

Media Engagement at Destinations Halal Tourism in Central Java

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia is known for its unique and diverse culture. Indonesia covers 7.81 million hectares, of which 3.25 million km² (hectares) are ocean. This gives Indonesia a superior natural resource potential. Indonesia is a developing nation that prioritises tourism development. Surah Al-Mulk, verse 15, states that Allah SWT allows man to walk wherever on the earth, because God has made it easier to explore. Nowadays, technological advancements seem unavoidable for everyone. All information can be found through social media. In tourism, Instagram plays a significant role, as many people travel or visit after viewing photos and videos posted on the platform. The term "halal" is often attached to food. Moreover, recommended drinks in Islam. However, in reality, halal is not just about encouraging food; it also applies to places of tourism. In 2019, Central Java Province received the Indonesia Muslim Travel Index (IMTI) award as a Leading Halal Tourism Destination. Halal tourism is now no less attractive, especially since it prioritises not only the comfort of Muslims but also of all humanity. This research is a quantitative study using a positivist approach. The sampling technique used in this study was non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, with 100 respondents among netizens in Semarang City and its surroundings. Based on the research results, the exposed account has a significant influence on netizens' interest in visiting halal tourism destinations in Semarang City and its surroundings, increasing it by 46.5%.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known for its unique and diverse culture. The world recognises Indonesia as the largest archipelagic country. Indonesia covers an area of 7.81 million km², of which 3.25 million km² is ocean. From Sabang to Merauke, Indonesia has 17,499 islands, large and small (Nurhadi, 2022). This gives Indonesia superior natural resource potential, including fertile soil, diverse flora and fauna, mineral resources, and natural beauty. Therefore, it is not surprising that Indonesia has tourism potential that attracts both local and international tourists. Indonesia is one of the developing countries that prioritise tourism development. Tourism is the most influential economic sector in any country, and Indonesia is no exception. In 2017, Suwena argued that tourism is often perceived as a foreign-exchange earner and has great opportunities in the future as human needs grow (Ramadhani et al., 2023). Furthermore, it is no surprise that everyone needs a refreshment

of body and mind when feeling tired from daily life; one way is to engage in entertainment or recreational activities. Do not forget, when planning a tourism activity, it is a good idea to determine your destination first. A tourist destination, often called a tourist attraction, is a geographical area within one or more administrative regions that contains tourist attractions, public facilities, tourism facilities, accessibility, and a community that are interconnected to realise tourism (Yustie et al., 2022).

According to information uploaded directly to the halal news website by the Ministry of Industry of the Republic of Indonesia, the Head of the Industrial Services Standardisation and Policy Agency (BSKJI) of the Ministry of Industry (Kemenperin), Doddy Rahadi, stated that Indonesia has significant potential to develop the halal industry. One of the halal industry developments in Indonesia with significant growth potential is the halal tourism industry. The halal tourism industry is not only attractive to Muslims but also to non-Muslims, as it guarantees cleanliness, safety, and overall quality in the delivery of tourism services (Rahmadi, 2021). The Indonesian Islamic Economic Planning was formulated by the Ministry of Planning.

The Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), launched by the global rating agency CrescentRating, ranks Indonesia second among the 10 best halal tourist destinations in the world. The 2022 GMTI (Indonesian Halal Travel Index) assessed four main indicators: ease of access to the destination, communication, environment, and services (facilities that meet the needs of Muslim tourists, such as halal food, prayer rooms, and other Muslim-friendly amenities). With these assessments, Indonesia beat out other countries such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Iran, Jordan, Bahrain, and Singapore (Dihni, 2022). This is not without reason, as Indonesia boasts numerous historical tourist destinations and remnants of Islamic kingdoms. Furthermore, the majority of Indonesia's population is Muslim, at 237.53 million, or 86.9% (Bayu, 2022). The call to travel or go on a journey to a place is contained in one of the verses in the Qur'an as a source of law and guidance for Muslims, namely Surah Al-Mulk verse 15, which reads:

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ ذُلُولًا فَامْشُوا فِي مَنَاكِبِهَا وَكُلُوا مِن رِّزْقِهِ وَإِلَيْهِ النُّشُورُ

Meaning: "He is the one who made the earth for you who are easily explored, then explore all the corners and eat part of His sustenance. Moreover, only to Him were you (back after) resurrected".

