

Muslim Tourists' Perception of Halal Tourism: A Qualitative Study based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

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Abstract

Halal tourism has grown rapidly as one of the most important segments in the global tourism industry. However, understanding of the factors that influence the behavior of Muslim tourists in choosing halal tourism destinations is still very limited. This research aims to explore Muslim tourists' perception of halal tourism using the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which includes attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. This study uses a qualitative approach with an in-depth interview method. The sample of this study consisted of 30 Muslim tourists who had visited halal tourism destinations. The data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns and themes that emerged from the respondents' narratives regarding their perception of halal tourism and factors influencing the decision to visit. The results of the study show that positive attitudes towards halal tourism, subjective norms from family and friends, and perceived behavioral control in terms of the availability of information and facilities in accordance with Sharia are key factors that affect the intention of Muslim tourists to visit halal tourism destinations. In addition, this study also found that the trust and reputation of destinations and previous experiences also play an important role in shaping the perception and intentions of Muslim tourists. This study provides in-depth insights into how Muslim tourists perceive halal tourism and the factors that influence tourists' decisions based on the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The findings of this study can be used by tourism developers and marketers to design more effective strategies in targeting and serving the Muslim tourist market, as well as improving the quality of services and facilities according to their preferred needs.

Keywords: Subjective Noma, Tourist Intentions, Halal Tourism, Consumer Behavior, Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).

INTRODUCTION

Travel has been an integral part of the lives of Muslims since the end of the 20th century (Hanafiah and Hamdan 2020). As the progress of modernization expands among their societies (Aji, Muslichah, and Seftyono 2021). Muslim tourists tend to choose tourist destinations in other Muslim countries due to factors such as religious obligations, the availability of halal facilities, and the similarity of lifestyles (Vanany et al. 2020). This phenomenon has sparked the attention of researchers to develop tourism guidelines that accommodate the needs of Muslim tourists and adhere to Islamic principles (Abdul Khalek, Hayaati, and Mohamad Ibrahim 2023). The behavior of Muslim tourists is strongly influenced by the holistic teachings of Islam (Medwin Farizkhan, Masnita, and Chrisjatmiko n.d.), so they tend to adhere to Islamic values even in the context of tourism (Rahman, Zailani, and Musa 2017). Research on halal tourism has shown that these factors play an important role in determining the choice of tourist destinations for Muslim tourists (Eid and El- Gohary 2015).

Halal tourism is still a controversial concept and does not have a clear definition (Karya, Ratnasari, and Anshori 2025). Some experts understand halal tourism as Islamic tourism, but this

definition can pose practical problems (Ting, Tan, and John 2017). The case of the rejection of the concept of halal tourism in Bali and Lake Toba in 2019 shows that non-Muslim communities are worried about the loss of local religious traditions and values (Moshin, Brochado, and Rodrigues 2020). This misunderstanding is caused by a lack of understanding of the difference between halal tourism and Islamic tourism (Yusuf, Yusuf, and Mandalia 2025). Therefore, efforts need to be made to increase public awareness and understanding of the concept of halal tourism (Zailani et al. 2016).

Halal tourism focuses more on compliance with Sharia in tourism activities (Chiou n.d.). As the tourism sector develops, new innovations have emerged new tourism products that focus on religious values (Jeaheng, Al-Ansi, and Han 2020). One form of innovation is religious tourism that focuses on historical and spiritual tourist attractions, such as the tombs of religious figures, mosques, and religious cultural heritage sites (Hassan, Mohamed Zainal, and Mohamed 2015). However, along with the dynamics of the needs of Muslim people, the concept of halal tourism began to be developed and promoted intensively as a form of service that integrates Sharia values in all aspects of tourism travel (Budi Utomo et al. 2024).

The concept of halal tourism emphasizes more on the needs and comfort of Muslim tourists during travel, both in Muslim and non-Muslim countries (Al-Ansi and Han 2019). This includes the provision of services and facilities such as halal hotels, halal restaurants, Muslim-friendly transportation, places of worship, and an environment that supports the implementation of worship according to Islamic teachings (Jeaheng et al. 2020). In other words, halal tourism is not solely limited to religious destinations, but also touches on aspects of the halal lifestyle in general tourism activities (Al-Ansi and Han 2019).

In terminology, halal tourism is also known by other terms such as Islamic tourism, sharia tourism, and Muslim-friendly tourism (Leyva-Hernández et al. 2022). In the business context, halal tourism is seen as a growing market segment (Ibrahim, Albattat, and Khatibi n.d.). Especially as Muslim consumers' awareness of consumption in accordance with sharia increases (Shafaei 2017). This phenomenon also encourages multinational companies to enter the halal market by providing Shariah-compliant products (Permana and Adam 2024).

In the local context, especially in the Purwokerto area, the potential for halal tourism development is also a concern. As an area that has a rich culture, history, and large Muslim community, Purwokerto has a strategic opportunity to develop halal tourism as one of the region's leading attractions (Ratnasari et al. 2020). Therefore, it is important to conduct an in-depth study of the potential and challenges in the development of halal tourism in Purwokerto to encourage inclusive and sustainable local economic growth (Nassar, Mostafa, and Reisinger 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to (Isa, Chin, and Mohammad 2018), The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a development of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) introduced by Ajzen and Fishbein (1975). The TPB is designed to understand and predict human behavior more specifically, taking into account the factors that influence individual behavior (Administrasi Bisnis, Restu Prayogo, and Febrianita 2018). This theory has been widely used to understand, predict, and change human behavior (Aziz et al. n.d.). Within the framework of SDGs, there are five key variables that are interrelated, namely attitudes, subjective norms, behavioral control, intentions or interests, and behaviors (Mohd Yousoof et al. 2023).

Subjective norms are factors that influence consumer behavior by providing information that encourages visiting certain tourist attractions (Quezado, Fortes, and Cavalcante 2022). Subjective norms can be divided into two categories, namely enacted norms and norms that develop in culture (cresive norms) (Sherwani et al. 2018). The agreed norms are rules set by the government and related institutions, which must be obeyed by the community and can be sanctioned if violated. Meanwhile, norms that develop in culture are norms that grow and develop in society, which can be understood and lived through social interaction (Minat Kunjungan Wisata Berdasarkan Aksesibilitas, Pendukung

Pariwisata, and Subyektif Gilbert Alvin Rumalatu Jurusan Adm Niaga Politeknik Negeri Ambon n.d.).

Subjective norms are an individual's perception of what others think about a particular behavior or decision. In the context of tourism (Shin and Hancer 2016). Subjective norms refer to tourists' perceptions of what other people (such as family, friends, or community) think about their decision to visit tourist attractions in Indonesia (Leyva-Hernández et al. 2022). According to research (Harjadi and Gunardi 2022) Subjective norms are an individual's perception of what others think about a particular behavior or decision. In this context, Subjective Norms refer to nurses' perceptions of what others (such as coworkers, employers, or patients) think about hand hygiene behaviors (Rahman et al. 2017).

The intention of the tourist's behavior is the result of rational processes and systematic decision-making (Widjaja, Khalifa, and Abuelhassan 2020). This intention is assumed to be able to predict the actual behavior of tourists with a high degree of accuracy (Md Husin, Ismail, and Ab Rahman 2016). So understanding behavioral intent is important in developing an effective marketing strategy (Haryono and Albetris 2022).

Halal tourism is a concept that emerged as an answer to the needs and interests of Muslim tourists despite the challenges and opportunities presented by the global world (Yoga Pratama et al. 2024). The travel section refers to the development of laws and drinks, experiencing tourists who respect Islamic guidelines and principles (Rahman et al. 2020). The concept of halal tourism does not mean Islamizing tourist destinations (Mohd Yousoof et al. 2023). Consumer behavior involves a decision-making process before purchasing to consuming a product and the purpose of studying consumer behavior is to develop a successful marketing strategy (Rasyid, Lubis, and Kartikasari 2019). According to (Haryono and Albetris 2022), Recognizing consumer behavior is not easy, sometimes they frankly state their needs and wants, but often they also act the opposite. Maybe they don't understand their motivations more deeply, so it's the last minute before finally making a purchase decision (Aziz et al. n.d.).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological case study method which aims to explore in depth the perceptions, experiences, and considerations of Muslim tourists in choosing halal tourist destinations (Singh and Aggarwal 2024). This approach was chosen because it is in accordance with the research objectives that want to understand the subjective meaning of travel intentions based on the experiences that have been carried out and the social context that surrounds the individual (Chetoui, Benlafqih, and Lebdaoui 2020).

The theory used as a conceptual foundation is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) which has been developed by Aizen 1991 (Jain 2020). TPB assumes that the intention to perform a behavior is determined by three main factors, namely attitudes towards behavior, subjective norms, and perceptions of behavior control (Han, Kim, and Lee 2018). In this context, the three dimensions are explored through the lens of Muslim tourists' experiences in choosing and undergoing halal tourism (Han et al. 2019).

The data collection technique was carried out through in-depth interviews with 10-15 informants who were selected by purposive sampling, with the criteria for informants to be Muslim tourists who have traveled to domestic or international halal destinations (Han et al. 2018). In addition, field observations and secondary documentation such as halal tourism brochures and social media are also used as complementary data (Singh and Aggarwal 2024).

The data analysis technique uses a thematic analysis approach with the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Xu et al. 2022). The validity of the data is maintained through the triangulation technique of sources and methods, as well as by member checking informants to ensure the accuracy of the results of the researcher's interpretation (Roh, Seok, and Kim 2022).

This method is expected to be able to fully describe how the construction of tourism intentions is formed among Muslim tourists and how the elements of the SDGs play a role

in their decision- making related to halal tourism (Bhutto et al. 2023).

Data collection is carried out directly in the field, with the presence of researchers as the main instrument in observing, digging, and interpreting data. The research was carried out for one and a half months, from early February to mid-March 2025, in Banyumas, Central Java (Han et al. 2018).

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The results of this study show that Muslim tourists' perception of halal tourism is greatly influenced by subjective norms, perceptions of halal facilities, and personal experiences in the consumption of tourism products and services (Abdul Khalek et al. 2023). Based on in-depth interviews conducted with informants, it was found that subjective norms, such as the influence of family, religious communities, and religious leaders, play an important role in shaping tourists' beliefs and intentions to choose destinations that are in accordance with Sharia principles (Moshin et al. 2020).

Tourists' intentions are influenced by a combination of belief in the spiritual benefits of halal tourism and ease of accessing halal facilities such as food, places of worship, and accommodation that supports the comfort of worship (Arachchi and Samarasinghe 2023). Halal tourism is not only understood as a physical service, but also as a representation of spiritual values and Islamic identity which is an important part of tourism decision-making (Roh et al. 2022). In terms of consumer behavior, informants said that previous experiences with halal destinations also influenced their preferences and loyalty to a place (Garg and Joshi 2018). Consumers tend to recommend destinations that are able to provide a tourist experience that is in accordance with their religious values (Jeaheng et al. 2020). Through the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), these results reinforce that positive attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (i.e. ease of accessing halal tourism) are the main determinants in shaping intentions and behavioral decisions in the context of tourism (Quezado et al. 2022).

Subjective norms function as a strong social mediation in shaping the behavioral intentions of domestic Muslim tourists. Recommendations and shared experiences from close social circles, especially family and peers, proved to be the dominant driving force. The credibility of information sourced from informal word-of-mouth (WOM) often exceeds formal promotion, as it is perceived as more authentic and unbiased. This phenomenon is reinforced by the use of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) through social media platforms, where testimonials and reviews from peers or influencers play a catalytic role in the decision-making process (Arachchi and Samarasinghe 2023).

In addition, the existence of communal authorities or religious figures who explicitly support or recommend halal tourism provides substantial social legitimacy. This creates a prescriptive norm in which choosing halal tourism is considered an "encouraged" or "appropriate" action within the community. The implication for marketers is the need for a careful influencer marketing strategy, identifying and collaborating with individuals or entities that have significant influence in the Muslim community. Creating campaigns that facilitate user-generated content and encourage the sharing of positive experiences can effectively reinforce subjective norms, shaping a collective reality in which halal tourism becomes a recognized and appreciated option (Medwin Farizkhan et al. n.d.).

Analysis of findings consistently shows that positive attitudes towards halal tourism go beyond the dimension of sharia compliance alone; It encompasses the pursuit of unique experiential value. Participants explicitly articulated that the assurance of the availability of halal food and beverages, as well as adequate worship facilities, is an essential prerequisite that fundamentally shapes their initial evaluation of tourism destinations or services. However, beyond this functional aspect, there is a strong affective dimension. Tourists express the sense of security, comfort, and inner peace they derive from an environment that supports Islamic values, free from worries related to sharia violations (Han et al. 2019).

Furthermore, some participants highlighted the alignment between halal tourism ethics and their expectations for a "meaningful" and "productive" vacation. This indicates that halal tourism is perceived not only as ritualistic compliance, but as a holistic value proposition, in which spiritual and recreational experiences are integrated. This perspective advocates the understanding that attitude toward behavior in the context of halal tourism is a multifaceted construct, encompassing cognitive (halal, facility) and affective (tranquility, meaning) dimensions, which cumulatively form strong preferences. For marketers, it emphasizes the need to communicate benefits that go beyond halal checklists, toward a narrative that highlights inner experiences and aligned values (Bhutto et al. 2023).

The behavioral control felt by domestic Muslim tourists tends to be high, which indicates a strong level of self-efficacy in accessing and enjoying halal tourism. The increased availability of online information, the proliferation of halal tourism-specific mobile apps, and integrated booking platforms have significantly reduced the perception of barriers and increased individuals' confidence in their ability to plan sharia-compliant trips. This shows the maturity of the halal tourism ecosystem in Indonesia, where supporting infrastructure is growing (Bhutto et al. 2023).

However, some nuances related to cost perceptions and variety of options are still identified. Although participants generally felt they could overcome these potential barriers, the identification of costs as potential barriers indicated price sensitivity in a particular market segment. Some respondents feel that halal tourism still has premium pricing compared to conventional options, or less varied choice of destinations/packages. The managerial implication is the need for a competitive pricing strategy and product/service diversification to reach a wider market segment and dismiss the stigma of "expensive." In addition, focusing on increasing perceived value through superior service quality and experience can mitigate pricing issues. Thus, despite the perceived high control, there is an opportunity for industry stakeholders to further facilitate and optimize the conversion of intent into actual behavior (Ham, Jeger, and Ivković 2015).

CONCLUSION IMPLICATION

This research makes a significant contribution to the development of halal tourism literature by applying the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in the context of Muslim tourists (Ham, Jeger, and Ivković 2015b). The findings of this study show that positive attitudes towards halal tourism, supportive subjective norms and perceived control of behavior play an important role in shaping Muslim tourists' intentions to choose halal tourism destinations (Musyarofah et al. 2025). The practical implication is that tourism service providers can design tourism experiences that are in accordance with halal principles, such as the provision of halal food, worship facilities and a supportive environment, in order to increase the satisfaction and loyalty of Muslim tourists (Harjadi and Gunardi 2022).

LIMITATIONS

Some limitations in this study need to be considered. The first limitation is that this study only included domestic Muslim tourists, so the results may not be fully representative for international Muslim tourists (Vicky Alvian and Anak Agung Ketut Diatmika 2024). The second limitation is that the study is qualitative with a limited sample, which can affect the generalization of the findings (Quezado et al. 2022). Thirdly, this study does not consider external variables such as economic factors or government policies that can influence tourists' decisions in choosing halal tourism destinations (Nassar et al. 2015).

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Researchers are further advised to expand the scope of the sample by involving international Muslim tourists to gain a more comprehensive perspective. In addition, a quantitative approach with survey methods can be used to test the generalization of findings. The research may also explore the role of additional variables, such as halal literacy and religious commitment, in influencing Muslim tourists' intentions towards halal tourism.

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