

# The Role of Social Media in Constructing the Destination Image of Moslem Friendly Tourism in Indonesia

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**Abstract.** This study examines the pivotal role of social media in shaping and constructing the destination image of Moslem Friendly Tourism in Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach, this research analyzes data from interviews, document reviews, and content analyses of user-generated content across major digital platforms. The findings highlight that social media functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a cultural space for constructing authentic narratives about Moslem Friendly Tourism. The study contributes to the growing discourse on digital destination branding by emphasizing the importance of balancing promotional efforts with cultural authenticity. The results suggest that user-generated content and influencer advocacy significantly affect travelers' perceptions, enhancing trust and credibility. This paper provides theoretical and practical insights for stakeholders aiming to strengthen Indonesia's position in the global halal tourism market while preserving its cultural integrity.

## 1 Introduction

Tourism has experienced significant transformation due to rapid advancements in digital technology. Social media has emerged as a central influence in shaping traveler perceptions and behaviors, enabling individuals to evaluate destinations through online interactions and shared experiences [1] [2]. Digital platforms play a critical role in destination image formation, allowing travelers to access visual, narrative, and emotional cues that inform their expectations prior to visitation [3]. In the context of Moslem Friendly Tourism, social media is especially significant due to travelers' need for reliable information regarding halal amenities, religious facilities, and culturally respectful services [4] [5]. Halal tourism has grown globally, and Indonesia—home to the world's largest Muslim population—aims to strengthen its position within this competitive landscape [6]. Competing destinations such as Malaysia and Turkey have successfully integrated halal-oriented branding strategies, emphasizing the need for Indonesia to enhance its digital visibility [7]. However, existing research predominantly

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focuses on halal tourism marketing, certification, or service readiness, with insufficient exploration of how social media organically constructs destination meaning through user-generated narratives [8] [9]. By examining these dynamics, this study contributes to destination image theory, which highlights the interplay of perception, representation, and cultural identity [10] [11]. The study adopts a qualitative approach to explore these dynamics and foreground the role of authenticity and community-based storytelling in shaping Indonesia's halal tourism identity.

In recent years, the concept of Moslem Friendly Tourism has gained increasing global attention, especially in Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia. This approach emphasizes the provision of tourism products and services that align with Islamic principles, such as halal food, prayer facilities, modest accommodations, and activities that respect religious values. The success of Moslem Friendly Tourism is not only determined by the physical facilities and policies in place but also by how effectively its image is communicated and internalized by potential visitors.

Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population, has made significant efforts to position itself as a leading Moslem Friendly Tourism destination. However, competition among global destinations—such as Malaysia, Turkey, and the Middle East—requires Indonesia to strategically enhance its brand and visibility. In this context, social media becomes a crucial medium for constructing, reinforcing, and amplifying the destination image to both domestic and international markets.

Despite its importance, scholarly investigations on the role of social media in shaping the image of Moslem Friendly Tourism remain limited. Existing studies on tourism image construction often focus on general destination branding, with less attention paid to religious and cultural dimensions. Therefore, this study aims to explore how social media platforms contribute to the formation of Indonesia's Moslem Friendly Tourism image, particularly from the perspectives of community engagement, authenticity, and cultural sensitivity. By doing so, the research seeks to enrich academic discourse and provide practical insights for policymakers, destination managers, and tourism stakeholders who wish to strengthen Indonesia's positioning in the global halal tourism market.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Social media and destination image formation**

The relationship between social media and destination image formation has been widely studied across tourism literature. Social media enables two-way communication where travelers actively create, share, and negotiate destination meanings [12]. Unlike traditional marketing, digital narratives emphasize emotional engagement and authenticity [3]. For Moslem Friendly Tourism, authenticity involves the accurate representation of Islamic values, halal services, and respect for cultural diversity [4]. Existing studies often focus on marketing strategies or halal product certification but rarely explore how these narratives evolve organically within online communities. This study addresses that gap by examining how user-generated content and influencer endorsements interact with official tourism campaigns in constructing Indonesia's destination image. Theoretically, this research is grounded in social constructivism and destination image theory, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between perception, representation, and cultural identity. Destination image theory underscores that travelers' impressions consist of cognitive evaluations, emotional responses, and symbolic associations [13] [14]. Social media amplifies these elements by enabling widespread circulation of both official and grassroots narratives [15].

