	Lectur	25	52	36	113
	Government employess	5	4	2	11
	Soldier/police	0	1	0	1
	Private worker	5	7	11	23
	Entrepreneur	7	5	4	16
	Other	5	8	1	14
	<b>Total</b>		<b>80</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>74</b>

The data collected were analysed both descriptively and qualitatively using an interactive strategy (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Survey data were organised into tables and presented in a descriptive manner. Following the framework outlined by Miles and Huberman (2020), the analysis proceeded in stages, beginning with data collection, followed by data reduction, and concluding with the drawing of insights. Interview data were analyzed to extract meaning and were then described in detail.

## **Result Analysis**

### **Millennial Perceptions of Halal Tourism**

The millennial perceptions of halal tourism in the cities of Pekalongan, Semarang, and Surakarta are generally categorized as good. Based on the distribution of questionnaires and data analysis, the results reveal that the millennial generation perceives the four components of halal tourism in Pekalongan as excellent, while other components in the city are rated as good. In Semarang, the millennial generation's perception of all halal tourism components is consistently good. Surakarta received a slightly higher rating, with one component considered excellent and the others deemed good (see Table 2).

Table 2. Halal Tourism Perception

Aspect	Pekalongan		Semarang		Surakarta	
	Average	Criteria	Average	Criteria	Average	Criteria
Attraction	4.04	Good	4.05	Good	4.15	Good
Accessability	4.03	Good	4.11	Good	4,17	Good
Amenity	4.21	Very Good	4.15	Good	4.16	Good
Communication	4.81	Very Good	3.85	Good	3.97	Good
Environment	4.25	Very Good	4.19	Good	4.25	Very Good
Facilities	4.25	Very Good	4.13	Good	4.17	Good

From the data in Table 2 above, it can be obtained that the millennial generation positively perceives the readiness to implement halal tourism in the regions. Pekalongan is in the more prepared category (all components are excellent), followed by Surakarta (one component is excellent, other components are suitable) and Semarang (all components are good). However, three cities are ready to implement halal tourism based on the perceptions of the millennial generation.

To further explore the millennial generation's perceptions, the researchers conducted interviews with several informants. Among the respondents, the concept of "halal" is seen as more than just a religious requirement; it has become a social trend. Informant 1, a 22-year-old, views halal tourism as a lifestyle choice, stating: "Halal tourism is very important because 'halal' has become a trend for both young people and the elderly. Halal tourism will attract many tourists, leading to an increase in income and economic growth." Similarly, Informant 4, a 30-year-old private sector worker, emphasized the importance of halal tourism for ensuring peace of mind and security during travel: "I agree with halal tourism because both local and foreign tourists need it. It ensures well-being and clarity of mind, allowing individuals to feel confident that their actions align with what is lawful and lawful."

These insights highlight how halal tourism is viewed as a modern and practical solution for millennials seeking both spiritual fulfilment and economic benefits. Based on the data presented in Table 2 and interviews, the millennial generation shows a generally positive perception of the readiness to implement halal tourism in the regions. Pekalongan stands out as the most prepared city, with all components of halal tourism (such as infrastructure, services, and facilities) being rated as excellent. Surakarta follows, where one component is rated excellent, while the other components are considered suitable, suggesting that there is room for improvement in certain areas to fully align with halal tourism

standards. Semarang, although still positive, has all components rated as good, indicating that while the city is making progress, it has not yet reached the level of excellence seen in Pekalongan.

### **Millennial Literacy on Halal Tourism**

The survey results provide an overview of the millennial generation's perceptions and support for halal tourism in three cities. The approval ratings for the implementation of halal tourism were as follows: Pekalongan received a score of 4.24 (very good), Semarang scored 4.22 (very good), and Surakarta scored 4.20 (good) (see Table 3). These results indicate strong support for halal tourism in these cities, with respondents expressing high approval of its implementation.

Regarding promotional efforts, the desire for halal tourism promotions was also positively rated. Pekalongan scored 4.19 (good), Semarang scored 4.18 (good), and Surakarta scored 4.19 (good) (see Table 3), suggesting that respondents in these cities are interested in seeing more promotional activities related to halal tourism.

Concerning the literacy of the millennial generation about halal tourism, the data shows varying levels of awareness across the cities. In Pekalongan, 66 respondents were familiar with halal tourism, while 24 were not. In Semarang, 60 respondents were aware, and 45 were not. In Surakarta, 40 respondents knew about halal tourism, and 34 were unfamiliar (see Table 3). These findings indicate that while awareness of halal tourism is relatively high in Pekalongan and Semarang, there is still room for improvement in all three cities to further enhance literacy about this growing tourism segment.

Table 3. Knowledge of Halal Tourism

Region	Answer		Total
	Know	Not Know	
Pekalongan	66	24	80
Semarang	60	45	105
Surakarta	40	34	74
Total	166	103	259

Table 3 shows that the millennial generation's understanding of halal tourism in the three cities is high, with 64% (166) of respondents familiar with the term, compared to 26% (103) who are not, out of a total of 259 respondents. More than half of the respondents in all three cities already know the term "halal tourism." Respondents' literacy in Pekalongan was 82.5%, higher than in Semarang at 57.1%, and Surakarta had the lowest literacy rate at 54%. From these results, it can be concluded that tourists

visiting these cities generally have some knowledge of halal tourism, although awareness is still relatively low.

A solid understanding of halal tourism will help the millennial generation to apply the principles of halal tourism in practice. With the aid of technology, information is easily accessible, turning into knowledge (Berakon et al., 2021). Millennials have shown positive perceptions of halal tourism in both Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority countries, such as Sweden (Abbasian, 2021). Japan's success in developing halal tourism began with widespread understanding across various sectors, including the community and government, of the halal industry. Thus, knowledge is essential for the development of both tourism and the halal industry.

To gain a deeper insight into the millennial generation's knowledge of halal tourism, the authors conducted interviews with three informants. The results revealed that millennials are generally familiar with the concept of halal tourism and, for the most part, hold positive views of it. The informants noted that halal tourism represents an important development in the tourism sector, offering benefits such as promoting moral conduct at tourist destinations. Many emphasized that halal tourism enables tourists to enjoy their travels while adhering to religious practices, such as prayer, thanks to the availability of necessary facilities. Additionally, halal tourism is viewed as a means of preventing undesirable behaviour by providing appropriate amenities for Muslim travellers.

Informant 1 (22 years old, student) shared the following perspective: "I first learned about halal tourism from articles on the internet. Halal tourism meets halal criteria, such as separate food options and swimming pools. I've never actually experienced it, but the idea is great. With halal tourism, you don't have to worry about food or swimming pool facilities being uncomfortable." Informant 2 (21 years old) explained that halal tourism goes beyond just the destination, focusing on the provision of religiously appropriate facilities: "Halal tourism isn't about making tourist sites halal; it's about providing halal food in restaurants, having prayer spaces, and ensuring that hotels follow halal standards." Informant 3 (19 years old) echoed similar sentiments, noting the importance of prayer spaces and halal food in halal tourism: "Halal tourism is a Muslim-friendly destination, with adequate prayer rooms and separate halal food options."

These statements from the informants suggest a shared understanding of halal tourism as a segment catering specifically to Muslim travelers. Halal tourism is seen as ensuring halal compliance in all aspects, from food to religious practices, offering a comforting and ethical travel experience for

Muslim consumers. While the informants' understanding is still evolving, their views largely align with the established conceptualization of halal tourism in the academic literature.

### **Millennial Affirmation of Halal Tourism**

The distribution of questionnaires across the three cities revealed that millennials held a positive perception of visiting these destinations. Additionally, they expressed favorable affirmations regarding the promotional efforts (see Table 3).

Table 4. Affirmation of Muslim Millennial Actions

Aspect	Pekalongan		Semarang		Surakarta	
	Average	Criteria	Average	Criteria	Average	Criteria
Visiting	4.24	Very Good	4.22	Very Good	4.20	Good
Promotion	4.19	Good	4.18	Good	4.19	Good

Table 3 indicates that the perceptions of halal tourism in Pekalongan and Semarang fall under the "outstanding" category, while Surakarta is rated as "good." All three cities share similar perceptions regarding promotions, with respondents viewing them as being in a "good" condition. To gain a deeper understanding of millennial perceptions, the authors conducted interviews with millennials from these cities, with the findings presented as follows.

Regarding the implementation of halal tourism in these regions, informant 1 (22 years old) expressed optimism, stating that if implemented correctly in Pekalongan, it could become a major attraction, noting that Pekalongan is known as a student city, which aligns well with the concept of halal tourism. Informant 4 (30 years old) also expressed support for halal tourism in Semarang, highlighting its potential to ensure security for tourists.

The interviews reveal that halal tourism resonates strongly with the Muslim millennial generation in Pekalongan, Semarang, and Surakarta. For this demographic, the term "halal" carries deep religious significance and is closely tied to their ethical and moral standards. When combined with economic and business concepts such as halal tourism, it garners strong support and approval for its implementation. Muslim millennials view halal tourism as an opportunity to uphold morality and prevent immorality in tourist destinations, aligning with their religious and ethical values.

However, to establish a comprehensive and sustainable halal tourism framework, further exploration and refinement are necessary. This underscores the need for collaboration among stakeholders—local

governments, tourism operators, and the Muslim millennial generation—to effectively integrate halal principles into the broader tourism industry, ensuring its success and long-term viability.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

This study identifies three key dimensions—perception, literacy, and affirmation—as critical indicators of the viability of halal tourism destinations, according to Muslim millennials. Respondents and informants across three cities exhibited positive perceptions of halal tourism components, as reflected in both the survey results and interviews. Their literacy of halal tourism is also noteworthy, demonstrating a solid understanding of its principles and potential benefits. Moreover, their affirmation of halal tourism is evident through their approval and willingness to engage in promotional efforts. Together, these findings suggest that the perceptions, literacy, and affirmation of Muslim millennials provide a strong foundation for the growth of halal tourism.

The results align with broader research on halal tourism and millennial participation. Previous studies have emphasized the compatibility of halal tourism with sustainable tourism (Azam et al., 2019; Cuesta-Valiño, 2020) and the role of millennials as catalysts for its growth (Shofi'unnafi, 2020). This generation, characterized by technological fluency and adaptability, not only contributes as tourists but also serves as influencers and entrepreneurs in the halal tourism ecosystem. Their involvement strengthens tourism development in various aspects, including economic impact (Bernardi, 2018), social media promotion (Liu et al., 2018), and the formation of new tourism trends (Monaco, 2018).

Halal tourism aligns well with the principles of sustainable tourism, emphasizing resource management to meet economic, social, and environmental needs while preserving cultural heritage and biodiversity (Lax, 2013). Engaging Muslim millennials in halal tourism ensures the sustainability of this sector, given their enthusiasm for travel, responsiveness to innovation, and alignment with values such as sustainability. By fostering their involvement, policymakers and tourism stakeholders can secure the long-term success of halal tourism in Indonesia and beyond.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing discourse on halal tourism by highlighting its synergy with sustainability and the engagement of millennials. Future research should adopt more comprehensive methodologies and expand both respondent and informant bases to gain deeper insights. As a pilot study, this research lays the foundation for further exploration of the potential role



of Muslim millennials as key drivers of halal tourism, offering both practical and theoretical insights for stakeholders seeking to leverage this demographic's influence in the global tourism industry.

## **Conclusion**

Millennials exhibit positive perceptions, literacy, and affirmations regarding halal tourism, recognizing it as an innovative and attractive segment within the broader tourism industry. They see its potential not only to enrich travel experiences but also to contribute to regional economic growth and enhance branding. The implementation of halal tourism in specific regions could position these areas as unique and competitive halal tourism destinations. However, the success of such initiatives is heavily dependent on the support and policies of local governments, which play a crucial role in facilitating development.

While halal tourism has faced negative perceptions in certain areas, this study reveals a contrastingly positive attitude among Muslim millennials. Their openness, adaptability, and familiarity with technology make them key stakeholders in the halal tourism ecosystem. Beyond being tourists, they can serve as influencers and entrepreneurs, contributing to the growth and sustainability of the halal tourism sector. Their positive perceptions and willingness to support halal tourism initiatives—through participation in promotions and visits—underscore their strategic importance in the development of the industry.

This study adds to the growing discourse on halal tourism by providing valuable insights into the perspectives of Muslim millennials, highlighting their potential as a critical asset for regional development. However, the study's descriptive nature presents certain limitations, and future research should adopt more comprehensive quantitative or qualitative approaches with broader respondent and informant bases. As an initial exploration, this research offers foundational insights into the readiness of the millennial generation to embrace and advance halal tourism, providing valuable direction for policymakers and stakeholders aiming to leverage this demographic in both regional and global tourism strategies.

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## **Eleven Domains of Challenges and Strategic Implementation of Halal Tourism - A Systematic Review**

**Muhammad Aslam Fadritama**

Bandung Institute of Technology, Indonesia

[aslam\\_fadritama@sbm-itb.ac.id](mailto:aslam_fadritama@sbm-itb.ac.id)

**Mustika Sufiati Purwanegara**

Bandung Institute of Technology, Indonesia

[mustika@sbm-itb.ac.id](mailto:mustika@sbm-itb.ac.id)

### **Abstract**

With the growing Muslim populations and increasing demand for Shariah-compliant tourism experiences globally, Halal Tourism has emerged as a significant sector in the travel industry. This systematic literature review explores the challenges and strategic approaches to implementing Halal Tourism. By analysing findings from 53 academic journals published between 2014 and 2024, the study identifies key problems and proposes strategic solutions. The findings highlight 11 critical challenges in the implementation of Halal Tourism: human resources, financial constraints, halal standards and certification, stakeholder engagement, sociocultural factors, marketing and promotion, infrastructure, market competition, environmental concerns, and security. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in Islamic Tourism and offers a comprehensive framework for policymakers, stakeholders, and researchers to address the challenges within this emerging industry.

**Keywords:** Halal tourism, tourism challenges, tourism strategy

### **Introduction**

The tourism industry, which encompasses various aspects such as accommodation, transportation, food services, and cultural activities, is one of the key drivers of economic growth. In this sector, the growth of halal tourism as a niche market is aimed at catering to the specific needs of Muslim travelers. A significant driving force behind the rise of halal tourism is primarily due to the global spike in the Muslim population. The Pew Research Center (2017) foresees an increase in the number of people who practice Islam that will occur at a faster pace than natural growth over the coming decades. Fifty years from now, the Muslim population is expected to grow by 31%. This represents a massive market segment — a niche but one of the most powerful markets to tap. According to the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) (Crescentrating & Mastercard, 2022), the overall potential size of global Muslim travel is projected to reach US\$ 300 billion by 2026, showing an annual growth rate of around 8.2%.



This growth can be attributed to the rising disposable incomes of Muslim travelers, as well as their evolving tastes and preferences when it comes to seeking experiences that cater to their religious and cultural requirements during travel.

Halal tourism has evolved alongside the increasing awareness of Islamic safety, comfort, and compliance with Sharia principles during travel. The concept extends beyond halal food and beverages to include a holistic ecosystem, halal lodging, transportation, entertainment, and other supporting facilities for tourism activities such as swimming and prayer (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Soonsan & Jumani, 2022). The aim is to provide comfort for Muslim travelers who adhere to Islamic principles, while supporting sustainable tourism by preserving cultural heritage, fostering economic development, and conserving natural resources (Martaleni et al., 2022; Muneeza et al., 2019).

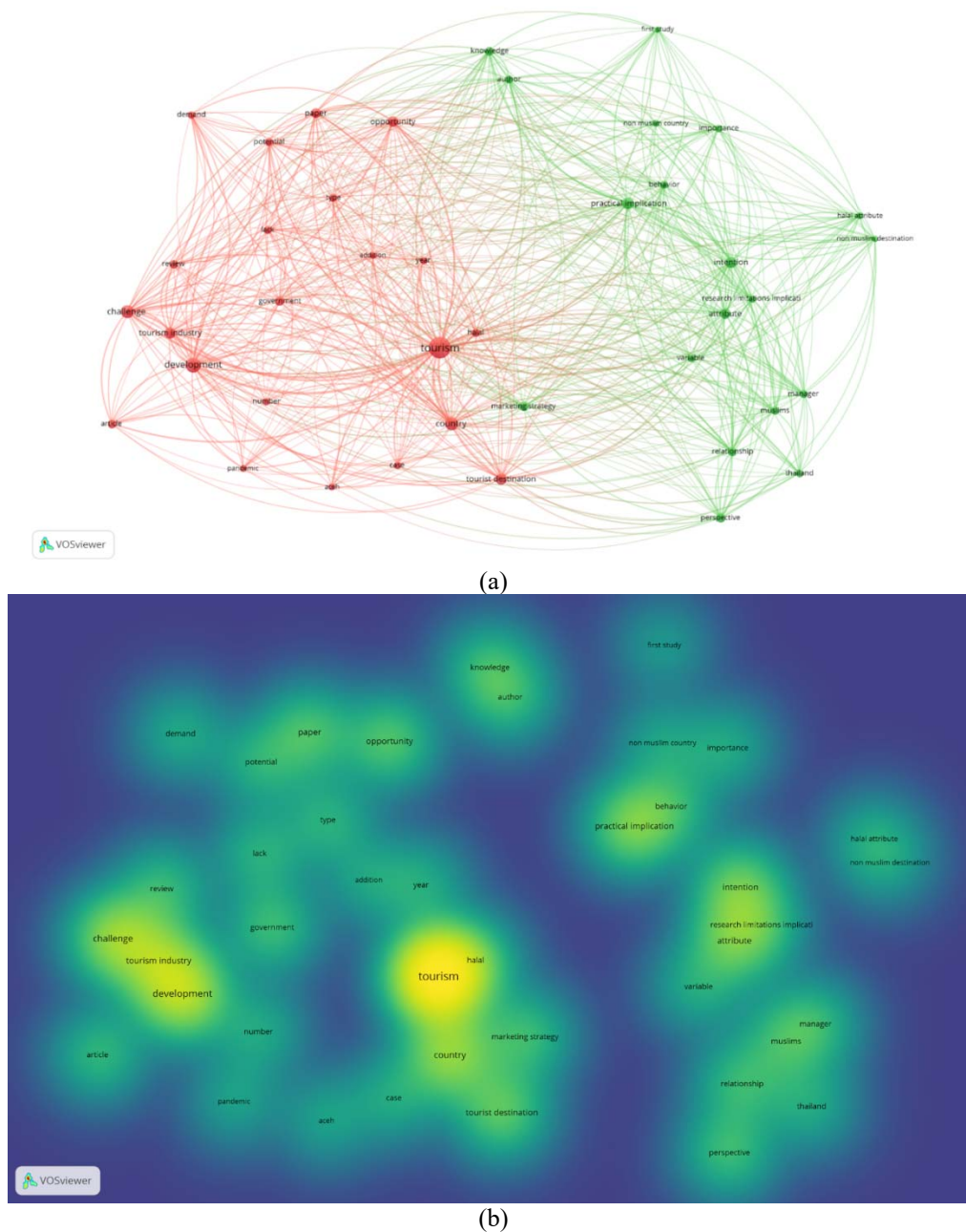
Despite the burgeoning opportunities in the halal tourism industry, many countries face challenges in implementing it effectively. Even nations already engaged in halal tourism struggle to meet demand. In Indonesia, a predominantly Muslim country, the concept of halal tourism is not fully realized, as the country prefers to be known as a Muslim-friendly destination. This caution stems from a commitment to ensuring high adherence to halal standards and the fact that the standardization of halal services has yet to take place. Non-Muslim countries, like Japan, also face difficulties, as the relatively small Muslim population makes obtaining halal certification challenging, hindering efforts to enhance their travel industry (Wibawa et al., 2021; Papastathopoulos et al., 2021; Yousaf & Xiucheng, 2018).

This demonstrates that research in the halal tourism field is crucial to understanding what Muslim tourists want and will further spur innovation within the industry, leading to more products and services that are tailored to Muslim tourists. Al-Ansi et al. (2022) focus on research in this area, offering a synthesis of major themes from prior work, as well as advising on the direction for future research. Before implementing halal tourism, one critical consideration is the challenge of identifying and implementing effective solutions. However, the authors found that limited research has been conducted on strategies for implementing halal tourism and addressing these challenges.

The bibliometric analysis conducted by the authors reveals that research on strategies for halal tourism is still scarce. Figure 1 exhibits the keyword analysis (a) and heatmap analysis (b) focusing on halal tourism strategies obtained from the Scopus database. Figure 1(a) divides the red group, which consists of terms associated with the tourism industry and development, and the green group, which encompasses terms related to halal tourism research. This finding indicates that limited research has

been undertaken relating to the strategic use of halal tourism as a means of overcoming particular challenges.

**Figure 1.** Bibliometric analysis of strategic halal tourism research. (a) keyword analysis, and (b) heat map analysis.



Source: VOS viewer, author's work

This study seeks to address some of the existing gaps by investigating potential challenges and opportunities for the advancement of halal tourism and providing strategic recommendations through

an in-depth literature analysis. The present study is an extended systematic review that also incorporates a qualitative interpretive approach to address the following research questions:

Q1. What are the challenges to the implementation of halal tourism?

Q2. What strategies could be implemented to address these challenges?

Through a systematic literature review, this study aims to offer synthesized strategies for the successful implementation of halal tourism initiatives. The findings from this study will provide guidance for countries seeking to enhance and develop their halal tourism sectors. A systematic approach was designed to achieve the study's objectives, and it was divided into several steps. It began with an investigation of the conceptual development of halal tourism, followed by discussions on methods, results, and implications.

This study employed a combination of bibliometric mapping and a systematic literature review to thoroughly investigate the topic. Bibliometric mapping tools were instrumental in tracking the evolution of research and identifying emerging patterns, making it possible to process the vast amounts of data generated by the rapid pace of academic inquiry. However, while this method offered valuable insights, it occasionally fell short of providing the in-depth analysis required. To address this limitation, the researchers supplemented bibliometric mapping with a systematic literature review, ensuring a more comprehensive and detailed examination of the subject.

These methods were chosen because they provide a structured and comprehensive approach to identifying and analysing trends in the challenges and potential strategies for implementing halal tourism based on academic research. Given that the research in this area spans multiple fields, such as human resources, marketing, socioeconomic factors, and the environment, these methods are crucial for knowledge synthesis and identifying research gaps. By combining bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review, this approach offers a macro-level view of the halal tourism sector, providing overall insight.

## **Methodology**

To analyse the evolution of research in the challenges and strategy of the implementation of halal tourism, a scientific journal database is utilised as the main source of information. Scopus will be used as the main source of this study. The reason for adopting Scopus as the database source is due to the

fact it is one of the most comprehensive databases for bibliographical information. Scopus contains a greater number of journals, potentially yielding more useful results for similar queries and reliable quality assessment. The Scopus database was chosen for its extensive coverage and high use of high-quality journals across disciplines to ensure a robust dataset for analysis. By solely using Scopus as a source, we tend to avoid the variability in quality and indexing. Using Scopus without other relevant research databases like Web of Science may lead to less variety in perspective. We attempt to partially counteract this problem by designing the search terms and inclusion criteria to maximize our capture of relevant studies. Additionally, the transparency in methodology allows future research to expand the dataset using another database.

**Table 1.** Eligibility criteria.

<b>Items</b>	<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>
Search limitation	Scopus
Keyword search	<p><b>Search string 1:</b> "halal tourism" OR "halal travel" OR "Islamic tourism" OR "halal tour" OR "Islamic tour" OR "halal-friendly tourism" OR "Muslim tourism" OR "Muslim-friendly tourism" OR "Muslim tour".</p> <p><b>Search string 2:</b> "Strategy" OR "development" OR "advancement" OR "implementation".</p> <p><b>Search string 3:</b> "Challenge" OR "barrier"</p>
Literature type	Articles and review articles
Abstract	Challenges and/or strategies
Language	English
Year of publication	2014-2024

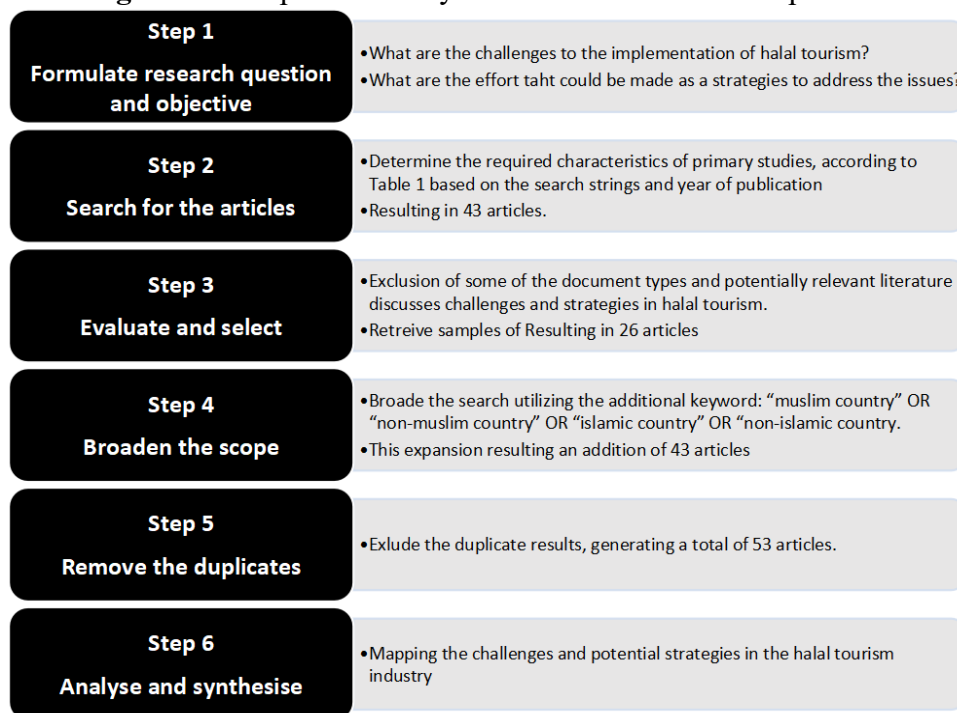
Source: Author's work

This study employs a systematic literature review process that consists of six distinct steps: (1) formulating research questions and objectives; (2) conducting a comprehensive search for relevant articles in appropriate databases; (3) evaluating the search results; (4) broadening the search scope; (5) eliminating duplicate entries; and (6) analysing and synthesizing the findings.

In the first step, the foundation of the study is established by clearly articulating its research questions and objectives, as outlined in the introductory section. During the second step, the author actively

searches for articles that align with the study's requirements, with detailed characteristics of the relevant articles summarized in Table 1.

**Figure 2.** Comprehensive systematic literature review process.



Source: Author's work

The third step is a detailed examination of the search results. To illustrate, the author excludes certain document types—such as books, book chapters, conference papers, and conference reviews—focusing solely on articles and review articles. In this phase, the author also retrieves other potential literature on challenges and strategies in halal tourism.

In the fourth step, since there were only 26 articles found in the previous search, the author finds it significant to conceptualize the various aspects of halal tourism. With this purpose in mind, the search has now broadened to global halal tourism in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. In this modification, the key token 'halal tourism' is combined with a set of further keyword strings: "Muslim country," "non-Muslim country," "Islamic country," and "non-Islamic country." Using this more extensive search strategy, the author retrieved 43 more articles.

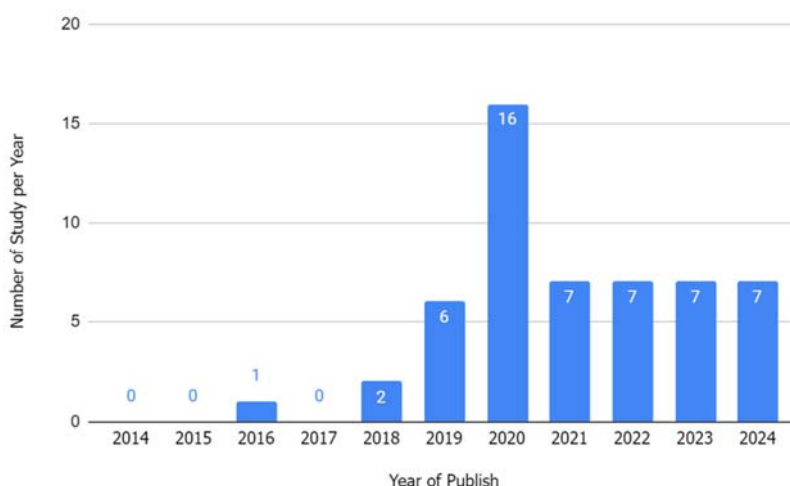
The fifth step is to remove duplicates from the preceding results, leaving 53 original articles for analysis. Finally, in the sixth step, the analysis of these articles is conducted, where the author

systematically reviews the literature to identify the challenges and strategies related to the implementation of halal tourism. The complete flowchart process is illustrated in Figure 2.

### **Result Analysis**

In this study, the author provides a comprehensive overview of the research on the dynamics of halal tourism, with a particular focus on the challenges and potential solutions associated with its implementation. The study traces the evolution of halal tourism since 2014, highlighting key developments and areas of concern. Through a systematic literature evaluation, the author identified 53 publications, all published between 2014 and 2024, that meet the criteria for inclusion (Figure 3). These publications offer valuable insights into the progress and obstacles faced by the halal tourism industry over the past decade.

**Figure 3.** Number of publications by year.



Source: Author's calculations

Figure 3 shows a peak of research on problems about halal tourism implementation in 2020. After this peak, the number of studies focusing on these challenges declined and stabilized from 2021 through 2024. However, this may not apply to the trend, as there might be a change in the numbers if there is an increase in publications from the third and fourth quarters of 2024. This implies that interest could further increase in the topic and probably pave the way for fresh learnings and trends in this industry.