Surah Al-Mulk, verse 15, states that Allah SWT allows man to walk wherever on the earth, because God has made it easier to explore. In this verse, Allah links travel and fortune. In Indonesia, many regions continue to preserve and develop halal tourism destinations, among them Central Java Province. According to information uploaded directly by the official portal of Central Java Province, in 2019, Central Java Province received the Indonesia Muslim Travel Index (IMTI) award as a Leading Halal Tourism Destination. This award was given because halal tourism destinations in Central Java provide comfortable access for Muslim tourists, including facilities and other supporting amenities such as culinary delights, souvenirs, and so on. The people of Central Java Province should be proud of their many stunning tourist destinations. The most popular natural and cultural attractions in Central Java Province include the Great Mosque of Central Java, the Great Mosque of Demak, the Kudus Tower, the tombs of the Walisongo (Wali Songo), and temples closely linked to Islamic history (Bhwana, 2019).

Halal tourism destinations in Central Java Province not only offer beauty but also enhance tourists' experience and insight into the destination. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), halal tourism is the provision of facilities for Muslim tourists to fulfil their sharia obligations at the tourist location. The concept of halal tourism

encompasses products and services designed to meet the needs of Muslim tourists, including halal restaurants (which do not serve non-halal food or beverages), halal accommodations, and so on (Mahmuddin, 2025; Putra & Tucunan, 2021; Takdir & Hamida, 2023). According to information posted on the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy/Baparekraf news website, there are three potential areas for developing halal tourism: the richness and diversity of national tourism resources, public attention and positive attitudes toward halal tourism development, and Indonesia's position as a destination for halal tourism investment, given its predominantly Muslim population.

Technology has made life easier for many people, including the advent of social media. Technological advancements seem unavoidable. All information can be found through social media. Social media is a tool that enables interactive, two-way communication. The types of social media currently widely used by people in Indonesia include TikTok, Instagram, Line, LinkedIn, Telegram, Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, WhatsApp, YouTube, and others. In 2021, Instagram ranked second among the most downloaded apps worldwide, behind TikTok. According to AppTopia research, TikTok recorded 656 million downloads and Instagram 545 million in 2021 (Rizaty, 2022). Social media is considered a useful source of information for the public to increase knowledge about tourist destinations. In tourism, Instagram plays a significant role because many people travel or visit after viewing photos and videos posted on Instagram. Instagram is considered an effective platform for disseminating tourism information. Currently, many Instagram accounts have been created to promote tourist attractions.

The National Development Plan (NDP) has highlighted the crucial role of implementing Industry 4.0 technologies to encourage and enhance the halal industry in Indonesia, particularly in the food and beverage, finance, and fashion sectors (Rahardyan, 2021). In Central Java Province, numerous accounts share information about halal tourism on destinations, including travelling *@explorejateng*, *@wisatajateng*, *@wisatajawatengahid*, *@wisata_jateng*, and many others. Travel accounts on Instagram are considered to influence a person's interest in a destination because, indirectly, after watching interesting videos of a destination, people can be attracted to visit it, especially if it meets the desired criteria. Halal tourism destinations are now no less attractive, especially since they prioritise the comfort of not only Muslims but all of humanity. This is closely related to the public's knowledge of halal tourism destinations.

The application of the Value-Expectancy Model is highly relevant in explaining the formation of visiting interest toward halal tourism destinations driven by netizens' engagement with social media content. Theoretically, this framework by Ajzen and Fishbein posits that an individual's attitudes, intentions, and eventual behavioural decisions regarding media consumption and real-world actions are governed by two primary cognitive components: expectancy and value. In this context, the expectancy component represents an individual's level of belief that accessing visual information on social media, such as reviews of sharia-compliant facilities or location aesthetics, will provide the necessary satisfaction, certainty, and ease of information. Meanwhile, the value component refers to how significantly an individual prioritises halal principles, worship convenience, and destination appeal. When information from social media accounts successfully confirms netizens' expectations and aligns with their internal values, this psychological impulse translates into a strong behavioural intention to visit (interest in visiting).

Based on the information provided, the question is: How does social media engagement at destinations in Central Java affect halal tourism? Is this question then formulated as a research question: Does exposure to travel accounts influence interest in visiting halal tourism destinations among netizens in Semarang City and its surroundings? This research is a quantitative study using a positivist approach. The sampling technique

used in this study is non-probability purposive sampling. The important thing that underlies the purposive sampling technique is determining the criteria; in this study, the sample criteria are Instagram netizens in Semarang City and its surroundings. The data collection technique will be a questionnaire. Researchers sent a Google Form to 100 respondents via direct message on Instagram and via WhatsApp chat. Respondents can provide answers based on the actual situation and check the answer choices prior to submission..

METHODS

This study used a quantitative, positivist approach to determine the effect of exposure to travel accounts on Instagram on interest in visiting halal tourist destinations in Central Java. The population in this study was Instagram users in Semarang City and its surrounding areas. The sampling technique used was non-probability purposive sampling, selecting respondents based on the following criteria: Instagram users who had viewed travel content from travel accounts. The number of respondents in this study was 100. Data collection was conducted through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, sent to respondents via Instagram direct messages and WhatsApp. The variables in this study consisted of exposure to travel accounts as the independent variable (X) and interest in visiting as the dependent variable (Y). The obtained data were then statistically analysed using SPSS version 25, employing descriptive analysis and simple linear regression tests to determine the relationship between the two variables.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Nowadays, all kinds of information are increasingly accessible to the public. This ease of access is inextricably linked to technological advancements. It is no wonder that everyone, from young to old, accesses the latest information *through* their *gadgets*. One example is the existence of *travel accounts* on Instagram. *Travel accounts* are one way to disseminate information about tourist destinations. The presence of *travel accounts* is expected to provide the public with a variety of information related to tourist destinations.

According to Elvinaro (2007) and Alkautsar (2022), to determine the influence of media on a person (Huang et al., 2026; Leung et al., 2013, 2013; Morgan, 2008; Riza et al., 2012), measurements can be made through three aspects, namely (Nabilah et al., 2025): 1) Frequency, namely, how often a person or audience consumes messages from the media; 2) Duration, namely, how long someone consumes a message from a medium; 3) Attention, namely, how deeply someone pays attention to media messages.

Social media is an online platform that allows users to represent, interact, collaborate, share, communicate, and form social bonds with other users (Nasrullah, 2020). There are many types of social media, including Instagram. Instagram comes from the words "insta" and "gram." Insta is derived from the term "instant," meaning fast or easy, while the word "gram" is derived from "telegram," meaning to send information quickly. This definition is made in accordance with Instagram's purpose: to send photos and videos on the internet instantly and quickly (Arifin, 2023). Instagram users can freely express themselves to show themselves. In other words, a person's self-image can be reflected through their social media account. Sometimes, Instagram provides entertainment and even goodness (Ratnasari & Oktaviani, 2019).

According to Effendy (Gusyanto, 2019; Illyasa & Masitoh, 2019), interest is explained as a tendency that is intensively directed towards an object that is considered important. According to the last study (Lubis & Helmi, 2024; Wardani, 2018), visiting interest is assumed to be similar to buying interest; buying interest is part of the process of determining purchasing decisions. Buying interest is a consumer action that underlies the

intended purchasing decision (Trirahayu & Putri, 2019). In buying interest, the purchase has not been made by the consumer and will be carried out at a future opportunity. Consumers consider factors before deciding to make a purchase, as tourists do before deciding to visit a place. In the process of choosing, prospective consumers or tourists can determine the purpose of the choices that have been considered. According to Deksono (Naisaburi et al., 2024), buying interest can be identified through four indicators, namely (Eman, 2022; Morgan, 2008): 1) Transactional interest, namely, a person's tendency to buy a product; 2) Referential interest, namely a person's tendency to recommend or suggest a product to other people; 3) Preferential interest, namely a person's behaviour that makes the product they have consumed their main choice or priority; 4) Exploratory interest, namely a person's interest that makes them look for information about the product they are interested in.

The word halal is often attached to food and recommended drinks in Islam. However, in reality, halal is not only about food and drinks; it also applies to tourism. Context: Halal tourism lies in the services provided. The number of Muslim travellers requires addressing several important matters related to religious teachings that must be obeyed. KH Ma'ruf Amin interprets halal tourism as not about changing the theme of the tour to be about halal (Puspaningtyas et al., 2023), but rather about the question of whether the provider has restaurants, places of worship, and availability of meeting places, standards, and hands that have standard halal, and related health and hygiene (Puspaningtyas & Sucipto, 2021). The data analysis techniques used in this study are descriptive tests and assumption tests. Classical and hypothesis testing. Based on the research that has been conducted, the results obtained from the hypothesis testing indicate. Based on Table 1, the significance is 0.000, which is smaller than the significance value of 0.05, and the calculated *t* of 9.225 is greater than the *t*-table value of 1.984. So *H*₀ is rejected, and *H*₁ is accepted, meaning there is a significant influence of fish on the variable of exposure to *travelling* accounts on the variable of interest in visiting.

Table 1. Analysis Results: Simple Linear Regression

		Coefficients ^a			
		Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	
Model		B		Beta	t
1	(Constant)	12,76	8,725		1,463
	Travelling Account Exposure	.487	.053	.682	9,225
					Sig.
					.147
					.000

a. Dependent Variable: Interest in Visiting

Source: Data processed in SPSS 25, 2022

Table 2. Coefficient Test Results Determination Variable X against Y

Model Summary ^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Standard Error of the Estimate
1	.682 ^a	.465	.459	20.78889

a. Predictors: (Constant), Travel Account Exposure

b. Dependent Variable: Interest in Visiting

Source: Data processed in SPSS 25, 2022

Like contained in table 2, explains mark correlation or relationship (*R*) namely of 0.682 and is explained by the size presentation influence exposure account through the

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vexing to interest the so-called visit coefficient determination which is results from squared R. From the output obtained, the coefficient of determination is R^2) is 0.465, meaning influence exposure account travelling to an interesting visit by 46.5%, while the travelling is influenced by other variables outside this research.

Based on the results of the hypothesis test, it can be concluded that exposure to the account Travelling significantly influences netizens' interest in visiting halal tourist destinations in Central Java. This means that when netizens are exposed to messages shared by travel accounts about halal tourist destinations, their interest in visiting them increases. Based on results research that has been done related influence account traveling to interest visit to halal tourism in Semarang City and its surroundings, then can withdraw conclusion that there is significant influence exposure account traveling to interest visit netizens at the destination Halal tourism in Central Java, as indicated by the results of the significant regression of X against Y of 0.000 (<0.05) and t count of 9.222 (>1.984). The results prove that H_0 is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that exposure to the account Travelling influences travel interest. Exposure to travel accounts has a 46.5% influence on travel interest.

This study provides robust empirical validation for the Value-Expectancy Theory (originally formulated by Ajzen & Fishbein) within the specialised domain of digital religious and halal specialised posits that an individual's orientation toward media content is driven by their internal values and their expectations regarding the rewards or gratifications that consumption will provide (Pryor, 2022; Wei, 2017). Within the framework of the Value-Expectancy Model, exposure to travel Instagram accounts functions as the expectancy component represented by the independent variable. The empirical findings indicate that netizens who frequently engage with visual content—such as photos, videos, geotags, and reviews posted by travel accounts like @explorejateng and @wisatajateng develop specific expectations regarding halal tourism destinations in Central Java and Semarang. Specifically, this media exposure fosters the belief that these destinations will provide adequate worship facilities, certified halal culinary options, high standards of cleanliness, and appealing location aesthetics. The highlights, Travelling Account Exposure as an independent variable represented by exposure to travel Instagram accounts, were operationalised through three primary dimension metrics: message frequency, exposure duration, and audience attention. The empirical analysis reveals that this multi-dimensional media engagement exerts a statistically significant positive influence on netizens' interest in visiting halal tourism destinations in Central Java and Semarang ($b = 0.487$, $t = 9.225$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the model yields a determination coefficient (R^2) of 0.465, indicating that 46.5% of the variance in netizens' visiting interest is directly accounted for by their active consumption and cognitive evaluation of content on travel accounts such as @explorejateng and @wisatajateng. Supporting this fact, netizens, specifically the Muslim population in Semarang and its surrounding areas, hold core internal values, including religious beliefs, halal lifestyle needs, and spiritual consciousness as guided by Islamic teachings (e.g., Surah Al-Mulk: 15). These intrinsic values cause the presence of sharia-compliant facilities to be perceived as significant to them.

Historically, this framework has been applied to legacy broadcast networks or generalised online news consumption. This research extends the theory into niche, identity-driven digital spaces (specifically, travel-focused Instagram accounts catering to Semarang netizens). The regression equation generated by this study demonstrates that a one-unit increase in multi-dimensional media exposure directly results in a 0.487 increase in intention to visit.

Within the framework of the Value-Expectancy Model, the behavioural intention component—represented by netizens' visiting interest (Variable Y) is activated when social media content successfully confirms audience expectations while aligning with their spiritual and aesthetic values. In this study, visiting interest is operationalised through four core sub-dimensions: transactional intent (inclination to undertake actual travel), referential intent (willingness to recommend halal destinations to peers), preferential intent (prioritising halal tourism options over conventional alternatives), and exploratory intent (active pursuit of additional destination information). The empirical regression analysis strongly validates this behavioural mechanism, demonstrating that multi-dimensional media exposure directly and substantially drives visiting interest. Rather than being a result of random chance or sampling error, the effect of travel account exposure (independent variable) on visiting interest (dependent variable) is robust and statistically significant. This is evidenced by a remarkably high t-statistic, which far exceeds the critical t-table value ($9.225 > 1.984$) at a significance level of $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the positive direction of the t-statistic (+9.225) indicates a direct linear relationship, confirming that higher frequency, longer duration, and deeper attention in consuming travel account content directly lead to a stronger intention among netizens to visit halal tourism destinations.

Theoretically, this confirms that modern netizens are not passive recipients of content; rather, their media-seeking habits reflect active cognitive mechanisms. When digital visual cues such as high-quality photos, geotags, and captions centred on a religious lifestyle align perfectly with an individual's cultural and spiritual expectations as well as their underlying Islamic values, this triggers predictable behavioural changes. These findings reinforce the theory that subjective evaluations of media content serve as the primary catalyst for real-world behavioural intentions. By breaking down the observed behavioural variables into four distinct structural subdimensions, namely Transactional Intention (willingness to travel), Referential Intention (willingness to provide recommendations to others), Preferential Intent (prioritising halal options over conventional ones), and Restorative Intent (actively seeking information). This study contributes to the reconceptualisation and development of a framework regarding tourist intentions in the context of consumption.

Traditional models (AIDA Model) often viewed destination selection as a linear path starting with basic awareness and ending with an absolute choice (Adi Tristanto & Hurriyati, 2023; Clemente, 2002; Tyagi & Kumar, 2004). However, the high visual saturation (Chan et al., 2023) of platforms like Instagram introduces a more dynamic paradigm (Cenizo, 2015). This study proves that digital media exposure, including passive awareness, pushes consumers rapidly into the explorative and preferential phases. The high-reliability metrics achieved in this research (Cronbach's Alpha of 0.968 for media exposure and 0.959 for visiting interest) prove that modern digital tourism choices are built on a highly synchronous psychological processing loop (Adi Tristanto & Hurriyati, 2023; Tyagi & Kumar, 2004). For emerging and non-conventional tourism markets, such as halal and religious destinations in Central Java, competing with mainstream commercial spots relies on using visual social syndication to establish a strong cultural preference within target demographics before they even set foot out the door.

Halal tourism has traditionally been framed as an isolated, purely structural phenomenon, relying almost entirely on physical features like prayer spaces (musholla), certified halal food options, and Islamic-compliant accommodations. This study adds a necessary communicative layer to that view, demonstrating that a destination's "halal value" is not merely physical; it is a socially constructed narrative created and maintained via interactive networks. The fact that social media exposure explains nearly half (46.5%) of the variance in tourist interest indicates that the perceived digital image of an urban halal ecosystem is just as vital as its physical infrastructure. Social media acts as an interpretive

filter for urban environments, allowing religious tourism to break out of its conventional boundaries and rebrand itself as a modern, aesthetically appealing lifestyle choice for urban netizens.

The emergence of visual-based social media platforms, such as Instagram (Balinas, 2015; Rogers, 2021) and TikTok, has driven a distinct evolution in consumer tourism intention frameworks, particularly within niche markets like halal tourism. Through real-time visual engagement (Yan et al., 2024), high-quality content including photos, video reels, geotags (Yang & Zhang, 2026), and user reviews effectively bypasses traditional passive awareness, enabling tourists to dynamically experience a destination's atmosphere rather than merely reading about it. Consequently, this immersive visual exposure accelerates decision-making by rapidly propelling consumers from the awareness phase directly into the exploratory and preferential phases within seconds. Ultimately, this evolved framework demonstrates that the success of halal tourism destinations relies not solely on physical infrastructure, such as on-site prayer facilities or halal culinary options, but is heavily dictated by a strategically constructed digital narrative.

Finally, this research deepens our understanding of Advancing the Paradigm of Urban Communication in Halal Environments, particularly regarding how spiritual spaces are communicated and integrated within modern, digitally dense metropolitan areas like Semarang. Urban Communication (McQuire, 2019) theories examine how spatial identities are constructed, distributed, and maintained through media channels within urban ecosystems. Within the landscape of modern urban areas like Semarang and its surroundings in Central Java, the empirical findings demonstrating that social media exposure significantly influences netizens' visiting intentions reveal a paradigm shift in how public religious spaces are consumed and perceived through digital ecosystems (Kertajaya, 2018). This phenomenon can be critically validated and analyzed through the three core elements of urban communication: first, the ubiquity of digital devices and networks, which grants unrestricted access to information within public spaces; second, the growth of place-specific data via location-based features that enhances the contextual relevance of information to a specific territory; and third, the emergence of new rhythms of communication that fosters faster and more dynamic interactions among urban citizens, ultimately reconstructing halal and religious destinations as integral components of the modern urban lifestyle.

CONCLUSION.

This study demonstrates that social media exposure through travel accounts, particularly Instagram, has a positive and significant effect on people's intention to visit halal and religious tourism destinations in Central Java, accounting for 46.5% of the variance in visiting behaviour ($R^2 = 0.465$; $p = 0.000$). Social media not only facilitates access to information but also serves as a strategic medium for shaping awareness, preferences, and visit planning through the frequency, duration, and cognitive attention devoted to tourism content. These findings confirm that engaging visual presentations and informative digital content can transform potential tourists from merely being aware of a destination into developing transactional, referential, preferential, and exploratory intentions. Theoretically, this study reinforces the Value-Expectancy Theory and contributes to the development of tourism intention models by demonstrating that tourists' cultural and spiritual expectations can interact with media characteristics in shaping visiting decisions ($Y = 12.761 + 0.487X$). Furthermore, this study enriches the discourse on urban communication in halal contexts by demonstrating that halal and religious tourism spaces are no longer understood solely as physical locations, but also as digital ecosystems constructed through technology, geotags, location-based hashtags, and the flow of information across social media. Therefore,

government authorities and halal tourism stakeholders should optimize digital communication strategies through multidimensional visual and informative content to enhance public knowledge, destination attractiveness, and visiting intentions toward halal tourism destinations in Central Java.

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