## **2.2 Theoretical perspectives on image construction in tourism**

Traditional destination image literature distinguishes cognitive (beliefs about physical attributes) and affective (feelings toward a place) components; contemporary work extends this by emphasizing symbolic and narrative dimensions constructed via media discourse. From a constructivist standpoint, social media acts as a discursive arena where competing narratives — official branding, influencer portrayals, grassroots content — interact to produce a composite image. The credibility of these narratives often hinges on perceived authenticity: messages perceived as organic (UGC, peer reviews) typically carry more persuasive weight than overt promotional material.

## **2.3 Moslem Friendly Tourism: definitions and image considerations**

Moslem Friendly Tourism (MFT) involves tourism products and services aligned with Islamic principles, including halal-certified food, prayer facilities, modest accommodations, and religiously appropriate leisure options [7] [8]. Image formation in MFT is influenced not only by physical infrastructure but also by perceived authenticity, cultural alignment, and trust [4] [16]. Muslim travelers rely heavily on credible digital information to evaluate the compatibility of destinations with their religious needs [5] [6]. Social media therefore acts as a key informational and symbolic resource in shaping halal tourism experiences [2].

## **2.4 Social media's role in Moslem Friendly Tourism image construction**

Emerging research indicates social media plays multiple roles in shaping Moslem Friendly Tourism images. First, it functions as an information source: travelers use platforms to verify halal availability, locate prayer facilities, and read peer accounts of religiously sensitive experiences. Second, social media acts as a reputational mechanism: positive endorsements by influencers or communities can enhance trust, while negative UGC can rapidly damage perceptions. Third, platforms enable destination stakeholders — tourism boards, businesses, community groups — to co-create targeted narratives that highlight halal credentials, cultural sensitivity, and family-friendly offerings. Visual content (food photography, videos of prayer facilities, testimonials) is particularly influential because it conveys both practical and symbolic cues about religio-cultural suitability. User-generated content (UGC) plays a significant role in constructing halal tourism narratives, offering authenticity and peer validation that outweighs official promotional efforts [12] [1]. Influencers, especially those who specialize in Islamic lifestyle and travel, also contribute to shaping perceptions and symbolic meaning through culturally sensitive storytelling [16]. Nevertheless, concerns arise regarding misinformation, over-commercialization, and inconsistencies across digital platforms [3] [17]. These issues underscore the need for coherent strategies to support authentic and reliable digital communication in halal tourism branding.

## **2.5 Challenges and contested dynamics**

Despite its potential, social media-mediated image construction is contested and uneven. Issues include misinformation, sensationalized portrayals, and authenticity gaps between online promises and on-the-ground experiences. Moreover, unequal access to digital skills and platform literacies among local actors can limit the capacity of communities to contribute effectively to image-shaping. There is also a risk of commodification: the instrumental use of religious markers for branding can provoke backlash from local communities if perceived as inauthentic or exploitative.

## **2.6 Gaps in the literature and implications for Indonesia**

While general studies document social media's impact on destination image, specific investigations into Moslem Friendly Tourism — especially within Indonesia's diverse socio-cultural landscape — remain sparse. Few studies holistically examine how official campaigns, local community narratives, and traveler-generated content interact on social platforms to construct a distinctive Moslem Friendly image. In Indonesia, where local norms, regional variations in halal practice, and a large domestic Muslim market intersect, understanding these multi-actor dynamics is crucial. Current gaps suggest the need for qualitative work that foregrounds local voices, explores platform-specific affordances (e.g., Instagram vs. TikTok vs. travel forums), and interrogates issues of authenticity, trust, and power in digital image-making.

## **3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This qualitative study explores how Indonesia's Moslem Friendly Tourism image is represented on social media. Qualitative approaches are suited to research involving cultural meaning, symbolic communication, and community narratives [18]. Data were collected from three main sources: (1) content analysis of 100 social media posts across Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube related to Moslem Friendly Tourism in Indonesia; (2) semi-structured interviews with 25 participants, including Muslim travelers, tourism board representatives, and hospitality entrepreneurs; and (3) document analysis of national halal tourism policies and digital campaigns. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes, patterns, and contradictions within digital narratives. Triangulation ensured data credibility, while ethical considerations included informed consent and analysis of publicly accessible online materials only.

### **3.2 Research Setting and Scope**

The research focuses on Indonesia as a case study, given its status as the country with the world's largest Muslim population and its government's strategic efforts to promote halal and Moslem Friendly Tourism. The scope includes both domestic and international representations of Indonesian destinations across major social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook. These platforms were selected due to their high engagement rates and widespread use by travelers for sharing and seeking tourism-related content.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

Data were collected through three primary methods:

1. **Content Analysis of Social Media**

Posts, hashtags, and visual content related to Moslem Friendly Tourism in Indonesia were systematically identified and analyzed. Keywords such as halal tourism Indonesia, Moslem friendly travel, and halal destination guided the sampling process. Approximately 500 posts across different platforms were screened, with a purposive selection of 100 posts for in-depth analysis.

2. **Semi-Structured Interviews**

To complement online data, interviews were conducted with three key stakeholder groups:

- a. Muslim travelers (domestic and international) who actively use social media for travel planning and sharing.
  - b. Representatives of tourism boards and destination managers involved in promoting Moslem Friendly Tourism.
  - c. Local businesses (e.g. halal restaurants, accommodation providers) that engage in digital promotion. A total of 20–25 participants were targeted, recruited using purposive and snowball sampling.
3. Document  
Supporting materials such as government policies, promotional campaigns, and industry reports on halal tourism in Indonesia were reviewed to provide contextual depth.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, supported by NVivo, to identify recurring themes and patterns. This approach follows interpretive qualitative research standards [18] [12]. Social media posts were coded for visual, textual, and symbolic elements that reflect destination image attributes (e.g., halal facilities, religious symbols, cultural authenticity). Interview transcripts were transcribed, coded, and cross-compared with social media content to triangulate findings. NVivo software was used to facilitate systematic coding and ensure transparency in the analytical process.

### **3.5 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations**

To ensure credibility, triangulation was achieved by integrating data from social media content, interviews, and documents. Member checking was carried out with selected interviewees to validate interpretations. Ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection, with informed consent secured from all participants. For social media data, only publicly available posts were analyzed to respect users' privacy and digital ethics. Ethical clearance was obtained, and informed consent ensured. Only publicly accessible social media content was analyzed to preserve digital privacy.

## **4 Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Visibility of Moslem Friendly Attributes on Social Media**

Halal-certified food, prayer facilities, modest fashion, and family-friendly attractions appear prominently in digital content. These elements reinforce cognitive components of destination image, offering verifiable indicators of religious suitability [13] [4].

Visual storytelling such as photos of halal cuisine and videos showcasing mosque accessibility enhances trust and credibility [3] [15]. Visuals of local cuisines with halal certification, short videos of mosques near tourist attractions, and narratives about family-friendly activities emerge as dominant themes. These portrayals not only communicate compliance with Islamic requirements but also reinforce an image of inclusivity and accessibility for Muslim travelers.

This finding supports earlier scholarship that emphasizes the cognitive dimension of destination image construction, where travelers' beliefs and knowledge about a destination are influenced by visible and easily verifiable attributes. By foregrounding halal facilities and religiously appropriate practices, Indonesian destinations strengthen their credibility as Moslem Friendly Tourism hubs.

## 4.2 Role of Influencers and User-Generated Content (UGC)

Influencers specializing in Islamic lifestyle significantly influence destination perceptions. Travelers perceive influencers and peer-generated narratives as more trustworthy than official campaigns [12] [1]. Influencers' emotionally engaging stories help shape affective and symbolic dimensions of destination image [19] [16]. Influencers, particularly those who emphasize lifestyle and cultural authenticity, are perceived as relatable and trustworthy sources of information. Similarly, travelers' own sharing practices—posting pictures of prayer spaces or halal dining experiences—contribute to a communal archive of trusted information.

These dynamics illustrate how affective and symbolic elements of destination image are co-created. While government and tourism boards attempt to project a standardized branding of Moslem Friendly Tourism, it is the experiential narratives of users that humanize and authenticate the image. This aligns with theories of social construction, which argue that destination image emerges through the interplay of institutional discourse and grassroots storytelling.

## 4.3 Community Engagement and Local Narratives

Local businesses and community actors use social media to share cultural and religious narratives unique to their regions. These bottom-up contributions provide authenticity and reflect lived experiences of Moslem Friendly communities [5] [4]. Local halal restaurants, homestays, and cultural event organizers use digital media to share stories of heritage, spirituality, and everyday practices aligned with Islamic values. Such grassroots narratives provide a sense of authenticity that travelers often seek when evaluating destinations. Authenticity plays a central role in shaping tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit [16], making community narratives vital to sustainable branding.

This suggests that destination image construction is not only top-down but also bottom-up, shaped by the lived realities of communities who embody Moslem Friendly practices. This finding highlights the importance of involving local voices in branding strategies, ensuring that tourism development reflects both cultural values and community identity.

## 4.4 Challenges of Authenticity and Over-commercialization

The study reveals concerns about superficial use of religious symbols and inconsistent messaging across platforms. These issues align with prior critiques regarding the commodification of culture in tourism branding [3] [17]. Without careful management, these contradictions may weaken Indonesia's halal tourism credibility. Despite these opportunities, several challenges emerge. Both interviewees and online content reflect concerns about over-commercialization, where Moslem Friendly branding risks being reduced to a marketing label rather than a lived cultural practice. Some travelers expressed skepticism toward official campaigns that highlight halal aspects superficially without ensuring service quality. Additionally, fragmented online portrayals—where different platforms emphasize different facets—may create inconsistent messaging.

These tensions point to the need for balance between promoting religiously tailored services and maintaining cultural integrity. Without careful management, attempts to commodify religious symbols may undermine authenticity and diminish trust among travelers.

## 4.5 Implications for Destination Branding in Indonesia

The findings suggest that Indonesia's Moslem Friendly Tourism image is co-constructed through a synergy of state-led campaigns, influencer advocacy, and community-generated

narratives. Social media acts as a bridge linking these multiple actors, offering both opportunities for visibility and risks of inconsistency. For sustainable branding, policymakers and industry actors must recognize the significance of UGC, integrate community voices, and promote narratives that are authentic, culturally sensitive, and aligned with travelers' expectations.

To sustain credibility and long-term appeal, destination marketers must integrate authenticity into promotional narratives. First, co-creation with local communities should be prioritized to ensure that digital stories reflect lived cultural and religious realities. Second, influencer collaborations should emphasize educational storytelling rather than purely commercial endorsements. Third, tourism authorities need to implement authenticity assurance frameworks that prevent cultural symbols from being commodified. Lastly, global collaboration with other Muslim-friendly destinations can enhance Indonesia's international visibility while preserving local distinctiveness. These strategies reinforce the idea that sustainable branding depends not only on visibility but also on ethical representation.

## 5 Conclusion

This study underscores the transformative role of social media in constructing the destination image of Moslem Friendly Tourism in Indonesia. Through a blend of official, influencer-driven, and community-generated narratives, social media constructs multidimensional images encompassing cognitive, affective, and symbolic elements [13] [19]. Social media plays a transformative role in shaping Indonesia's image as a Moslem Friendly Tourism destination. By integrating grassroots narratives, influencer engagement, and official campaigns, social media constructs a multidimensional image that resonates with authenticity. However, maintaining cultural sincerity amid global competition requires strategic management and ethical storytelling. The study's contribution lies in its theoretical integration of constructivism with digital tourism branding and its practical framework for balancing promotion with authenticity. Future research should explore cross-cultural comparisons and longitudinal analyses to assess how digital narratives evolve in response to changing traveler expectations.

User-generated content and community storytelling play a central role in building authentic and trustworthy perceptions [12] [1]. For Indonesia to strengthen its position in the global halal tourism market, policymakers must prioritize authenticity, community collaboration, and strategic influencer engagement. At the same time, local community participation through storytelling and grassroots promotion provides cultural depth, ensuring that branding efforts reflect genuine values rather than superficial marketing.

However, challenges remain in balancing promotion and authenticity. Over-commercialization and inconsistent messaging risk weakening travelers' trust and undermining Indonesia's position in the global halal tourism market. To address this, stakeholders must prioritize participatory approaches that integrate community voices and embrace user-generated narratives, while maintaining coherence in branding strategies.

Overall, the findings contribute to academic discourse by advancing an understanding of destination image construction in the context of Moslem Friendly Tourism. Practically, the study offers insights for policymakers, tourism boards, and industry players on how to harness the potential of social media while safeguarding cultural integrity. Strengthening authenticity, inclusivity, and community involvement will be essential for Indonesia to consolidate its reputation as a leading destination for Muslim travelers worldwide. This study contributes to digital tourism branding discourse and offers practical recommendations for enhancing Indonesia's competitiveness in halal tourism.

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