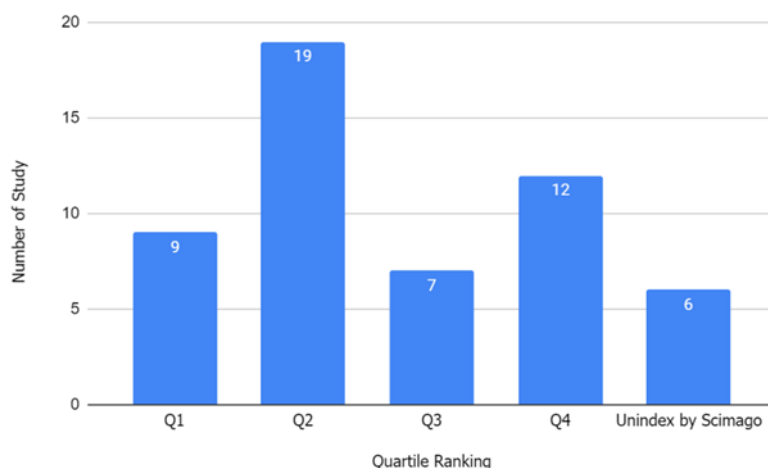
Most of the articles addressing challenges and strategies for halal tourism are in relation to publication quality, published journals categorized into Q1 to Q4 (Figure 4). Analysis shows that most articles were published in Q2 journals (19 publications), followed by 12 publications in Q4 journals. Besides,

9 were articles in Q1 journals and 7 in Q3 journals. All 6 of the other articles appeared in un-indexed journals as defined by Scimago, showing a broad spectrum of quality levels within the industry.

Research on halal tourism challenges and strategies has been published across different journal quality tiers, with a significant number of them in mid-tier (Q2). The distribution indicates that even though the topic has captured the interest of scholars, it is not yet mature in terms of being able to get published in top-tier (Q1) journals. The presence of articles in lower-tier (Q3 and Q4) journals and non-indexed journals also indicates that the research field is broad but possibly varied in terms of recognition. This might suggest that more quality and impactful research is still required in the field of halal tourism.

This study also classifies the country settings of the 53 articles collected to identify which contexts are used most often for research on trends in halal tourism dynamics. As can be seen in Figure 5, over 60% of the studies are performed in Muslim-majority countries, pointing to a significant emphasis on the region most implicated with halal tourism. A small proportion of the studies are in non-Muslim-majority countries, about one-fifth, and are divided between sites with mixed backgrounds suggesting that although Muslim-majority regions remain the main area of interest when it comes to halal tourism research, there is a noticeable group beginning to explore halal tourism outside its general context.

**Figure 4.** Distribution of the quality of the publications.

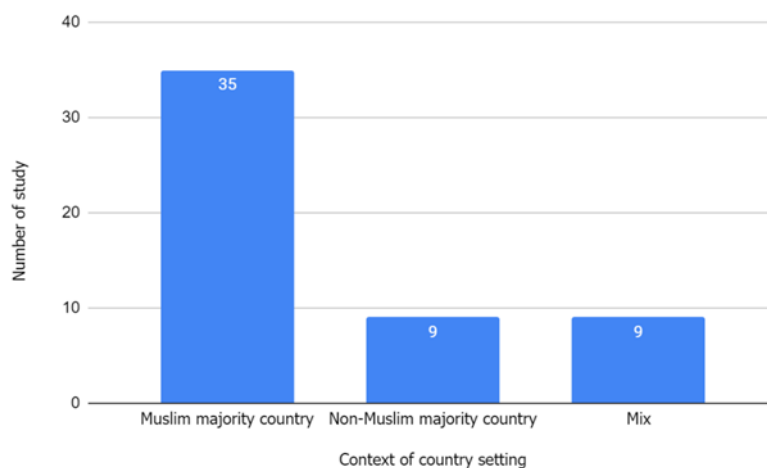


Source: Author's calculations

Academic research around halal tourism has mainly been conducted within countries with a clear Muslim majority, where the concept is most obviously relevant and can be better implemented. This level of concentration indicates that these areas are perceived as key markets or halal tourism test cases. Nevertheless, the inclusion of studies from non-Muslim-majority and mixed-context settings recognizes that halal tourism is a global phenomenon with manifestations beyond its principal

traditional contexts. That wider interest could indicate increasing roles and gaps for Halal Tourism in additional or non-traditional markets.

**Figure 5.** Geographical Distribution of Halal Tourism Research.



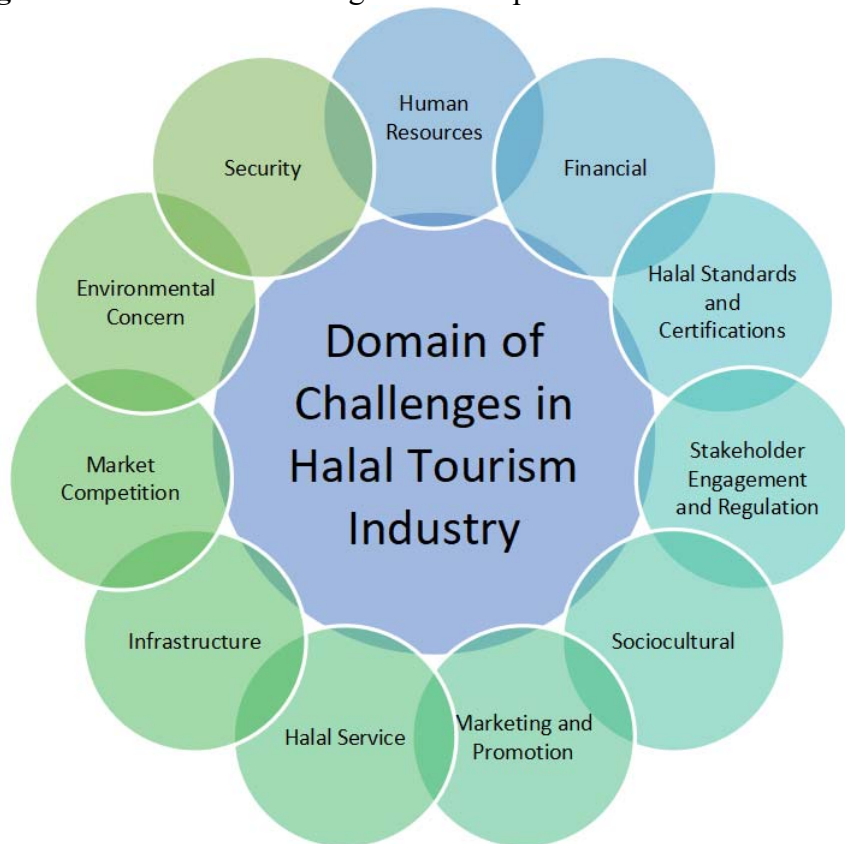
Source: Author's calculations

This study systematically maps the barriers and strategies of halal tourism implementation. By conducting an extensive literature review, the author identified a wide array of issues that have been discussed in the field. Based on the data analysis, 11 key challenge domains that pertained to core areas of the halal tourism industry were identified. These domains include human resources, financial issues, halal standards and certifications, stakeholder engagement and regulation, sociocultural factors, marketing and promotion, halal services, infrastructure, market competition, environmental concerns, and security. These domains are illustrated in Figure 6 and cover different angles pertinent to the successful development and operation of halal tourism. These 11 domains reflect the complex and multifactor nature of halal tourism, which involves navigating diverse issues in both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority countries. By identifying these areas, this study provides a framework to overcome various barriers for more effective implementation of the tourism industry.

The upcoming discussion section will explore each of the 11 challenge domains identified within halal tourism in further detail. This section will explore the unique challenges in each domain and ideas to combat those challenges. Through extensive discussion, the research intends to provide a "deep dive" on these challenges, with the hope that this study will be able to contribute to the side of issues and shed some light on how those obstacles are overcome, potentially stimulating halal tourism enhancement and growth in both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim countries.



**Figure 6.** Domains of challenges in the implementation of halal tourism.



Source: Author's work

## **Discussion Analysis**

Through a systematic literature review, this study identifies eleven main domains as challenges in the implementation of halal tourism. In the following section, each of the challenges will be discussed in detail along with the strategic approach to tackle the current issues and promote the successful development of halal tourism.

### ***Human Resources***

The halal tourism industry faces significant challenges, primarily due to constraints in organizational resources, particularly human resources. Many studies have highlighted a persistent issue that the pool of workforce who understand Sharia principles and can deliver service to Muslim tourists remains lacking (Irewati & Nufus, 2024; Junaidi, 2020; Junaidi et al., 2019). This skills gap is especially prominent in places like Lombok, Indonesia, where Prawiro and Fathudin (2023) identify the lack of

qualified personnel as a major barrier to effective service delivery. The absence of Sharia-compliant staff can have a substantial impact on the overall guest experience, reducing the quality and desirability of Muslim-friendly accommodations (Lada et al., 2024). Thus, concern on these human resource constraints is an important job that must be concentrated on to guarantee long-term growth as well as advancement in the halal tourism market.

Lack of skilled staff in terms of Sharia principles may affect the overall service quality of the tourism sector. This regard could lower its competitive ability compared to regular tourism. The aim of this niche tourism strategy is to attract loyal customers that strongly adhere to Islamic principles thus, the importance of knowledgeable staff in the sector should be prominent. The management's strategic commitment is essential for the effective implementation of halal tourism, where training and certification of the staff is a major foundation.

To address this issue, an educational and training-focused, multidisciplinary is needed. This should be accompanied by comprehensive training that focuses on language and cultural competencies for staff to cater to the diverse needs of Muslim tourists (Lada et al., 2024). Management must give a strong commitment to restrict the availability of food and beverages, halal services, and worship facilities in compliance with Sharia regulations (Suryanto et al., 2022). In addition to this, targeted capacity-building initiatives could improve staff competencies and equip personnel with essential knowledge of halal tourism standards and levels of service quality for Muslim tourists (Irewati & Nufus, 2024). Furthermore, educational programs that focus on halal tourism and certification processes will help staff better address the specific requirements of halal travellers (Prawiro & Fathudin, 2023). Together, these tactics can enhance human resource capabilities for the tourism sector to ensure a more inclusive environment that addresses the needs of all types of tourists.

The other major problem is the inadequate training and knowledge of operators. Several researchers stress the importance of continual education and training programs to be established among hospitality staff, tour guides, and service providers in halal requirements and cultural sensitivities (Soonsan & Jumani 2024; Razzaq et al. 2016). Educating businesses and destinations about the preferences of Muslim travellers is crucial for enhancing service offerings (Ainin et al., 2020), alongside efforts to ensure local communities are well-informed about halal requirements to deliver quality services (Dabphet, 2021). Furthermore, tourism operators are responsible for providing adequate training to foster sharia-competent human resources. Vargas-Sanchez et al. (2020) suggest additional training for tourism professionals, academics, and students on the reinforce of their knowledge of the concepts of

halal tourism. In addition, qualification programs for halal tourism on workforce may add other benefit and enhance service quality (Sultan et al., 2020). Finally, forming a culture where every staff member is trained and respectful to Muslim traditions is an important element of the full experience in halal tourism sectors.

On the other hand, concern about gender addresses additional limitations in the halal tourism business. Research by Sultan et al. (2020) and Seyfi & Hall (2019) depicts how restrictions based on norms in Islamic principles may impact the tourism experience for women, creating more challenges for female tourists and workers in the industry. To address this challenge, promoting gender equality and inclusive practices in the industry is needed. Encouraging the employment of female workers in the tourism sector may be an effective approach to diversify the workforce and cater to the needs of women tourists.

### ***Financial***

The implementation of halal tourism in the financial sector faces some considerable obstacles and has its roots in three factors: (1) perceptions of diminished profit potential, (2) financial constraints, and (3) the ineffectiveness of tax allowance policies. Junaidi et al. (2019) reported that some hotels are reluctant to adopt halal tourism because they believe they will lose revenue from alcohol sales, which may account for a large proportion of profits. This concern is valid, as embracing halal accommodations requires a commitment to not offering non-halal food and beverages, including alcohol as a service. Moreover, Vandromme (2020) observes that quite a few resorts and hotels have financial constraints, which make it difficult for them to adjust facilities just to honor the halal way of life. A third major challenge is the high cost of transitioning from conventional tourism to halal-compliant practices. For instance, isolating male and female contact could be a daunting task for operators, with substantial costs associated with it (Junaidi, 2020; Junaidi et al., 2019). In addition, the current tax allowance policy has not been able to significantly raise tax revenue, meaning that the present framework is ineffectual and adds to the barriers to halal tourism implementations (Jaelani et al., 2023).

Therefore, to overcome its financial barriers, a well-practiced multidimensional strategy can be enforced, combining niche marketing, innovative financing, and supportive government policies.

Tourism operators can treat the halal tourism market as a niche-specific sector, allowing them to adopt targeted marketing practices that cater to the unique needs of Muslim travellers. This could justify the approach of implementing premium pricing policy, as consumers are willing to pay more for the perceived high quality of halal services that are tailored to their preferences (Junaidi et al., 2019). Research by Alam et al. (2024) indicates that customers do not mind paying a higher price for extra service in halal tourism, reinforcing the potential to increase profit margins within this niche.

Besides, operators might consider a more adaptive cooperation mode with Muslim-friendly companies to be cost-effective in reaching the right niche market among moderately practicing Muslim tourists (Junaidi et al., 2019). Raising money through Islamic financing institutions is further an essential measure for overcoming financial constraints. Encouraging private investors to invest in Shariah-compliant resources for the limited development of Islamic resorts can also diversify funding sources. Furthermore, Muneeza et al. (2019) introduced that equity crowdfunding could be an alternative form of fundraising for constructing Islamic tourism projects.

To accommodate the needs of halal tourism in the context of supporting development and infrastructure, it is important that stakeholders develop shariah-compliant financing mechanisms specific to this sector (Muneeza et al., 2019). This, in combination with adopting the principles of justice policy formulation from Ibn Khaldun for Sharia tourism, will elaborate on ways to improve stakeholder engagement and lead to sustainable growth (Maskuroh, 2023). Supporting revenue is necessary and highlights the importance of investing more in the halal tourism area. Here comes the importance of investments and resources to grow this sector (Sultan et al., 2020).

Finally, operators may use a psychological pricing strategy to offset the incremental cost of halal compliance because emotional and spiritual motivators are some of the most effective factors that resonate with consumers (Junaidi, 2020). Tourism operators can set higher prices which caused an additional effort to offer Sharia accommodation. Implementing this strategy not only overcomes the operational costs but also strengthens the brand value as a premium halal tourism service which could affect how consumers perceive the products. The government can also support halal tourism by determining more optimal tax allowance regulations (Jaelani et al., 2023). For the halal tourism sector to thrive, formulating tax regulations that are clear and benefit tourism operators is needed to encourage their willingness for such offerings. Optimal tax regulation not only eases the burden but also can bring more investment settings and reduce entrance threats for newer businesses. Collectively, these

strategies can greatly alleviate the economic challenges impeding halal tourism, enabling the desired growth in this sector.

