

Enhancing Muslim Tourists' Travel Intention Through Social Media Tourism Promotion: The Moderating Role of Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Alivia Meyrizka Utami^{1*}, Sri Ekanti Sabardini¹, Nur Rokhman¹.

¹Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Manajemen Yayasan Keluarga Pahlawan Negara, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
e-mail: alivameyritzka@gmail.com ^{*1}.

*Corresponding Author

Abstract: Social media has become one of the most influential digital marketing tools in the tourism industry, particularly in promoting halal tourism destinations and influencing tourists' travel decisions. This study investigates the effect of Social Media Tourism Promotion on Muslim Tourists' Travel Intention and examines the moderating role of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM). A quantitative approach was employed using a survey of 250 Muslim tourists selected through purposive sampling. The collected data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The findings reveal that social media tourism promotion has a positive and significant effect on Muslim tourists' travel intention. In addition, electronic word-of-mouth positively moderates this relationship, indicating that positive online reviews and recommendations strengthen the influence of social media tourism promotion on travel intention. This study contributes to the halal tourism literature by highlighting the importance of integrating official digital promotion with consumer-generated online communication to enhance Muslim tourists' intention to visit halal tourism destinations.

Keywords: Electronic Word-of-Mouth, Halal Tourism, Muslim Tourists, Social Media Tourism Promotion, Travel Intention.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the tourism industry, particularly in the way destinations communicate and engage with potential tourists. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube have become strategic marketing channels that enable destination marketing organizations (DMOs) to disseminate tourism information, create destination awareness, and influence tourists' decision-making processes. Compared with traditional promotional media, social media provides interactive communication, visual storytelling, and real-time information exchange, allowing tourists to access destination-related information before making travel decisions. Consequently, social media tourism promotion has become one of the most influential determinants of tourists' behavioral intentions because it enhances destination attractiveness, improves destination image, and facilitates information search behavior (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Leung et al., 2022; Wijaya et al., 2025). Recent studies further demonstrate that both firm-generated content (FGC) and user-generated content (UGC)

shared on social media significantly shape tourists' attitudes and increase their intention to visit tourism destinations.

The importance of social media promotion is even more evident in the halal tourism sector, which has experienced remarkable growth over the last decade. The increasing global Muslim population, rising purchasing power, and growing awareness of Muslim-friendly tourism services have stimulated demand for destinations that accommodate Islamic values and religious needs. Unlike conventional tourists, Muslim travelers generally require comprehensive information regarding halal food availability, prayer facilities, Islamic hospitality, modest recreational activities, and other Muslim-friendly services before deciding to travel. Therefore, social media has become an essential information source because it provides visual evidence, destination experiences, and practical information that reduce uncertainty and strengthen tourists' confidence in selecting halal destinations (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Aji et al., 2020; Wijaya et al., 2025). Empirical evidence also indicates that digital tourism promotion positively influences Muslim tourists' attitudes,

destination image, and travel intention through the dissemination of authentic and relevant destination information.

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), travel intention represents an individual's willingness to perform future travel behavior and is determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). In digital tourism contexts, social media promotion contributes to favorable attitudes toward destinations by providing attractive visual content, destination information, and persuasive marketing messages. Previous studies have consistently found that social media marketing significantly improves destination image, tourist engagement, perceived value, and ultimately travel intention (Han et al., 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2023). Nevertheless, tourists rarely rely solely on official promotional content when evaluating tourism destinations. Instead, they increasingly seek opinions and experiences shared by previous visitors through online platforms before making travel decisions, especially when choosing halal tourism destinations where trust and information credibility play crucial roles.

In this context, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has emerged as one of the most influential sources of tourism information. Electronic word-of-mouth refers to positive or negative statements made by consumers through online platforms regarding products, services, or destinations, which can be accessed by a wide audience (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Compared with official promotional messages, eWOM is generally perceived as more credible because it originates from independent travelers who voluntarily share their actual experiences. Positive online reviews, travel blogs, destination ratings, social media comments, and travel vlogs help reduce perceived risk, increase destination trust, and strengthen tourists' confidence in visiting a destination (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). In halal tourism, where tourists seek reliable information about religious facilities and service quality, eWOM becomes increasingly important because authentic experiences shared by fellow Muslim travelers are often considered more trustworthy than commercial advertisements. Recent studies have confirmed that eWOM significantly influences Muslim

tourists' intention to visit halal destinations by improving destination image and destination trust.

Although previous studies have extensively investigated the influence of social media marketing and electronic word-of-mouth on tourism behavior, several research gaps remain. First, most studies have examined the direct effects of social media promotion on destination image, tourist satisfaction, or travel intention without considering how eWOM may strengthen or weaken the effectiveness of promotional activities (Han et al., 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2023). