



How destination image and knowledge shape loyalty to halal tourism destinations: The role of social media

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Abstract

The image and knowledge of a destination play a crucial role in influencing travel decisions. Within the context of Islamic traditions, many Muslim travelers prioritize halal certification when choosing a destination to visit. This study examines how destination image, destination knowledge, and social media contribute to shaping loyalty toward halal tourism destinations. A secondary data collection method was employed, drawing on scholarly databases to gather relevant information on halal tourism and the use of social media. A systematic approach guided the review process, ensuring the inclusion of credible and diverse sources. The analysis reveals that social media has become a critical driver in promoting both the image and knowledge of tourism destinations. Online reviews, travel vlogs, and user-generated content significantly shape positive perceptions of halal-certified destinations, thereby encouraging tourist loyalty. By analyzing keywords and themes from secondary data, the study establishes the interconnections between destination image, destination knowledge, and social media. In recent years, social media influencers and platforms have increasingly shaped travelers' perceptions by highlighting halal-friendly facilities and services. This type of digital promotion builds trust, enhances awareness, and motivates potential visitors to choose halal-certified destinations. Consequently, the role of social media in fostering destination loyalty cannot be overlooked.

Keywords: *halal tourism, destination image, destination knowledge, social media, Islamic culture, Muslim travelers*

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1. Introduction

Halal tourism is a form of tourism in which Muslim travelers remain connected to Islamic values, while service providers ensure the availability of Muslim-friendly services and facilities. This form of tourism typically includes transportation, halal-certified food and beverages, travel insurance, prayer facilities, gender-sensitive accommodations, and healthcare. The market size of Islamic tourism was valued at USD 243.41 billion in 2022 (Saleh, 2025). Projections suggest that this market will grow from USD 256.51 billion in 2023 to USD 410.9 billion by 2032. Specifically, the halal tourism market is expected to increase at a CAGR of 4.07%, reaching USD 324.96 billion by the end of 2023 (Ghani, 2025). This growth emphasizes the rising significance of halal tourism as a distinct sector within the global tourism industry, highlighting the need for continuous research on how to strengthen its market potential.

In managing tourism goals, tourist loyalty becomes a crucial factor. Within halal tourism, loyalty is shaped by dimensions such as perceived value, satisfaction, halal mindfulness, Islamic tourism experiences, and motivation. Destination knowledge and image play a vital role in attracting tourists, encouraging repeat visits, and fostering trust. According to Wang et al. (2022), a positive destination image enhances tourists' perceptions of value, satisfaction, and loyalty, thereby contributing to repeat visitation. In this regard, incorporating social media marketing strategies has become an essential component of tourism promotion. Social media platforms help highlight halal tourism culture, experiences, and Muslim-friendly environments to a wider audience. Online reviews, user-generated content, and digital campaigns not only increase awareness but also influence tourist decision-making and loyalty.

Existing studies largely emphasize Muslim-majority (OIC) countries, while little attention has been given to non-OIC countries where halal tourism is also gradually emerging. Moreover, there is limited research that explores the role of user-generated content, which reflects tourists' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. Another gap concerns the lack of studies examining how destination image and knowledge directly affect tourist loyalty within the context of halal tourism. While halal food is widely recognized and consumed by both Muslims and non-Muslims, halal tourism as a concept is less understood and underexplored. Conducting specific studies on halal tourism can therefore help raise awareness and broaden knowledge of this emerging sector. Finally, although social media strategies are commonly used in tourism marketing, there is still a lack of research addressing their role in shaping destination image

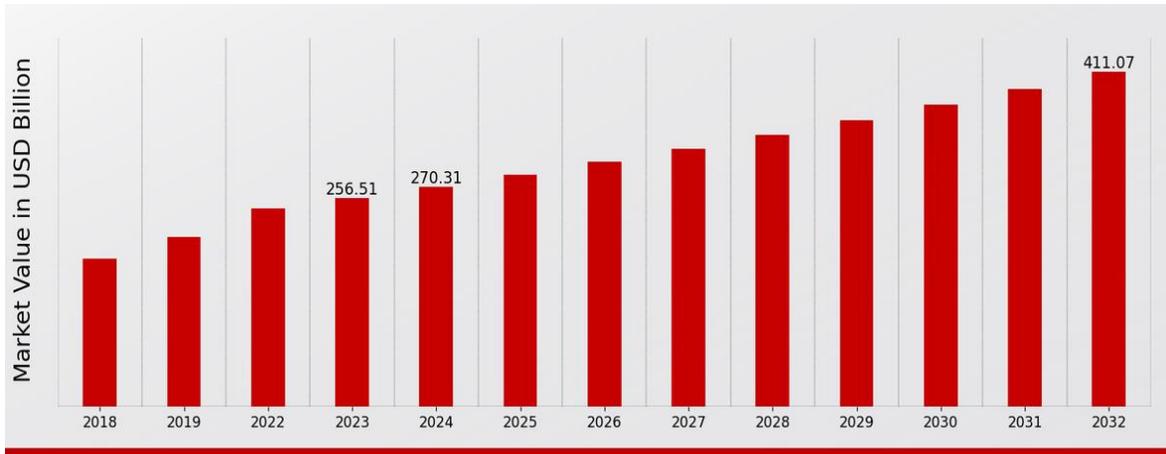
and knowledge in halal tourism contexts. Addressing these gaps provides opportunities to advance knowledge in halal tourism and to emphasize the importance of digital engagement in promoting Muslim-friendly travel experiences.

This article critically analyzes halal tourism in terms of its objectives, the connection between destination knowledge, loyalty, and image, as well as the role of social media in strengthening these relationships. Many Muslim tourists may not have sufficient knowledge of halal-certified destinations; therefore, providing them with comprehensive and reliable information can significantly benefit tourism organizations. This study's conceptual framework emphasizes the interrelationships between destination image, loyalty, knowledge, and social media, while also addressing the implications for various stakeholders within halal tourism. Through this analysis, a deeper understanding of how these factors interact is achieved, highlighting the importance of integrating digital strategies into tourism development. This study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the interconnected roles of destination image, knowledge, and social media in shaping tourist loyalty toward halal destinations, thereby providing valuable insights for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Destination Loyalty and Image

The destination image in halal tourism, from the perspective of tourists, significantly influences their decisions and experiences. Destination image plays a key role in shaping loyalty because it directly affects visitors' faith, satisfaction, and overall trust in the services offered (Siregar et al., 2021; Jebbouri et al., 2022). A strong and positive image contributes to the development of the destination while influencing visitor behavior. For tourists, this image represents an emotional evaluation of services, and when satisfaction is achieved, it can positively reinforce loyalty and long-term trust. In addition to image, other factors also influence the choice of a tourism destination, including tourist attributes, the size and attractiveness of destinations, psychological boundaries, distance, and accessibility. Figure 1 highlights that the market size of Islamic tourism was valued at USD 243.41 billion in 2022, demonstrating the growing importance of halal tourism and the need for deeper knowledge in this field.

Figure 1*Halal tourism market value*

Source: marketresearchfuture.com (2024)

2.2 Destination Loyalty and Knowledge

In halal tourism, logistical, religious, and cultural factors have a strong impact on loyalty. Tourism in this context provides social encouragement, offering opportunities for Muslims to interact with fellow believers and strengthen family ties. Delivering services that align with Islamic cultural values, while ensuring visitor satisfaction, helps promote repeat tourism. Religious motivation is also a crucial driver, as Muslim tourists often seek experiences that align with spiritual traditions, such as prayer facilities, halal-certified food, and religiously appropriate services (Singh et al., 2023). Furthermore, tourist engagement and service quality are essential precursors to traveler–destination co-creation, which significantly influences tourist loyalty and their willingness to revisit.

2.3 Social Media's Moderating Role

Social media has become a key factor in halal tourism, influencing loyalty and decision-making in both direct and indirect ways. It serves as a platform where visitors can share essential information, videos, photos, and updates about destinations, encouraging others to explore halal-friendly places. By providing authentic reviews of attractions, accommodations, and services, social media fosters trust and enables travelers to make informed decisions (Abdullah et al., 2022; Feizollah et al., 2021). The interactive nature of

these platforms allows tourism businesses to address customer concerns in real time, promote booking offers, and share timely updates on events, promotions, and even climate conditions.

Social media also empowers the tourism industry to reach specific demographics through targeted marketing campaigns. Collaborations with influencers expand visibility by leveraging their large and active followings. Such strategies enhance customer loyalty by promoting transparency, offering valuable insights, and strengthening engagement. Advertising quality, knowledge-driven content further captures public attention, promoting halal tourism culture and experiences. As noted by Mohammad et al. (2025), social media is among the fastest and most effective ways to reach a global audience, making it indispensable for halal tourism marketing.

2.4 Gaps in Existing Literature

Despite the advantages of halal tourism, several limitations remain. Destination loyalty and image face challenges when stakeholders and developers fail to address the preferences and requirements of Muslim tourists, which may result in a loss of trust in halal services and products. Furthermore, gaps exist in terms of evaluations from both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists, leaving halal destinations vulnerable to competition. Without improvements in halal services and standards, these destinations risk losing their competitive edge (Yafi, 2024).

Destination knowledge and loyalty are also limited by the restricted availability of halal tourism services and a frequent misunderstanding of tourist needs, interests, and motivations. The absence of unified global standards further weakens the development of this sector, a challenge that was intensified by the disruptions of the coronavirus pandemic. Social media, while beneficial, also carries limitations, particularly with the spread of misleading information about halal tourism, which can negatively affect consumer trust in halal products and services. Additionally, research on halal tourism in digital contexts remains constrained by limited keyword coverage and narrow scopes, with some studies focusing exclusively on tourism while neglecting related industries such as halal pharmaceuticals, food, and cosmetics.

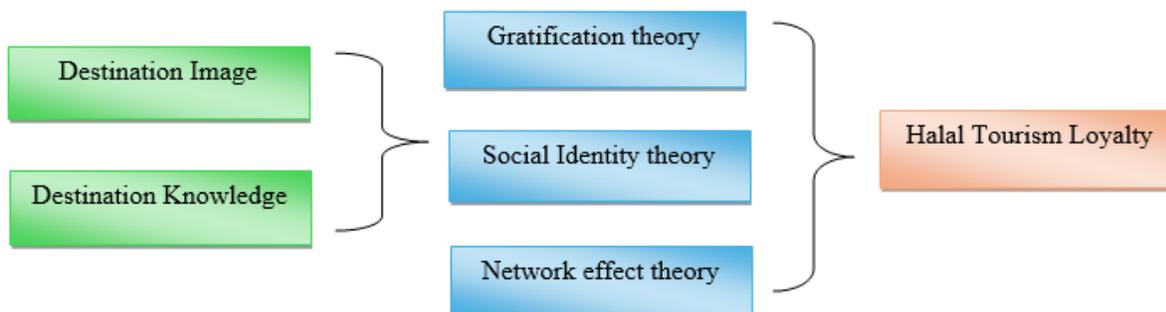
2.5 Conceptual Framework

Figure 2 presents the conceptual design of this study, suggesting that an understanding of destination knowledge and destination image can be achieved through the alignment of relevant theories. Destination image plays a decisive role in shaping loyalty in halal tourism,

as it is closely linked with visitor satisfaction and trust. A positive image enhances tourists' emotional evaluation of services, thereby increasing their loyalty. Destination image can be defined as the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions an individual hold about a place. In the context of halal tourism, this includes services such as flights free from pork and alcohol, religious programs, and designated prayer times (Afifi et al., 2022).

Figure 2

Conceptual framework



Destination knowledge has a direct and positive effect on loyalty, particularly through raising awareness of halal facilities and services. Knowledge about a destination contributes to brand loyalty by shaping expectations, improving trust, and enhancing satisfaction. As Sodawan and Hsu (2022) point out, halal-friendly destinations that consistently deliver positive performance reinforce destination trust and encourage repeat visits among Muslim tourists. Destination knowledge also influences personal attitudes, standards, and memorable experiences, which together strengthen Muslim-friendly attributes and customer attachment.

Social media plays a significant moderating role by linking destination image and destination knowledge with tourist loyalty. As De las Heras-Pedrosa et al. (2020) argue, social media serves as both a tool and a resource: it enables information sharing, facilitates decision-making, and provides a platform for travelers to express themselves. Beyond simply transmitting information, social media also moderates the relationship between destination knowledge and loyalty, acting as a value-explicit mechanism for tourists after their journeys. Chen and Zhan (2023) suggest that social media can reshape the way customers make travel decisions, while enhancing destination brand awareness through user-generated content and peer influence. This not only improves perceptions of service quality and authenticity but also strengthens tourist loyalty.

From a theoretical standpoint, social media's influence can be understood through multiple perspectives. Social Exchange Theory highlights that social media fosters reciprocal relationships that strengthen loyalty, as customers who feel valued are more likely to engage with organizations and destinations (Farhana, 2021). Gratification Theory emphasizes that travelers actively seek information and engagement, explaining why social media has become the most effective platform for delivering knowledge about halal-friendly destinations (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022). Azam et al. (2024) further argue that platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube provide travelers with essential knowledge, earning their trust and contributing to the growth of halal tourism businesses. Social Identity Theory also applies, as online communities foster a sense of belonging by reinforcing religious and cultural identities. Robertson et al. (2020) note that many tourism organizations use such communities to advertise destinations, thereby shaping loyalty and strengthening brand identity. Finally, Network Effect Theory suggests that the value of a destination brand increases as more users interact with it online. Ali (2024) supports this by explaining that user-generated content, personalized engagement, and peer recommendations bridge gaps in knowledge while building trust and emotional connection.

The conceptual framework therefore illustrates that destination image and destination knowledge, when mediated by social media, collaboratively shape tourist loyalty in halal tourism. A strong destination image emphasizes cultural and religious alignment while improving perceptions of service quality, thereby attracting more visitors. At the same time, knowledge of halal facilities and local customs enhances traveler confidence and enables informed decision-making. Social media amplifies both these dimensions by providing real-time information, user reviews, and interactive engagement. Chou et al. (2024) emphasize that social media discussions around halal-friendly services foster community-level interactions that reinforce loyalty and encourage repeat visits. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook allow travelers to share experiences, shaping perceptions of reliability and credibility, and further strengthening trust. Positive online feedback, therefore, contributes not only to credibility but also to broader brand awareness, reinforcing the role of social media as a dynamic moderator in halal tourism.

3. Methodology

This study employs a secondary qualitative data collection method for critical analysis. The purpose is to examine how destination image and destination knowledge shape loyalty toward halal tourism destinations, with particular attention to the mediating role of social media. Secondary data collection refers to gathering information from existing sources rather than conducting direct fieldwork (Cheong et al., 2023).

The data for this study were collected from Google Scholar, one of the most reputable academic databases that provides access to peer-reviewed journal articles and industry reports related to tourism, destination image, customer behavior, and social media influence. A systematic approach was followed, beginning with keyword searches such as “destination image and knowledge,” “halal tourism loyalty,” and “social media influence on tourism.” Careful screening was undertaken to select high-quality and recent literature to ensure the relevance and credibility of the findings. The analysis involved identifying key themes and patterns to explain how social media moderates the relationship between destination knowledge and tourist loyalty. Comparative analysis was also applied to achieve a deeper understanding of these dynamics.

To ensure reliability, only studies published in recognized journals were included. This approach strengthens the validity and credibility of the research (Ahmed, 2024). Moreover, the review of existing literature not only synthesizes current knowledge but also highlights research gaps that can guide future studies. By adopting this method, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of halal tourism, as it integrates diverse scholarly perspectives on halal tourism, destination image, and the role of social media.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Destination Loyalty and Image

Destination loyalty and image are crucial factors in tourists’ decision-making, including whether they will remain loyal to a destination. Destination image is shaped by visitors’ beliefs, impressions, and perceptions about a place. Loyalty to a destination significantly influences tourism development, particularly in countries with both Muslim majority and minority populations, as religion plays an important role in shaping travel behavior (Boon Liat et al., 2020). A positive destination image provides Muslim visitors with confidence and encourages them to revisit. Understanding tourism strategies and how these designs influence perceptions is vital in enhancing both tourist experiences and stakeholder

satisfaction. Online branding, reviews, and influencers strongly affect tourists' perceptions of tourism products and destinations. Halal tourism can utilize digital marketing strategies such as blogs, videos, and images to enhance branding (Darmawati & Basri, 2023). Online reviews are especially influential, as many travelers rely on peer reviews when making travel decisions. Social media, in particular, shapes attitudes and thoughts toward products, services, and destinations.

Theoretically, a strong and positive image builds trust and satisfaction, encouraging tourists to revisit. The Destination Image theory highlights that perceptions are formed by both cognitive and affective factors. In halal tourism, cognitive factors include halal-certified accommodations, prayer facilities, and Islamic cultural experiences, all of which generate comfort and religious alignment. Meanwhile, the Branding Theory emphasizes the importance of strategic marketing to strengthen the halal identity of destinations. Destinations that highlight halal-friendly services, cultural authenticity, and religious accommodations foster positive perceptions among Muslim travelers.

Online reviews play a particularly critical role. Positive reviews increase trust, while negative ones can discourage potential visitors and damage destination loyalty. The Influencer Marketing Theory explains how influencers strengthen destination image by sharing authentic halal-friendly experiences (Chen & Yang, 2023). Similarly, the Source Credibility Theory suggests that endorsements from trusted influencers enhance the perceived value of destinations, increasing tourists' intention to visit. As noted by Absah et al. (2024), Muslim travelers prioritize destinations with official halal certification, which highlights the importance of strategic branding and digital engagement. A combination of branding, peer reviews, and influencer marketing ultimately strengthens tourist loyalty and creates favorable perceptions of halal destinations.

4.2 Destination Loyalty and Knowledge

Halal facilities also strengthen destination loyalty by shaping positive perceptions among Muslim travelers. Tourism experiences aligned with Islamic practices, such as prayer rooms, gender-segregated facilities, and halal food, are vital in meeting religious expectations (Rosli et al., 2024). These facilities, along with supportive social environments, enhance perceived value. Tourist satisfaction, in turn, fosters trust, which is a key determinant of revisit intention and loyalty. Online forums and blogs also provide a platform for information sharing,

influencing travel decisions and connecting tourists directly with others who share similar experiences. From a theoretical standpoint, destination knowledge reinforces loyalty by increasing confidence in travel decisions. The “Knowledge-Based View (KBV)” argues that access to accurate knowledge enhances decision-making and trust. In halal tourism, knowledge of halal accommodations, prayer spaces, and certified halal food directly impacts the likelihood of visiting a destination (Azam et al., 2024).

Digital platforms, such as blogs, forums, and online travel agencies, play an essential role in disseminating such knowledge. The Uses and Gratifications Theory explains that tourists actively seek information to meet their personal needs, making digital platforms particularly effective in shaping choices. As Hariani et al. (2024) observed, Muslim travelers prefer destinations where halal-related information is easily accessible, which in turn strengthens loyalty by enabling informed decision-making.

The Place Attachment Theory further suggests that familiarity with a destination fosters emotional connections, thereby increasing the likelihood of repeat visits (Pantelidis et al., 2023). Local knowledge and cultural authenticity also enhance the destination’s appeal, as Muslim travelers value respect for Islamic traditions (Hall et al., 2022). Accurate information is therefore vital, as it ensures confidence in religious practice and strengthens travelers’ willingness to return and recommend the destination, thereby contributing to the growth of tourism businesses and agencies.

4.3 The Role of Social Media

Social media plays a significant role in connecting destination knowledge with tourists’ perceptions, influencing both trust and travel intentions. Platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter are widely used by travelers to learn about destinations through influencer recommendations, reviews, and user-generated content such as videos and photos (Hemmige & Rousseau, 2024). Social media enables tourists to virtually explore destinations, enhancing knowledge about food, facilities, and cultural attractions before traveling.

Theoretically, the Network Effects Theory explains that increased social media engagement enhances the perceived value of destinations, making them more attractive (Aamir et al., 2024). Content such as vlogs and reviews is particularly important in shaping knowledge and influencing decision-making. Travel organizations now leverage social media campaigns to attract tourists by showcasing halal-friendly services and experiences. On the other hand,

the Social Identity Theory suggests that online communities foster belongingness, which strengthens the intention to revisit destinations (Qin et al., 2024). Meanwhile, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) emphasizes that influencer-driven halal content has a persuasive effect, shaping tourists' attitudes and reinforcing loyalty (Karoline et al., 2023). Together, these theories demonstrate that social media not only supports destination image and knowledge but also enhances tourists' confidence, trust, and loyalty in halal tourism.

4.4 Implications for Halal Tourism Stakeholders

Social media enhances both knowledge and destination image, fostering loyalty by encouraging existing customers to share experiences and by leveraging influencer marketing. Influencers can significantly shape travel interest and audience perception through authentic engagement (Omeish et al., 2024). By involving audiences in interactive content, social media promotes transparency, builds trust, and highlights the uniqueness of destinations. High-quality videos, images, and live streaming further emphasize the beauty and distinctiveness of halal tourism destinations, strengthening their appeal and branding potential.

Effective social media strategies include creating content on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to amplify visibility and influence audience perceptions. Paid advertisements targeting specific demographics allow tourism organizations to increase reach, brand awareness, and engagement. These platforms also enable direct interaction with audiences, showcasing the advantages of halal tourism in real time (Soliman & Al Balushi, 2023). In addition, quality assurance is communicated through digital advertising, packaging, and labeling, which reinforce consumer trust in halal-compliant services and products.

To enhance tourist perceptions and knowledge of halal destinations, tourism stakeholders should prioritize social media promotion, advertising campaigns, and public awareness programs. Such initiatives can lead to more positive perceptions and encourage participation in cultural and religiously aligned activities. For instance, destinations may design programs where Muslim tourists can actively engage in crafts, arts, local festivals, galleries, and religious sites while maintaining cultural and religious individuality. Incorporating halal-compliant products and services that are accessible and affordable further enriches the visitor experience and strengthens destination competitiveness.

5. Conclusion

In halal tourism, destination image, knowledge, and social media play a central role in building loyalty. Through education and the sharing of information, destinations can strengthen travelers' confidence, satisfaction, and intentions to revisit. The image of a destination represents the collection of impressions, beliefs, and feelings that individuals form, and a positive image not only enhances satisfaction but also increases the likelihood of recommendations and repeat visits.

This study discussed the influence of destination image, knowledge, and social media on loyalty, highlighting both advantages and challenges. A conceptual framework was developed to illustrate how these elements interact: destination image and knowledge directly shape tourism loyalty, while social media serves as a mediator that enhances both perception and engagement. These findings also have practical implications for stakeholders in branding, marketing, and the design of social media strategies to expand reach and strengthen competitiveness in the halal tourism industry.

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