### ***Halal Standards and Certification***

There are challenges in the form of standards and certification for the halal tourism sector, which play a role in putting a ceiling on its growth and ability to serve Muslim travellers effectively. One challenge is that there are no direct halal indicators in Sharia-compliant tourism management, so the interpretation and use of halal principles by tourism operators tend to differ (Junaidi et al., 2019). The absence of universally recognized halal standards complicates the certification of accommodations, leading to confusion for both operators and tourists regarding what constitutes genuine halal offerings (Fauzi & Battour, 2024). The inconsistency of halal standards across the globe may limit the halal tourism industry ability to cater special needs of Muslim tourists. This may cause confusion towards the consumer which can make them hesitant to purchase such services since they are not assure whether the requirements are met. This disparity is mainly noticeable in countries such as China, where the observance of halal practices varies considerably, which poses challenges for Muslim tourists seeking authentic halal products (Yousaf & Xiucheng, 2018).

Since there is no standardized perception of Sharia tourism among operators and stakeholders, this creates inconsistency in the application of halal principles (Junaidi, 2020). Implementation of these principles varies significantly across Muslim-majority countries, influenced by local interpretations of Islam and cultural contexts, adding another layer of complexity. Therefore, up to this time, there is no worldwide shared concept of halal tourism, and this situation can cause in determination for Muslim tourists in terms of the legitimacy of places and services (Supryadi et al., 2022; Yagmur & Aksu, 2020).

The certification issue also arises as other factor. The complexity and variation in certification processes across regions is a source of difficulty for numerous small businesses in obtaining and retaining halal certification (Domingues & Almeida, 2024; El-Gohary, 2020). This may also cause confusion among stakeholders and customers due to the presence of various halal certification bodies with their own requirements (El-Gohary, 2020). The ignorance of local businesses about the necessity to obtain a halal certificate negatively affects the development of halal tourism (Irewati & Nufus, 2024).

All these problems can be solved by several solutions or initiatives for the development of halal standards in the tourism industry and certification procedures. Creating a complete regulatory framework for halal tourism, with clear and accepted halal standards, can help to ensure industry compliance (Irewati & Nufus, 2024; Junaidi, 2020). The collaboration among countries and tourism organizations can generate a uniform understanding regarding halal tourism around the world, and simultaneously improve consumer confidence (Supryadi et al., 2022). Putting in place standardized SOPs for halal operations is also recommended. The SOPs for halal should be distributed widely among the tourism operators and make them aware of easy steps to ensure compliance with halal requirements so that all stakeholders have a common understanding of practices related to halal (Junaidi, 2020). According to a study conducted by Domingues & Almeida (2024) and Prawiro & Fathudin (2023), simplifying the halal certification procedure for tourist businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), can increase accessibility and efficiency. Steps should be taken to minimize bureaucratic barriers and establish clear rules for certification.

The success of the halal tourism industry will depend on how well local companies are made aware of and understand halal certification. Thus, governments and related organizations must provide robust educational resources and support to enable operators to understand the benefits of certification and successfully manage the certification process (Irewati & Nufus, 2024). Implementing an integrated halal grading system, which is proven to be successful in Japan and Korea, could harmonize the halal perception of offers. As stated by Yousaf & Xiucheng (2018), ranges of this system may be from "pork-free" to completely halal-certified places, which enable Muslim tourists to make more informed decisions in their dining and accommodation experiences. Once these steps have been established, appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms must be set in place. Regular monitoring of halal compliance and certification processes would assure that these requirements are fulfilled, enhancing trust and visibility to Muslim travellers (Prawiro & Fathudin, 2023). This monitoring effort may foster a sense of accountability in halal tourism, which is essential on offering Islamic-friendly products. A thorough process of quality control can ensure that the business is committed to the halal guidelines which can boost customer loyalty towards services. Open feedback regarding the monitoring process may enhance its effectiveness, indicating that the industry is adapting into the evolving market. These are steps that the halal tourism business can take to become more conducive and reliable to its Muslim customers.

***Stakeholder Engagement and Regulation***

Halal tourism is not easy to implement and has various obstacles in terms of stakeholder engagement and regulatory compliance. Political conflicts have cleared the way for politics and a legacy of tension and mistrust in places such as Aceh that are said to be preventing ambitions toward growing tourism (Rindrasih, 2019). Worse, the historical reluctance of government officials to accommodate this industry—owing to various secular policies implemented by past regimes—places a constraint on the development of the sector itself and subsequently translates into an absence of support from related stakeholders for initiatives in halal tourism (Syamsurrijal et al., 2023; Vandromme, 2020). Further worsening the difficulties in implementing halal tourism regulations, an overall lack of knowledge and awareness among different stakeholders regarding the halal principles further complicate the regulatory implementation of halal tourism guidelines and practices (Prawiro & Fathudin, 2023; Dabphet, 2021). The fragmented nature of the industry, El-Gohary (2020) underscores the distrust among consumers, due to multiple organizations involved in certification and accreditation, further contributing to a lack of trust among consumers, necessitating a more cohesive approach to regulation and stakeholder engagement.

Various strategies can be utilized to prioritize stakeholder engagement and more effective regulatory frameworks within halal tourism. Solid cooperation and partnerships among government authorities, local businesses, as well as halal certification organizations would be vital to effectively accelerate the development of halal tourism initiatives (Soonsan & Jumani, 2024; Syamsurrijal et al., 2023; Lada et al., 2024; Prawiro & Fathudin, 2023; Huda et al., 2021; Ainin et al., 2020; Aji et al., 2020). Engaging all stakeholders in the decision-making process ensures that regulations are inclusive and consider the diverse interests at play, establishing a climate of mutual support and understanding (Syamsurrijal et al., 2023). There is also a need for a meticulous, and transparent ethical framework for halal tourism (Syamsurrijal et al., 2023; Yagmur & Aksu, 2020; Papastathopoulos et al., 2020). The framework must outline the role of each party involved and should be done in a way that will help everyone to know what exactly is expected from their end. By improving awareness and providing training on halal tourism principles for all actors involved—including local communities and businesses—the sector can enhance adherence to halal standards and reduce mismanagement or misrepresentation (Prawiro & Fathudin, 2023; Hendijani & Sanny, 2021; Peristiwa, 2020).

Furthermore, a conducive political environment plays a major role in the creation of halal tourism (Syamsurrijal et al., 2023). Policymakers must create policies that favor halal tourism and provide

incentives to businesses that comply with halal standards. Monitoring and evaluation instruments can help observe the effects of implementing halal tourism regulations, at the same time building feedback that can identify improvement areas (Syamsurrijal et al., 2023; Echchabi et al., 2022). Countries can promote themselves as halal-friendly destinations by leveraging international cooperation and participating in tourism fairs and events aimed specifically at Muslim-majority countries (Domingues & Almeida, 2024; Jaelani et al., 2023; Chianeh et al., 2018). By adopting these strategies, halal tourism can overcome its current challenges and is set for growth in the future.

### ***Sociocultural***

The implementation of halal tourism in the sociocultural sector causes several constraints that hinder its growth effectively. One of the leading barriers is community resistance toward halal tourism activities (Echchabi et al., 2022; Adel et al., 2021; Ainin et al., 2020; Aji et al., 2020; Rindrasih, 2019; Razzaq et al., 2016), especially in regions where cultural and religious values are deeply rooted in everyday life like Aceh. In this context, adherence to Islamic doctrine would cause conflicts in tourism practices that are interpreted as not in line with the principle of religion, such as alcohol drinking and other behaviours considered deviant (Rindrasih, 2019; Huda et al., 2021).

Ethnic and religious perception also plays a role in non-Muslim majority countries. Yousaf & Xiucheng (2018) explored this in Japan, South Korea, and China. Japan's cultural practices, such as the use of certain ingredients or cooking methods, may not necessarily be compliant with halal criteria. For Japanese businesses and venues, catering to halal considerations while respecting cultural sensibilities can be tricky. Thailand has a unique and rich culinary tradition in addition to its culture, which may not always fit right in with the taste and dietary preferences of Muslim tourists. Balancing the promotion of halal options with traditional Thai cuisine could be a challenge. South Korea has its own food traditions and culture that may not always be in line with the eating habits/preferences of Muslim travellers. In China, the Islamic religion is deeply integrated with the traditional cultures of ethnic minority groups, thus religious tourism is often perceived as ethnic tourism in China.

Islamophobia is another part that is experienced in various research. This point includes Islamophobia in some non-Islamic countries which might make Muslim travellers feel they face a threat or risk. Negative perceptions or stereotypes about Muslims may influence tourism decisions and impact the overall experience for Muslim visitors (Aji et al., 2020). Islamophobia, xenophobia, racism, discrimination, and terror have done damage to halal tourism, as well as rising Islamophobic voices



that could deter the rise of Halal Tourism into the years (Al-Ansi et al., 2022). Not only adrift but also opposing views about the direction and implementation of halal tourism programs within local communities can again add friction, making it almost impossible to achieve consensus and support (Prawiro & Fathudin, 2023). Halal tourism is also perceived as a step back from modernity by the population in countries with strong secular legacies like Tunisia, which makes it very hard to earn public support for these proposals (Vandromme, 2020).

There are several solutions to these sociocultural problems. The most important thing is to develop culturally literate tourism actors. For this to happen, adequate training and educational programs need to be developed so that staff can increase their learning experiences in the general knowledge of Islamic rituals, dietary regulations, and cultural practices, which will help equip them on how best to cater to Muslim guests (Aji et al., 2020; Razzaq et al., 2016). Furthermore, including diversity in tourism offerings can lead to a halal-friendly environment that is expected to grow together with the existence of Muslim travellers. Promoting local culinary traditions and a few halal options can present a full travel experience with respect to the community culture as well (Yousaf & Xiucheng, 2018).

Another effective approach is to engage with local communities. The participation of residents in formulating tourism policy and decisions can create a sense of ownership and acceptance for halal tourism programs. This engagement can also assist in combatting improper perceptions of halal tourism (Irewati & Nufus, 2024; Suryanto et al., 2022; Seyfi & Hall, 2019). Public awareness programs that can project how halal tourism could economically and socially benefit these populations, in terms of perception and resistance, are likely to reduce resistance (Fauzi & Battour, 2024; Suryanto et al., 2022; Vandromme, 2020). Addressing safety and security concerns regarding possible Islamophobia, and promoting community dialogues and anti-discrimination activities, will create a secure environment for all travellers (Aji et al., 2020; Papastathopoulos et al., 2021).

Ultimately, the successful implementation of halal tourism requires a deliberate effort to educate and engage local people, maintain cultural sensitivities, and dispel misconceptions regarding the halal tourism concept. To do this, stakeholders can build supportive cultures by offering international collaborations and training that demonstrate awareness of unclear practices in the halal tourism sector, recognizing and delivering value for halal hospitality that is sensitive to different cultural contexts.

***Marketing and Promotion***

There are quite a few challenges in marketing and promoting halal tourism to make it well known in the global market. Most significantly, generally a low level of awareness of halal options among prospective travellers. For example, Sabah faces poor promotion as an Islamic tourism destination to capitalize on this very important and increasing market type of accommodation option. When coupled with a lack of exposure, this absence not only dents local businesses' profits but also hampers overseas-seeking firms' reputations, as travellers find it hard to identify halal services (Lada et al., 2024). A similar problem also exists in New Zealand, as many hotel providers do not intend to indicate halal offerings on their websites, resulting in missed opportunities to attract Muslim tourists (Razzaq et al., 2016).

All of this is made worse by minimal to zero promotion for Halal tourism. There is little interest among potential tourists ascending to halal tourism destinations, primarily due to a lack of understanding of what halal tourism entails (Fauzi & Battour, 2024). This can be made worse by negative stereotypes and misunderstandings towards Islam, which deters Western travelers from choosing more halal-friendly options that exist on hotel properties (Rindrasih, 2019). The Jordanian tourists, for instance, were only aware of the halal destinations but had limited knowledge of the international halal products available in different countries (Harahsheh et al., 2019). Problematic promotion hinders the visibility of halal tourism and narrows opportunities in the mature competitive market (Yusuf et al., 2021; Sultan et al., 2020; Junaidi, 2020).

A variety of the necessary steps to overcome this issue involve dealing with the marketing and promotion of halal tourism. The following are several strategies to promote and increase halal tourism marketing. First, as mentioned earlier, create targeted marketing campaigns that are going to help attract your ideal customers and educate them about what halal tourism entails. Clear messaging is key to differentiating halal and Muslim-specific offerings from standard tourism, so as not to reinforce any misconceptions about what a halal experience involves (Junaidi, 2020).

A study by Yousaf & Xiucheng (2018) explores marketing strategies in South Korea and China that have been done to take advantage of their competitive edge. Examples of those who have successfully marketed their halal offerings include projects such as the Muslim-Friendly Korea project in South Korea, which focuses on comprehensive information for Muslims, including more halal food options and availability. China is running tours along the Silk Road, emphasizing historical ties to Islamic culture. These tours provide insights into the cultural exchange and trade relationships that shaped the

region, offering a unique perspective to tourists interested in Islamic heritage in China. Furthermore, incorporating travel blogs or reviews from Muslim travelers visiting those destinations can help build trust. The sharing of personal stories on halal-friendly destinations can create positive experiences for future tourists, acting as key motivators for travel decisions (Fauzi & Battour, 2024; Supryadi et al., 2022; Adel et al., 2020; Sultan et al., 2020; Yousaf & Xiucheng, 2018).

Another key approach is through community engagement and local business connectivity. Local businesses should tailor their services to attract Muslim travelers. This can transform businesses into halal tourism destinations. Reinforcing the list of halal-approved establishments can significantly promote visibility and interest in halal tourism prospects (Vargas-Sanchez et al., 2020). Utilizing digital platforms as well as social media marketing is also effective. Targeting younger demographics on these channels works well, as they tend to seek information online before making travel decisions (Fauzi & Battour, 2024). Inclusivity can also be promoted in marketing efforts, especially in creating a welcoming environment for Muslim travelers. Tailoring marketing strategies to highlight halal-friendly features, cultural sensitivity, and respect for Islamic practices can enhance the attractiveness of destinations to a diverse audience (Adel et al., 2020).

By adopting these strategies, tourism destinations can improve their marketing efforts, build awareness, and foster trust, ultimately appealing to a broader segment of travelers. Finally, a comprehensive, proactive, multi-staged approach that encompasses promotional strategies, community engagement, and communication will be critical to overcoming challenges in halal tourism marketing and promotion.

### ***Halal Services***

Various challenges encountered in the widespread use of halal tourism mainly include the lack of facilities and amenities, poor service quality, limited halal food availability, and non-halal-certified products or services (Soonsan & Jumani, 2024; Domingues & Almeida, 2024; Lada et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2021; Adel et al., 2021; Ainin et al., 2020; Peristiwo, 2020; Yousaf & Xiucheng, 2018; Razzaq et al., 2016). Many negative reviews left by Muslim travelers highlight a lack of necessities, such as insufficient prayer equipment and narrow parking areas in Sharia-compliant hotels. Moreover, the level of service usually does not meet the expectations of Muslim guests and may not adhere to Sharia principles efficiently, leading to dissatisfaction (Alam et al., 2024). Furthermore, many destinations struggle with a scarcity of halal-friendly services and products, which limits their appeal to Muslim

tourists. The presence of halal dining options, prayer facilities, and culturally sensitive amenities is crucial to enhancing the overall experience for this demographic; however, many locations still lack sufficient offerings (Soonsan & Jumani, 2024; Irewati & Nufus, 2024). The inadequate facility is a major turn-off and becomes a primary risk of decreasing the credibility of halal tourism offerings. To succeed, this offering not only has to adhere to the halal principles but also consider the comfort of the travelers and offering service that is culturally resonant.

Availability of halal food is not just the compliant part but also helps in making a positive as well as an authentic experience during travelling. Destinations should offer a diversity of halal food across local cuisines in a Sharia-compliant way to better appeal to culture and improve the satisfaction of tourists with their experience. Besides that, by hosting events and food festivals or culinary tours also widely promote halal food which can be discovered further among other Muslim tourists who have an interest to explore more varieties of cuisines. Halal food, if offered in a good number, can also be one of the tastes that helps differentiate destinations to have unique offerings and cultural enriched destination experiences for Muslims (Fauzi & Battour, 2024; Hasan, 2023).

Addressing these challenges requires enhancing the quality of facilities and improving service standards in the halal tourism industry. Sharia-compliant hotels should upgrade facilities and services to meet Muslim tourists' needs, ensuring that prayer areas, halal meals, and recreational amenities are well-maintained and accessible (Alam et al., 2023; Huda et al., 2021; Hendijani & Sanny, 2021). Staff training is also crucial, as well-trained staff who understand the importance of Islamic values can improve the guest experience (Yusuf et al., 2021). Hotels and tourism providers should strive to offer appealing products, incorporating Islamic and family-friendly activities, and creating a Muslim-friendly environment. Ensuring that the halal food experience is not only compliant with halal standards but also enjoyable and reflective of local culinary traditions will further enhance the appeal of halal tourism (Fauzi & Battour, 2024; Soonsan & Jumani, 2024; Lada et al., 2024; Hasan, 2023; Alam et al., 2023; Echchabi et al., 2022; Papastathopoulos et al., 2020; Vandromme, 2020; Peristiwo, 2020; Vargas-Sanchez et al., 2020; Seyfi & Hall, 2019).

A strategic approach involves expanding marketing and communication efforts directed at Muslim tourists. Well-designed marketing campaigns showcasing why halal tourism is unique and addressing Muslim travellers' needs can boost awareness. Specialized web portals offering information about halal services, including prayer rooms and restaurants, are helpful for Muslim travelers planning trips (Yousaf & Xiucheng, 2018). Thailand and Japan have successfully organized halal food events and

guides to assist Muslim visitors in finding halal offerings (Yousaf & Xiucheng, 2018; Soonsan & Jumani, 2024).

Cultural awareness within the hospitality industry is also essential in creating a welcoming environment for Muslim tourists. Facilities like prayer rooms for women and family-friendly areas cater to these visitors' needs (Papastathopoulos et al., 2021). Integrating local Islamic culture and heritage into tourism experiences provides a richer context for Muslim travelers, making their visits more meaningful (Lada et al., 2024). Visiting Islamic art, history and heritage sites can augment the cultural component of halal tourism destinations required for a more authentic and holistic experience. This method is more than just adhering to halal norms, it opens a window for Muslim visitors to connect with the local Islamic culture. Tourism products that include elements of Islamic architecture, native traditions, and local histories can enhance travellers' connectedness and sense of belonging. Potentially, destinations could highlight similar local events like Ramadan festivals or Eid celebrations that are unique and memorable for Muslim tourists.

The stakeholders who aim to promote halal tourism must understand the challenges Muslim travelers face. By enhancing facilities, improving service standards, expanding marketing efforts, and deepening the industry's understanding of Islamic values, destinations will naturally become more inclusive and attractive spaces for halal tourism to thrive.

### ***Infrastructure***

In Thailand, a country with a majority non-Muslim population, the infrastructure sector has to face multiple challenges. Lastly, Soonsan & Jumani (2024) claimed that the lack of halal products, services, and information in the accommodation industry such as lodging facilities and restaurants or even retail centres reduce Muslim tourists' desire to travel while being well received. They also argue that tourism accommodation services quality outside large cities in rural areas with a lack of facilities. In those areas that did not provide those infrastructures, namely halal food and facilities (Fauzi & Battour, 2024; Suryanto et al., 2022; Hendijani & Sanny, 2021; Aji et al., 2020). Insufficient transportation options exacerbate these challenges, limiting access to halal tourism destinations for Muslim travelers (Irewati & Nufus, 2024; Yusuf et al., 2021).

In addition to improving international tourist infrastructure, we must also begin constructing halal-friendly amenities such as hotels with prayer rooms or masjid, and a wide range of halal food (Soonsan

& Jumani, 2024; Aji et al., 2020). This is part of the investment needed for hotels and restaurants to be able to cater adequately to Muslim travelers. Lada et al. (2024) argue the improvement of infrastructure and facilities can elevate the overall comfort of accommodations for Muslim tourists. It is also important to get past the stigma of access. Besides that, improving the promotion of information, and road quality to tourist attractions as well as public transportation will increase the repeat visits from tourists (Yusuf et al., 2021).

Moreover, involving halal services into an already existing tourism infrastructure at a destination could lead to a higher level of attractiveness and thus enjoy the benefit of ‘full-round packages. For example, Thailand has been developed into designated areas, such as prayer rooms and halal food for Muslim travelers (Yousaf & Xiucheng, 2018). The demand for investment in halal tourism, which encompasses the construction of halal facilities such as place-of-worship and food carts, may enhance the attractiveness of a regional tourism destination (Suryanto et al., 2022). The investment in cultural talent is also important for the consolidation of an identity and recovery, valorisation, and private initiative entrepreneurship incentive besides public sector cooperation (Chianeh et al., 2018). Besides, for easy reach of halal tourism destinations improving connectivity through better road, rail, and air transportation networks is essentially required (Irewati & Nufus, 2024).

An enhanced investment strategy into halal tourism infrastructure can attract more Muslim businesses and travelers, contributing to the overall growth of this segment of the tourism industry. Ensuring that destinations cater to the specific needs of Muslim travelers not only enhances their experience but also places these locations on a competitive footing in the global tourism market.

### ***Market and Competition***

Implementation of halal tourism faces intertwined challenges in the market and competition sector. The latest increase in halal tourism has led to extreme competition and market saturation for worldwide destinations, which highlights the importance of differentiation strategies (Ainin et al., 2020). This represents a unique and differentiated offering that distinguishes it from others, especially well-established Islamic tourism hotspots in the region such as Indonesia and Peninsular Malaysia which challenges efforts by destinations in Sabah to lure Muslim travelers (Lada et al., 2024). This strategic position becomes more relevant as consumer preferences change, which leads to the development of Unique Selling Propositions (USPs) that accurately communicate halal-friendly destinations like Aceh Province in moments of market turmoil (Yusuf et al., 2021). Furthermore, it can be difficult to attract

Muslim travelers without offending other potential customers due to the difficulty of balancing the needs of current market categories, including non-Muslims (Vargas-Sanchez et al., 2020).

According to the literature, promoting USPs can be done in any different way including offering Islamic heritage, availability of halal food, introducing local customs, and other unique aspects of Islam. Differentiation strategies that highlight the destination's unique attribute will not only attract more Muslim visitors but also foster familiarity, enhancing the experience and creating a traveling experience that is memorable thus enabling them to visit the destination at another time. A strong local USPs that combines local experience and halal-friendly facilities can further improve a destination's market resilience. This creates identity in the destinations that may also possibly attract travelers, especially those who want more cultural experience from Aceh such as Islamic festivals, arts and crafts, along with historic landmarks (Yusuf et al., 2021). By doing this, the traveller will feel connected to a destination on a personal or spiritual level and differentiate any destination from competitors. A robust USP builds brand loyalty and repeat visits that ensure a steady stream of revenues even during times when market conditions are highly volatile.

In such cases, the key challenge for destinations is their strategy of positioning and differentiation. For instance, the Aceh Province could emphasize its distinctive offerings that associate its rich Islamic heritage and culture with tailored halal services to differentiate itself from other competitors (Yusuf et al., 2021). The success of a more destination-driven marketing approach, as seen in countries like Thailand, further points to the viability of promoting the destination as Muslim-friendly by providing Muslim-centric travel and tourism options in terms of cuisine, prayer facilities, and so on. (Yousaf & Xiucheng 2018). Additionally, the market segmentation technique may provide tourism destinations with the ability to fulfil the diverse preferences and needs of the Muslim traveller. This effort allows tourism stakeholders to develop targeted marketing strategies and service offerings that are in line with conventional and conservative Muslim travelers (Papastathopoulos et al., 2020).

The consumer attitudes toward halal products and services can help ensure that the message of the marketing strategies aligns with Muslim tourists' values (Akin & Okumus, 2020). A comprehensive understanding of Muslim travellers' cultural and spiritual needs should inform marketing strategies for halal tourism. Travelers can develop an emotional connection through messaging highlighting Islamic values, hospitality and value systems like sustainability and responsible tourism. A value-based approach will further add attractiveness of the destination because it sees halal tourism as a significant and enriching cultural practice instead of only looking at commoditized halal renderings. Moreover,

this alignment with consumer values can boost brand loyalty as Muslim tourists will start considering the destination as a preferred choice that can always fulfil their religious and cultural expectations. Integration of the strategies can provide destinations to attract a wide range of consumers and enhance the overall halal offerings. This approach helps overcome the problems in the competitive market, initiate growth, and become the top-of-mind tourism destination from customer perspectives.

### ***Environmental Concerns***

Halal tourism encounters various environmental challenges that may harm and deteriorate the ecosystem. Conserving the environment, maintaining sustainability, and fostering cultural preservation are top priorities in Islamic values (Yusuf et al., 2021). The significant growth in the tourism sector may cause environmental damage, pollution, and loss of natural resources. For instance, a study by Jaelani et al. (2020) indicates that the increasing number of visitors at Mount Rinjani National Park resulted in 250 tons of plastic waste affecting the local ecosystem. This kind of behaviour, which is the principle of cleanliness, is contrary to the principles of halal tourism (Suryanto et al., 2022). Tourism's environmental footprint in terms of unsustainable waste disposal, damage to natural resources as an impact of the development of the tourism sector, and any services that do not adhere to the principle of cleanliness and purity is major contrary to the core of Islamic values and this may result to a problematic trust with the ethical consumer who chooses halal tourism experience. These challenges may raise significant risks for halal tourism's long-term sustainability.

Over-tourism leads to the degradation of local ecosystems which threatens not only the natural beauty of many destinations but also their existence as viable local places. Scenic landscape impacts, polluted waterways, and declining biodiversity make destinations less appealing to visitors, making their economic and ecological value less viable. This poses additional challenges in the implementation of halal tourism. The aim of halal tourism is not only to give an experience of traveling but also to emphasize creating a serene environment, especially in the Islamic heritage and natural environment where Muslim travelers can find tranquillity and engage in spiritual reflection to remember the greatness of Allah. Nevertheless, preserving natural beauty and making it coexist with the tourism industry is not an easy task because more tourists will directly result in environmental damage if there is no appropriate natural management. This leads to a contradiction between maintaining natural resource sustainability and the practical service of halal tourism business.



The implementation of sustainable action in halal tourism. Carbon emission reduction and community development efforts may be an effective way (Lada et al., 2024). Sustainability, conservation, and cultural preservation should be incorporated as part of tourism management as this is one approach to improving the Islamic environmental ecosystem (Yusuf et al., 2021). Additionally, to reduce the effect of mass tourism, managing and regulating waste disposal strictly and promoting cleanliness during peak season among destinations should be considered (Jelani et al., 2020). Halal tourism can be established through an emphasis on various elements such as sustainable development and technological innovations without disregarding the management of these environments (Al-Ansi et al., 2022). Partnerships with environmental NGOs or government agencies can help establish a sustainable solution in waste management for destinations without investment in these facilities. Promoting this strategy could ensure that halal tourism implementation is in line with the fundamental Islamic teachings and will end up rewarding a more sustainable tourism system, which caters both to the needs of Muslim travelers and the ecosystem they live in.

### ***Security***

In the realm of security, halal tourism faces challenges, especially in those areas which have higher crime rates. The Mataram and East Lombok Regency, Indonesia, reported higher crime rates, caused by fundamental issues such as poverty and limited employment opportunities which reduced consumer trust in these locations as a safe tourism destination (Jaelani et al., 2020). Crime and insecurity perception will badly affect tourism destinations because it can hinder the tourists from revisiting, and negative word-of-mouth recommendation, which is fundamental to growth in the long run. This bad reputation would be difficult to restore, especially if the incident is continuously happening and going viral. The global threat of security and terrorism worsens this situation leading to tourist anxiety and affecting the tourism industry (Sultan et al., 2020). Such concern not only threatens visitors' safety but also affects the destination's reputation, discouraging potential visitors who seek safety and security in their traveling activities.

Safety measurements must be integrated as part of marketing strategies to effectively tackle these concerns. For instance, destinations such as the UAE successfully promote higher safety and security, which reassure the visitors that their well-being while traveling is maintained as a priority (Echchabi et al., 2022). Other than that, increasing local safety through community policing and partnership with local law enforcement may foster a secure tourism destination. To ensure the approach of collaboration

and safety, the community-based program can be heightened (Jaelani et al., 2020). Community-based efforts foster collective ownership of safety where residents become directly involved in ensuring security and reducing crime. It also grows a sense of ownership and pride in the local population, encouraging communities to protect the good name and reputation of their sector. Improving security and political stability are critical for the tourism sector in a country such as Tunisia; hence, these two issues become collective (Vandromme, 2020). Destinations that have a focused strategic plan that emphasizes safety, including addressing and reducing other security concerns, will not only help to reassure travelers but position themselves back in the halal tourism sector.

To enhance safety in the long run, local communities must have access to resources and be engaged as they play an important role in providing a hospitable environment for visitors. To increase awareness among visitors regarding safety measures, it is suggested that the governments collaborate with tourism stakeholders and establish comprehensive safety protocols along with emergency action plans (Sultan et al., 2020). This collaborative approach will foster trust and security in the halal tourism sector, which can draw many tourists who feel that safety is above their taste in culture and religion. By prioritising these key security challenges along with effective strategies, halal tourism destinations can secure a more competitive position on the international landscape. By promoting itself as a “safe haven” for Muslim tourists, a destination can increase its desirability, encouraging both short-term and long-term tourism growth. This focus on security also reinforces the destination’s resilience, enabling it to withstand global shifts in travel trends that emphasize safety.

## **Conclusion and Policy Implications**

To comprehensively depict the dynamics of halal tourism, this systematic literature review integrates descriptive, exploratory, and inductive elements. The review emphasizes the challenges and strategic implementation of halal tourism. Based on the 53 analysed scientific papers related to the issues addressed in this paper, the study highlights significant publications in the field over the past decade, reflecting a growing interest among academics and practitioners. Despite this growth, the results indicate that further research is necessary, especially in the context of non-Muslim-majority countries where the knowledge and application of halal tourism face challenges. This literature review outlines eleven domains of challenges related to the implementation of halal tourism, including human resources, financial issues, halal standards and certification, stakeholder engagement and regulation, sociocultural aspects, marketing and promotion, halal services, infrastructure, market competition,

environmental concerns, and security. Furthermore, the study identifies and suggests various approaches to overcoming these challenges, providing valuable insights into the ongoing debate within this ever-growing industry.

Despite the valuable insights offered by this literature review, it is not without limitations. First, the study is constrained by its reliance on only 53 journal articles, which represents a limited number of studies available on Scopus. While this limitation ensures the quality of the papers included, it may not fully represent the broad range of research in the field. As a result, this limitation could lead to an incomplete understanding of the issue, particularly in emerging markets or regions with unique cultural contexts. Second, while the inductive approach used in the study may be relevant for identifying themes and patterns, the interpretation could be influenced by subjectivity. The author's perspectives and biases might affect the conclusions drawn, potentially impacting the generalisability of the proposed methods.

The absence of a global halal certification process remains a major challenge. Future studies could focus on developing a universal certification process worldwide, with the help of emerging technologies such as blockchain, ensuring transparency and the integrity of halal products and services. Exploring the impact of the certification process on consumer trust could also be a valuable research path. Other relevant studies might investigate the design of mobile applications, virtual reality halal tours, and AI-enabled platforms for real-time information on accommodation, food offerings, prayer facilities, and more. Additionally, future research could examine the halal supply chain within the tourism context. However, new challenges may arise. The essence of Islamic values may not always align with the advancement of technology and globalisation. Studies exploring the relationship between Islamic law and the use of technology are necessary, particularly regarding the extent to which technology use can be tolerated within Islamic principles. The use of blockchain in halal certification may not be well received by all parties. Research on this matter, prior to the widespread implementation of blockchain technology, may be essential. The halal tourism industry can meet the needs of tech-savvy travelers while also expanding its reach to a global audience.

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## **Exploring Dimensions of the Chinese Halal Tourism Industry**

**Sidra Sidra**

Business School, Sichuan University Chengdu Sichuan China

[sidra\\_scu@outlook.com](mailto:sidra_scu@outlook.com)

**Shah Mehmood Wagan**

Business School, Sichuan University Chengdu Sichuan China

[shah.mehmood04@outlook.com](mailto:shah.mehmood04@outlook.com)

### **Abstract**

China's tourism sector is experiencing rapid growth in catering to Muslim tourists. This study investigates Halal tourism in China drawing on several aspects like Consumer Preference, Cultural Awareness, Infrastructure Development, Safety and Security, Social Media Influence, and Intercultural Interaction. Using a sample of 423 respondents and partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4, the research confirms that all constructs significantly impact the overall Halal tourism experience.

The findings highlight Consumer Preference is the most influential factor in the satisfaction of Muslim tourists, which means the necessity for Halal services, sensitivity to culture, and appropriate infrastructure. It also brings into view that Cultural Awareness is an important aspect, which may imply that educating and training service providers need to ensure a friendly atmosphere. Safety and the use of social media also emerge as critical factors in forming perceptions about Halal tourism. This study provides significant insight into the development of tourism stakeholders on how best to meet the needs of Muslim travelers and improve their experiences. Addressing these factors can create favourable conditions for Muslim tourists, increasing their satisfaction and loyalty within this growing market segment.

**Keywords:** Halal Tourism, Consumer Preferences, Cultural Awareness, Infrastructure Development, Safety and Security, Social Media Influence, Intercultural Interaction.

### **Introduction**

Halal tourism has grown to be an influential sector in the global tourism market, catering to all kinds of needs and preferences of trips by Muslims. This demand for experiences during holidays compatible with their religious dogma is driven by increased interest from growing Muslim populations. These are the motives that convince countries like China to revise their products to attract and include this travel market (Adham et al., 2023). With centuries-old cultural accumulation and rich geographical diversity, China is unique in terms of the advantages in Halal tourism development (Abbasian et al., 2024). At the same time, however, it also faces some obstacles to give full play to this market potential.

Understanding what influences the choice and experience of Muslims go a long way in raising better Halal tourism in China (Abbasian et al., 2024; Abdullah et al., 2023). The most blatant constructs that influence the experiences of Muslim tourists include Consumer Preference, Cultural Awareness, Infrastructure Development, and Safety and Security. Consumer Preference brings into view the specifics of their needs and desires for availability: food, prayer facilities, and culturally appropriate services (Alam et al., 2024; Alam et al., 2023). Further, there is the creation of an enabling environment which is considerate of Islamic values and practices by service providers and local communities through Cultural Awareness (Alfiando et al., 2023; Amalia et al., 2024). Relevant infrastructural development and safety are also critical to instil a feeling of assurance and comfort in traveling (Amin et al., 2024; Aysan & Syarif, 2024). Now that safety issues are at the core, there is every need to address such concerns with efficiency by the stakeholders within the tourism industry (Battour et al., 2024; Bazin et al., 2024). The role of social media and intercultural interaction also be incredibly significant in influencing travelers in this digital era.

The study of Halal tourism in China points out numerous basic problems encountered by Muslim travelers who come to China. One of the important topics is the customer choice, which refers to the need for specific services like Halal food, prayer facilities, and culturally suitable living places. Recognizing these tendencies is an important prerequisite for bringing and keeping Muslim tourists. This is to say that undeveloped facilities can limit the travel experience. Moreover, Safety and Security are the most pressing issues, especially at a time when people are being increasingly careful about their personal safety as they travel (Ratnasari et al., 2024). Finally, the impact of social media and Intercultural Interaction is a key factor in how people view and experience things, making it necessary for those involved to interact with these platforms in such a way as to increase the attractiveness of Halal tourism in China.

This study identifies these critical factors and their linkages with a view to useful insights that enables China to offer better Halal tourism industry (Bogan et al., 2023). Therefore, the study is confirmatory in nature, applying certain advanced methods such as Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modelling to validate the importance of various constructs influencing Halal tourism (Chikaputri et al., 2023; Chowdhury et al., 2024).

## **Literature Review**

In the last ten years Halal tourism has turned into a niche in the field of tourism which has been attracting a whole lot of non-trivial academic studies to the international level (Ekka & Bhardwaj, 2024; Febriandika & Millatina, 2023). Indeed, research has suggested that the Muslim tourists seek to stay in hotels and resorts offering them dining and recreational activities according to Islamic law and culture (Hariani & Hanafiah, 2024; Haron et al., 2024). There is, therefore, the need for the operators to assess and accommodate such needs of this market segment accordingly (Hasan, 2023; Hendrik et al., 2024). On this note, it has been observed from studies that the availability of Halal food and prayer facilities has consequences on increased satisfaction and loyalty among travelers and hence the destinations are expected to ensure availability of these offerings (Gautam et al., 2024; Hamdy et al., 2024).

The second important construct derived from the literature is that of Cultural Awareness. Cultural awareness refers to the situation where service providers and the local community understand and respect the Islamic principles and traditions (Hennida et al., 2024; Iskandar, 2023). Researchers revealed that cultural awareness brings positive contributions, which are tolerance and hospitality, to the Muslim tourists' purposes (Islam, 2024; Kalyan & Ekka, 2024). This type of mobility facilitates not only the establishment of pervasive community consciousness and builds visitors' trust, but also of mutual trust that the hosts feel (Kurniawan et al., 2024; Lada, 2024). Infrastructure Development issue is a direct one because it is the main factor of physical and service thriving traveller satisfaction (Mujiatun et al., 2023; Osman, Junid, et al., 2024). For the purposes of accommodating Halal tourists, infrastructure development needs to improve along with upgrading transportation, accommodation, and recreational facilities.

In the context of tourism, safety and security have also become major concerns, more so amidst global events, which have sensitised people about their personal safety (Osman, Omar, et al., 2024). Besides that, the role of social media and Intercultural Interaction has gained tremendous speed since most voyagers seek information or recommendations from it (Ruhaeni et al., 2024). Social media is a highly active method in the construction and management of perceptions and experiences since there, among the voyagers, can take place an exchange of experiences or tips.

## **Hypothesis Development**

This study has therefore identified seven hypotheses from insights identified from the literature review on investigating the impact of several constructs on Halal tourism in China (Shah et al., 2023). These hypotheses, therefore, focus on key factors that are perceived to have a massive impact on the experiences of the Muslim travelers.

H1: Cultural Awareness positively influences Halal tourism experiences.

This hypothesis postulates that due to greater awareness and respect for Islamic practices among service providers and local communities, the experience for Muslim travelers is better (Shovkhalov, 2024). Greater cultural sensitivity can only be imagined as creating a more considerate atmosphere; therefore, satisfaction should be higher.

H2: The infrastructure development relates positively to Halal tourism experience.

An improved infrastructure, in the form of transportation, accommodations, and recreational facilities, facilitates the tourists with the improved bottom line of satisfying the needs of Halal tourists (Sulong et al., 2024). This hypothesis postulates an increase in satisfaction among the travelers with quality improvement in the infrastructures.

H3: Economic Incentives positively affect experiences related to Halal tourism.

This hypothesis, which can be developed, will be that economic benefits including competitive pricing, rebates, and packages that serve the needs of Muslim tourists will, as a result, lead to the inclusion of Halal tourism (Sumarliah & Al-hakeem, 2023). This link indicates that money might be the very reason for tourists' choices and satisfactions.

H4: Consumer Preferences have a positive effect on Halal tourism experiences.

The services that Muslim tourists opt for, such as halal food, prayer rooms, and cultural activities, are in a way that is in accord with their choices, thus they would be keener to travel and more trustworthy to the destination (Suud et al.).

H5: Social Media Influence is positively related to Halal tourism experiences.

This is the multiplication of the usage of social media for planning trips and sharing information, therefore, positive interactions and end position on social media platforms contribute to the halal tourism perceptions and experiences improvement. (Windasari et al., 2024).

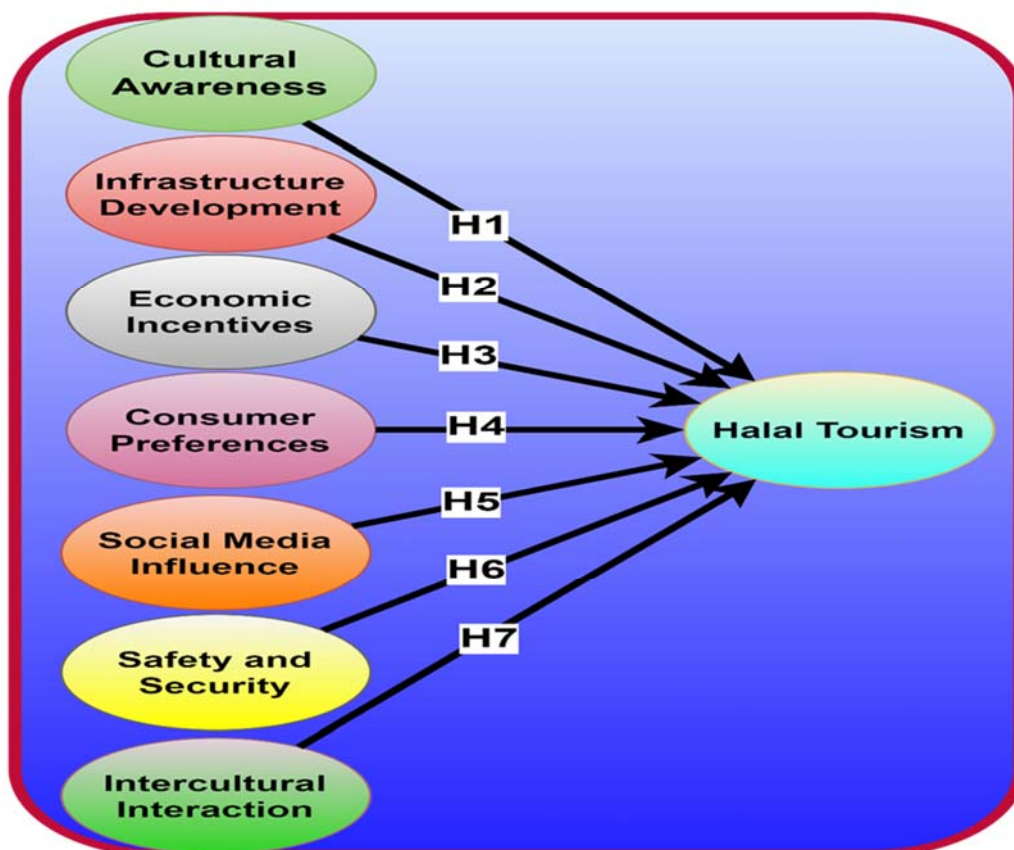
H6: Safety and Security positively influence Halal tourism experiences.

Sustainable tourism development relies heavily on the involvement of tourists, as they are key components who engage in environmentally responsible behaviour. However, this development can decline significantly if safety and security are not guaranteed Zainuri et al. (2024). Consequently, the perception of safety is expected to have a positive impact on tourists' satisfaction.

H7: Intercultural Interaction positively impacts the Halal tourism experiences.

The measurement shows that the extremely fast development of AI would make medical robots acceptable and even easier for doctors and patients to utilize (Zheng & Chi, 2024). This correlation may account for patients' and physicians' willingness to use AI-powered doctors and nurses, which will lead to patients' satisfaction and higher quality of healthcare. These hypotheses build a theoretical framework through which the nature of the relationships among the constructs and Halal tourism experiences in China can be evaluated as displayed figure 1.

**Figure 1: Hypothesis Diagram**



Source: Developed from (Isa et al., 2018) and (Adham et al., 2023)

**Research Methodology**

This study uses quantitative research to evaluate constructs of Halal tourism in China. (Febriandika & Purniasih, 2024; Fenitra et al., 2024). The data analysis is performed using SmartPLS-a tool for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation modelling. The items measuring seven key constructs, namely, Halal Tourism, Cultural Awareness, Infrastructure Development, Economic Incentives, Consumer Preferences, Social Media Influence, Safety and Security, and Intercultural Interaction, were measured using a structured questionnaire developed for the purpose. As seen in table 1 all the items of each construct were rated on a Likert scale from 1-Strongly Disagree to 7-Strongly Agree. Since the sample population of the research study is Muslim travelers visiting China, data collection was undertaken for this research using online questionnaires via social media sites and travel forums to ensure a wider reach and greater diversity among the participants.

After data collection, SmartPLS was used to conduct the CFA and to evaluate the structural model. First, CFA was performed, which included assessing the validity and reliability of the constructs to ensure that items loaded as required on their respective constructs. Then, the measurement model was used to assess the relationships of the constructs regarding their effect on Halal tourism. As a result, such findings are foreseen to provide an insight into the importance of each construct and their relationships, which in turn adds to the understanding of the dynamics of Halal tourism in China.

**Table 1: Constructs and Items**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>
<b>Halal Tourism</b>	HT1	"I am aware of the available Halal tourism options in China."	0.88
	HT2	"Halal-friendly destinations impact my decision to travel."	0.90
	HT3	"Recently, Halal tourism has grown very fast in China."	0.87
	HT4	"There are many different Halal tourism products."	0.85
	HT5	"I am satisfied with my experience in Halal tourism on the whole."	0.89
<b>Cultural Awareness</b>	CA1	"I know a lot about Halal food."	0.86
	CA2	"I have a good idea about the culture and values of Muslim tourists."	0.84
	CA3	"I am interested in learning more about Islamic culture."	0.82
	CA4	"I attend cultural events promoting Islamic culture."	0.81

	CA5	"I respect the cultural differences and practices of Muslim communities."	0.85
<b>Infrastructure Development</b>	ID1	"There are adequate Halal-certified restaurants around my area."	0.89
	ID2	"I can find prayer facilities while traveling."	0.87
	ID3	"The quality of the Halal service provided meets my expectations."	0.86
	ID4	"Accommodation and food establishments providing Halal amenities are accessible in tourist areas."	0.88
	ID5	"Tourist travel brochures highlight the promotion of Halal tourism facilities."	0.84
<b>Economic Incentives</b>	EI1	"Government supports Halal tourism ventures."	0.85
	EI2	"There is economic encouragement toward institutions which introduce and maintain Halal standards."	0.82
	EI3	"Halal tourism generates jobs."	0.84
	EI4	"Halal tourism has contributed to the improvement of the local economy."	0.83
	EI5	"There is a noted increase in the amount of Halal certifications among locals."	0.87
<b>Consumer Preferences</b>	CP1	"Availability of Halal is one of the important factors considered during making the travel decision."	0.88
	CP2	"Halal availability during the travel meets my expectations."	0.85
	CP3	"I love staying in a Halal hotel whenever traveling."	0.86
	CP4	"My destination choice is affected by the availability of Halal options."	0.87
	CP5	"My overall travel experience increases with the availability of Halal services."	0.89
<b>Social Media Influence</b>	SMI1	"I always look for reviews on social media for the Halal travel experience."	0.84
	SMI2	"I share my experience about Halal travel on social networking sites."	0.82
	SMI3	"I follow travel influencers who focus on Halal tourism."	0.85
	SMI4	"I use social media to plan my Halal travel itineraries."	0.83
	SMI5	"Recommendations from friends on Halal options influence my travel choices."	0.81
<b>Safety and Security</b>	SS1	"I feel safe traveling in areas known for Halal tourism."	0.87
	SS2	"I trust that Halal certifications are regulated properly."	0.86

	SS3	"I have concerns about my safety while traveling as a Muslim."	0.84
	SS4	"Safety considerations heavily influence my travel choices."	0.85
	SS5	"I feel secure when visiting Halal-friendly destinations."	0.88
<b>Intercultural Interaction</b>	II1	"I look for opportunities to connect with the locals during travel."	0.83
	II2	"I have had good interactions with locals during Halal travel."	0.81
	II3	"I engage in the activities of cultural exchange during my travels."	0.85
	II4	"I would like to learn about the customs of the local people where I will go."	0.84
	II5	"I believe mutual respect is important in my interactions with locals."	0.86

**Table 2:** Data Analysis Procedures

<b>Procedure</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Data Collection</b>	Online survey was distributed through social media and travel forums.
<b>Sample Size</b>	Target sample size of 423 respondents, adjusted for responses.
<b>Data Screening</b>	Checking for missing data and outliers.
<b>Confirmatory Analysis</b>	<b>Factor</b> Checking construct reliability and validity with SmartPLS.
<b>Structural modelling</b>	<b>Equation</b> Hypotheses testing and relationships among constructs.
<b>Model Evaluation</b>	Assessment of model fit indices, such as R <sup>2</sup> , Q <sup>2</sup> , and AVE.
<b>Results Interpretation</b>	Analysing significant paths and implications for Halal tourism.

Table 2 applies following approach can be considered comprehensive in providing, with robust insight into the factors influencing Halal tourism in China, where SmartPLS is applied for precise data analysis and interpretation.

### *Data Collection*

The collection of data for this study is done through an online survey collected to understanding what people think and feel to the Halal tourism market in China by Muslim travelers. This survey was sent to the respondents through social media platforms of their choice, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Furthermore, it has also been shared in popular travel forums accessed by Muslim tourists, which include debates related to the issues of Halal tourism. A wide coverage approach was adopted



to ensure access to a diverse range of respondents, enabling an in-depth exploration of the driving factors of Halal tourism. Participants were also encouraged to share the survey within their networks to maximise response rates, leveraging the social and participatory nature of new media to enhance engagement. The study targeted a sample size of 423 respondents, informed by prior research on the subject and the need to ensure a sufficiently large data set for reliable statistical outcomes. The sample size was adjusted periodically after distribution based on the number of responses received. This iterative process included monitoring the rates of completion to identify any demographic gaps for a sample representative of the wider population of Muslim travelers. In this light, with the dynamic approach that was given to the sample size management in the study, increased reliability and generalization can be achieved for the findings.

### ***Data Screening***

This was followed by an intensive data screening process after collection to ensure quality and integrity of the data set. This phase included checking for missing data and outliers that could potentially skew the results. More precisely, the response was checked for missing values and treated by exclusion of incomplete entries or, where applicable and necessary, imputation methods were applied. The outliers were checked using statistical methods to decide on their inclusion in or exclusion from the analysis. With such a keen eye on the data set, the research effort was enhancing the reliability of the subsequent analyses done through SmartPLS for the derivation of more valid conclusions on the constructs of Halal tourism.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	205	48.5%
	Female	200	47.3%
	Other	18	4.2%
<b>Education</b>	High School	40	9.5%
	Associate Degree	90	21.3%
	Bachelor's Degree	160	37.8%
	Master's Degree	110	26.0%
	Doctorate	23	5.4%
<b>Experience</b>	Less than 1 year	35	8.3%
	1–3 years	120	28.4%
	4–6 years	100	23.6%
	7–10 years	85	20.1%
	Over 10 years	83	19.6%
<b>Job Role</b>	Entry Level	60	14.2%
	Mid-Level	130	30.7%
	Senior-Level	100	23.6%
	Managerial	85	20.1%
	Executive	48	11.4%

Table 3 shows sample of 423 is well balanced by gender: males constitute 48.5%, females 47.3%, and other genders make up 4.2%. Higher education is highly concentrated in qualifications: the most come with a Bachelor's Degree at 37.8% or a Master's Degree at 26.0%. The Associate Degree holders are 21.3% while 5.4% are doctorate holders. Only 9.5% of the respondents had high school as the highest educational attainment, hence it can be concluded that the sample is educated. The experience levels are diverse in nature: 28.4% have 1–3 years of work experience, followed by the 23.6% segment of 4–6 years of work experience. Professions distribution illustrates that the largest share of the responding group falls into the mid-level occupation category at 30.7%, followed by the senior-level occupation

category at 23.6%. Next come managerial positions, which make up 20.1%, and executive occupations amount to 11.4%. The final 14.2% goes to entry-level positions. This distribution indicates a balanced workforce composition in terms of experience and levels of hierarchy within the responding sample group.

***Confirmatory Factor Analysis***

This work applies Confirmatory Factor Analysis through SmartPLS to validate the reliability and validity of all the constructs about Halal tourism in China. CFA represents a statistical method which allows one to evaluate if the data fit a hypothesized measurement model. The main purpose of the study is to assess if the items of every construct really reflect the conceptual framework. Examining the factor loading will determine the strength of the association between observable variables (i.e. items) and corresponding latent factors. Table 4 shows the reliability was measured for each construct with the use of both Cronbach's alpha and the composite reliability values. The internal consistency of all the constructs was good, as depicted in Cronbach's alpha, which had a value of 0.70 and above while the composite reliability values were also above 0.70, confirming this. Convergent validity was attained in all constructs as the AVE for each was above 0.50. Discriminant validity was measured by comparing the square root of the AVE to the correlations between constructs. Together, these analyses indicated that the measurement model was sound and thus permitted further investigation of the structural relationships between constructs.

**Table 4: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Composite Reliability</b>	<b>Average Extracted (AVE)</b>	<b>Variance</b>
<b>Halal Tourism</b>	0.92	0.94	0.76	
<b>Cultural Awareness</b>	0.88	0.91	0.72	
<b>Infrastructure Development</b>	0.90	0.92	0.75	
<b>Economic Incentives</b>	0.87	0.89	0.70	
<b>Consumer Preferences</b>	0.91	0.93	0.78	
<b>Social Media Influence</b>	0.85	0.87	0.68	
<b>Safety and Security</b>	0.89	0.91	0.73	
<b>Intercultural Interaction</b>	0.86	0.88	0.69	

Table 5 shows the Fornell-Larcker criterion is one of the most used approaches in structural equation modelling to evaluate the constructs concerning the discriminant validity. Discriminant validity is a

construct that is separate and hence, it is only able to relate to the phenomena that are not explained by other constructs. In compliance with the Fornell and Larcker criterion, the square root of AVE for each construct should be greater than the one for other constructs that show the highest correlation. This method lets every construct share more variance with its respective indicators than with other constructs, strengthening construct validity.

**Table 5:** The Fornell-Larcker criterion

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Halal Tourism</b>	<b>Cultural Awareness</b>	<b>Infrastructure Development</b>	<b>Economic Incentives</b>	<b>Consumer Preferences</b>	<b>Social Media Influence</b>	<b>Safety and Security</b>	<b>Intercultural Interaction</b>
<b>Halal Tourism</b>	0.76	0.45	0.40	0.36	0.55	0.33	0.48	0.50
<b>Cultural Awareness</b>	0.45	0.72	0.42	0.30	0.47	0.28	0.40	0.46
<b>Infrastructure Development</b>	0.40	0.42	0.75	0.35	0.46	0.26	0.38	0.44
<b>Economic Incentives</b>	0.36	0.30	0.35	0.70	0.40	0.27	0.35	0.42
<b>Consumer Preferences</b>	0.55	0.47	0.46	0.40	0.78	0.33	0.45	0.50
<b>Social Media Influence</b>	0.33	0.28	0.26	0.27	0.33	0.68	0.32	0.38
<b>Safety and Security</b>	0.48	0.40	0.38	0.35	0.45	0.32	0.73	0.41
<b>Intercultural Interaction</b>	0.50	0.46	0.44	0.42	0.50	0.38	0.41	0.69

Each construct has its square root of AVE on the diagonal, which is greater than the correlations of its row and column; therefore, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was satisfied. The AVE square root values (diagonal) confirm that constructs such as Consumer Preference (0.78) and Halal Tourism (0.76) present strong discriminant validity since each construct measures unique aspects in this model. Application of the Fornell-Larcker criterion establishes construct validity and promotes the reliability of model interpretations since clear distinctions across the constructs are extracted, enabling theory support for the study.

***Structural Equation Modelling***

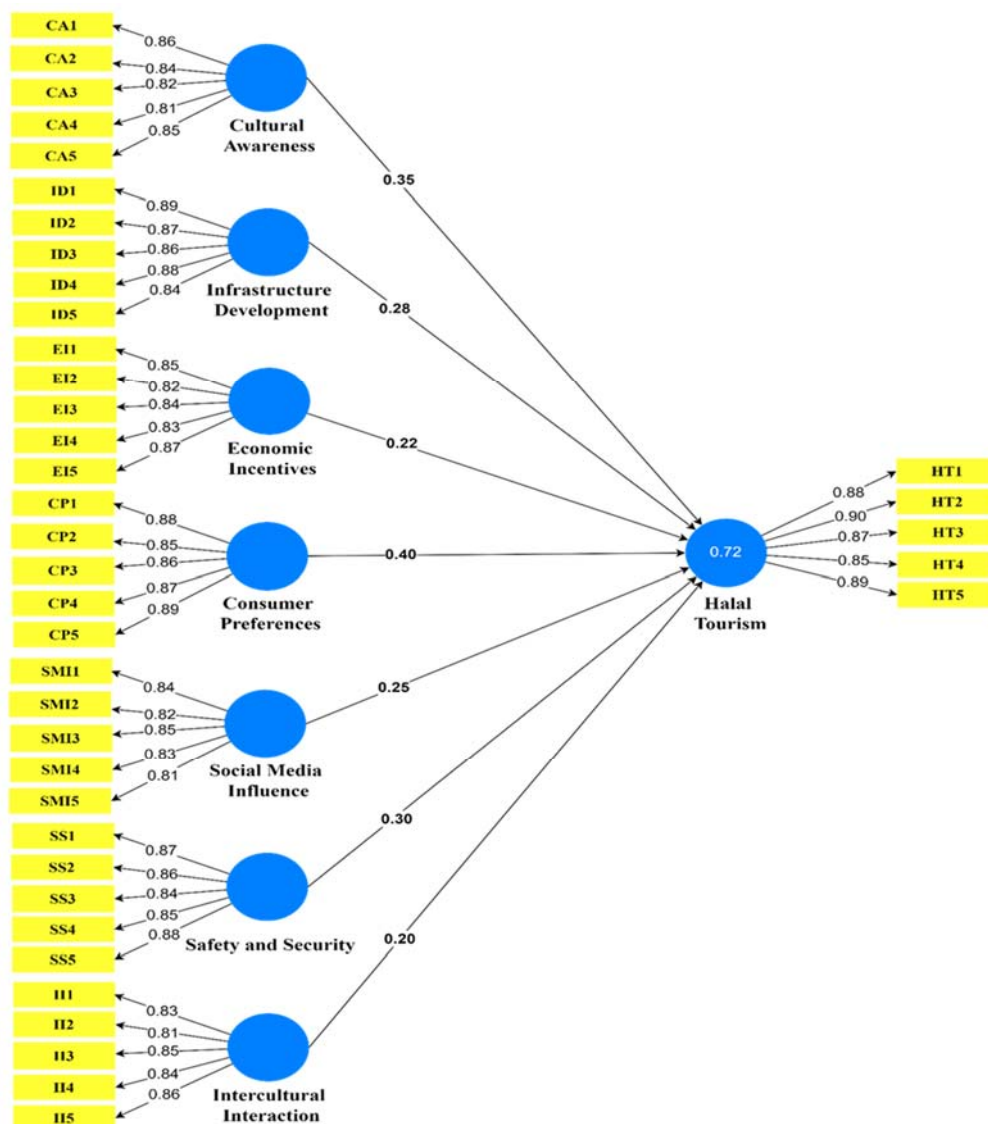
The hypothesised relationships among the constructs, based on the proposed theory, were assessed by applying SEM after validation of the measurement model through CFA. Structural equation modelling allows the estimation of multiple relationships simultaneously and thus provides an overall view of the interaction between the variables. This study evaluated a structural model in figure 2 that identifies significant paths and ways several factors influence Halal tourism experiences in China.

**Table 6: Structural Equation modelling Results**

<b>Path</b>	<b>Path Coefficient</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>Significance (p-value)</b>	<b>Implications</b>
<b>Cultural Awareness → Halal Tourism</b>	0.35	4.20	< 0.001	Encourage the understanding of Islamic etiquette to the tourists.
<b>Infrastructure Development → Halal Tourism</b>	0.28	3.50	< 0.001	Enhancing the Halal facilities to meet the travellers' needs.
<b>Economic Incentives → Halal Tourism</b>	0.22	2.90	< 0.01	Halal Tourism business will be increased by availing of incentives.
<b>Consumer Preferences → Halal Tourism</b>	0.40	5.00	< 0.001	Prioritize Halal to enhance tourist satisfaction.
<b>Social Media Influence → Halal Tourism</b>	0.25	3.00	< 0.01	Utilize social media for Effective Marketing Strategies.
<b>Safety and Security → Halal Tourism</b>	0.30	3.80	< 0.001	Provide a safe environment for Muslim Travelers.
<b>Intercultural Interaction → Halal Tourism</b>	0.20	2.60	< 0.05	Encourage cultural exchange to create better travel experiences.

The study, through this scientific approach toward CFA and SEM, can thus present meaningful conclusions about the dynamics of Halal tourism in China. The research provides relevant insight that is useful for stakeholders and policymakers in making information-based decisions to improve the experience of Halal tourism. There is a need to imply the results to understand the found relationship in the model. The path coefficients derived through analysis reflect the significant paths established. These are but a few that show the high prevalence factors that influence the Halal tourism experiences in China. For instance, the path coefficient of Consumer Preferences to Halal Tourism was the largest at 0.40, indicating high dependence on the preference of travelers for Halal service and accommodations in developing their overall experiences. This finding depicts that improving Halal options can directly increase the tourist satisfaction and attract more Muslim travelers.

Figure 2: SmartPLS Result



The path coefficient of 0.35 for the positive relationship existing between Cultural Awareness and Halal Tourism serves to raise the need for understanding and respect for Islamic practices and values that causes the Halal tourism to thrive. These are further enforced by the significant paths from Infrastructure Development to Improved Facilities at 0.28 and from Safety and Security at 0.30, which means better facilities and a safe environment should be guaranteed for Muslim tourists as seen in table 6. Furthermore, the analysis also revealed that Social Media Influence and Intercultural Interaction add to the overall experience, meaning digital platform marketing and cultural exchange surely help heighten the perceptions of travelers toward Halal tourism in China. This holistic assessment of model fit and result interpretation provides significant insights for the stakeholders in the Halal tourism sector. With the identification of these key drivers, stakeholders can develop strategies that can be used for the influencing and improvement of the overall experience for Muslim travelers, thereby providing the way to better growth and success of Halal tourism in China.

#### *Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ )*

Moreover, the coefficient of determination,  $R^2$  is one of the most critical indicators; it quantifies how the power of the ending from the structural equation model appears. This study used the coefficient of determination to establish the portion of variation in the dependent construct from the combined independent constructs in a halal tourism economy that can be justified. An  $R^2$  value of 0.72 was obtained, which denotes that through the model's independent variables, 72% of the variance within Halal tourism experiences is brought about. The considerable magnitude of the explained variance indicates that factors such as Cultural Awareness, Infrastructure Development, and Consumer Preferences explored in the model effectively create strong predictors of Halal tourism and, as such, lend weight to the model in terms of relevance to the nuances that capture the niche market.

Table 7 shows the higher values of  $R^2$  indicate better or stronger relationships among constructs. Well-established cut-off criteria consider an  $R^2$  value above 0.25 as weak, above 0.50 as moderate, and above 0.75 as substantial. A high value of  $R^2 = 0.72$  indicates, in this case, not only a strong model fit but also underlines the gravity of distinct factors acting in influencing the experiences of Muslim tourists. This finding informs that stakeholders may influence certain interventions to improve aspects of Halal tourism, as reflected by constructs with the most impact.

**Table 7: R<sup>2</sup> and Q<sup>2</sup> Values for Constructs**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>R<sup>2</sup> (Halal Tourism)</b>	0.72	72% of the variance in Halal tourism is explained by the model.
<b>Q<sup>2</sup> (Predictive Relevance)</b>	0.51	Indicates strong predictive relevance of the model.

Q<sup>2</sup> is calculated through the blindfolding procedure in SmartPLS and is an indicator of predictive relevance. This Q<sup>2</sup> value greater than zero suggests that this model has predictive power and hence the constructs are powerful in predicting the outcomes. AVE values, assessed in Confirmatory Factor Analysis, support the validity of the constructs. Having the AVE above 0.50 for each construct assures that enough variance in the observed variables is explained by the latent constructs, hence a threshold for adequate convergent validity. The combination of these indices of fit provides comprehensive insight into the strength and sufficiency of the model in mapping the dynamics of Halal tourism in China.

Table 8 shows f<sup>2</sup> is the effect size within structural equation modelling that represents the strength of relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable. The metric has been considered important because it assists in drawing inference about practical significance of the constructs. In this analysis, f<sup>2</sup> values were computed for each independent variable to evaluate its effect on Halal tourism experiences. They are categorised as small, 0.08; medium, 0.15; and large, 0.35-effect sizes to allow a certain clarity of interpretation of the strength of each relationship.

The results showed Consumer Preferences having the largest effect size, with f<sup>2</sup> = 0.35, which can be considered a large effect. The rest of the factors showed medium effects in their size: Cultural Awareness, with f<sup>2</sup> = 0.20, Economic Incentives with f<sup>2</sup> = 0.19, Safety and Security with f<sup>2</sup> = 0.19, and Infrastructure Development with f<sup>2</sup> = 0.15. These indicate that all three constructs do significantly impact Halal tourism, but by far, the highest magnitude of effect is by Consumer Preference. This is an area where there could be some strategic focus by the stakeholders of tourism. Determining the size of such effects would facilitate prioritization in resource allocation and marketing effort to enhance the overall Halal tourism experience.



**Table 8: Effect Size ( $f^2$ ) Results**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Effect Size (<math>f^2</math>)</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>Consumer Preferences</b>	0.35	Large effect on Halal tourism experiences.
<b>Cultural Awareness</b>	0.20	Medium effect on Halal tourism experiences.
<b>Economic Incentives</b>	0.19	Medium effect on Halal tourism experiences.
<b>Safety and Security</b>	0.18	Medium effect on Halal tourism experiences.
<b>Infrastructure Development</b>	0.15	Medium effect on Halal tourism experiences.
<b>Social Media Influence</b>	0.12	Small effect on Halal tourism experiences.
<b>Intercultural Interaction</b>	0.08	Small effect on Halal tourism experiences.

**Model Fitness**

These are SRMR, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual; Exact fit criteria,  $d_{ULS}$  and  $d_G$ ; NFI, Normed Fit Index; and  $\chi^2$ , all critical indicators for the assessment of the goodness-of-fit and the validity of SEM. This is specifically true in PLS-SEM, a commonly used methodology in the case study on Halal tourism in China when analysing complex datasets. The SRMR is a measure of the difference between the observed correlation matrix and the model-implied correlation matrix. The values of SRMR in table 9 vary from 0 to 1. The values closer to 0 indicate a better fit. The good fitness in SEM with values below 0.08 is accepted while values between 0.08 and 0.10 indicate moderate fitness. The low value of SRMR reinforces the belief that assumptions of the model are congruent with empirical data when models strive to catch the relationships in a dataset precisely, say one assessing Halal tourism experiences in China.

**Table 9: Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Acceptable Value</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>SRMR</b>	Standardized measure of model fit in terms of residuals	$\leq 0.08$	Good fit
<b>Exact Fit Criteria</b>	Tests for exact model fit	-	Confirms closeness to observed data

The above criteria help to illustrate the exact fit in PLS-SEM models, evaluating the closeness of the proposed model to the empirical data. Specific table 10 shows estimates include  $d_{ULS}$ , which means unweighted least squares discrepancy, and  $d_G$  standing for geodesic discrepancy. The values of both should, in theory, be small. The smaller values are, the closer the observed data is to the hypothesized

model. They are good metrics for studies that require a high degree of precision in model estimation, such as in the case of Halal tourism.

**Table 10: d\_ ULS, d\_ G**

Indicator	Definition	Interpretation
d_ ULS	Measures fit using unweighted least squares	Low values indicate better fit
d_ G	Measures geodesic discrepancy in SEM	Lower values are preferred

Table 11 shows the Normed Fit Index assesses the model fit by comparing the Chi-square value of the proposed model with that of the null model. The index ranges from 0 to 1, and values above 0.90 indicate a good fit. In this context, NFI is just an indicator but very often used in SEM analyses for the good representation of relationships in data.

**Table 11: NFI (Normed Fit Index)**

Indicator	Definition	Acceptable Range	Interpretation
NFI	Comparative measure based on Chi-square reduction	$\geq 0.90$	Good fit for PLS-SEM models

One of the traditional SEM indicators is the Chi-square test of model fit, which assesses whether one can consider the discrepancies between the observed data and the model as sampling variation. In studies, smaller values of Chi<sup>2</sup> imply a better fit as seen table 12. However, Chi-square shows sensitivity to sample size and may result in inflated rejection of models when the sample size is large. Thus, it is often considered in conjunction with other measures of fit when determining model adequacy.

**Table 12: Chi<sup>2</sup> (Chi-Square)**

Indicator	Definition	Acceptable Value	Interpretation
Chi <sup>2</sup>	Measures fit between observed and model data	Lower values	Smaller values indicate better fit; often used with additional metrics

In sum, these can form a very reasonable basis on which one could assess the structural model in terms of how effectively it could represent the relationships within the dataset regarding factors that influence Halal tourism in China. If applied appropriately and interpreted correctly, these metrics helps navigate

through the model refinement process and give insight into the dynamics of Halal tourism that can contribute toward data-informed strategies for industry stakeholders.

## **Discussion**

The findings present fundamental understandings of the drivers of Halal tourism in China and underpin the fact that substantial interlinkages exist within various constructs defining the dimensions of experience for Muslim travelers. The high value of  $R^2$  indicated that much of the variances in Halal tourism could be explained by those independent variables analyzed. Of these, Consumer Preference was the strongest predictor, and it underlines offering a variety of quality Halal options as the key to the market (Drammeh, 2024). It therefore suggests that business and destination marketers who wish to exploit Muslim tourism should ensure that accommodation facilities, dining outlets, and other services are offered that would address the specific needs of Muslim tourists. Along with such improvements, significant strides toward traveler satisfaction and loyalty can be achieved by the stakeholders and therefore, have a healthy market segment.

The fact that the Cultural Awareness and Halal tourism are interrelated represents a specific need to educate and train about the part of tourism providers and the destination's residents. It matches the trend in the wider society of cultural sensitivity in tourism, where the practice of understanding and respecting different cultures is an essential component of the travel experience. The stakeholders help provide a more welcoming environment for Muslim tourists by showing awareness of Islamic traditions and values (Ahmed & Shuvo, 2024). This benefits the traveler, not only the community, due to mutual respect and intercultural dialogue. The Infrastructure Development and Safety and Security constructs bear immense importance regarding shaping the experiences of the Muslim traveler. The medium effect sizes relating to these constructs have signaled that there is indeed further development in much-needed facilities and services to cater to this demographic segment. Other amenities that can give added value is the provision for a special room to pray, certification of Halal food, and other safety measures. Due to what has recently been happening around the world, tourists have become more sensitive regarding safety. The key to success is to allow Muslim visitors to feel safe while traveling. China, with infrastructural improvement and emphasis on safety is competitive in the global market for Halal Tourism.

The role of social media and Intercultural Interaction does not leave any significant marks on Halal tourism. According to this work, all voyagers use the digital world for information and recommendations; social media is, thus, a powerful tool in marketing and engagement. Those destinations that develop methods to exploit social media to promote their Halal offerings and positive travel experiences attracts the interest of potential visitors. Intercultural contact between Muslim travelers and locals can also help develop enhanced travel experiences, with better appreciation of cultural diversity (Supriadi et al., 2022). The study concludes once again to reiterate the complexity of Halal tourism and the multifarious dimensions that influence the experiences of Muslim travelers in China. With these identified constructs, the stakeholders could very well develop focused initiatives for enhancing the attractiveness of Halal tourism. The findings thus form a basis for subsequent efforts towards service quality improvement and the creation of a more accepting tourism environment, which in turn may affect Halal tourism development both in China and beyond.

## **Conclusion**

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the factors affecting Halal tourism in China based on the importance of constructs shaping the experiences of Muslim visitors. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling indicate that Consumer Preference, Cultural Awareness, Infrastructure Development, and Safety and Security are key factors. With regard to consumer preferences, it was the most influential variable in predicting Halal tourism experiences, and for this reason, a lot of effort should be invested by stakeholders into improving the level of Halal service provision and availability.

The positive impact of Cultural Awareness requires that education and training should be provided to service providers and the local community for serving Muslim tourists with hospitality. This kind of culturally sensitive attitude contributes not only to the travellers' satisfaction but also to mutual respect and intercultural dialogue between travelers and locals. Additionally, there is infrastructural improvement mentioned, which complements ensuring safety, since such factors majorly impact the experience of a Muslim traveller. The results also showed that social media and providing intercultural contact could make Halal tourism more appealing. With the continued rise in the international Halal tourism market, there is an increased requirement for strategic moves to be made by stakeholders through considering special needs and preferences of Muslim travelers. In such a way, China is in a position to enjoy competitive advantage and make itself one of the leading destinations within the

Halal tourism sector that could also contribute to economic development as well as intercultural understanding.

### **Limitations**

Although this study provides critical information on the drivers of Halal tourism in China, there are certain limitations that should be considered. It relies upon self-reported data from surveys. These can be subject to perceptual biases on the part of the respondents and social desirability biases. What this means is that responses come out as being more favourable or acceptable in society. Also, the cross-sectional design of this present study means that it is a representation of attitude and experience at one point in time; therefore, the study has limited capability to make any causal inferences about the relationships among constructs. Longitudinal research may offer much deeper insights into how these factors evolve over time. Besides, the research is directed towards certain parts of China which are taken as representatives of the entire country. Hence, it is not assured that Halal tourism will not be characterized by different elements in different regions concerning the heterogeneous culture and infrastructure of these regions.

### **Research Implications**

The findings of this study have considerable implications for stakeholders in the Halal tourism sector. It is in understanding issues of relevance, such as Cultural Awareness, Infrastructure Development, and Economic Incentives, that tourism policymakers, operators, and hospitality providers alike may be informed of how-to better deal with Muslim travelers. When the stakeholders centre their efforts on the improvements of Halal services and cultural diversity climate the environment is more conducive for tourists to receive positive hospitality and leave with a good feeling. In contrast, it is also reported that social media and Intercultural Interaction have a strong impact on the fact that community involvement programs and marketing campaigns are so catalytic in engaging Muslim tourists. Overall, this study dictates that Halal tourism development and marketing should be a holistic undertaking, integrating various dimensions to improve the overall experience of the visitors.

## **Future Research**

Future research in the field of Halal tourism should be directed at expanding investigations into more varied geographical locations and distinct cultural settings. Comparison among different regions in China or comparing it with other countries well known for Halal tourism, could thus afford more detailed insights as far as the influence of local characteristics on the experiences of Muslim travelers is concerned. This can be complemented by qualitative approaches, such as interviews, focus groups, or other forms, which can provide a deeper understanding of the perception and motivations of travelers. In view of emerging trends, research can be conducted on how digital transformation influences Halal tourism in e-commerce and online platforms. Such longitudinal studies would record changes in both travellers' preferences and industry responses to this over time, therefore offering insights into a more dynamic understanding of Halal tourism that would help stakeholders adjust to the evolving market.

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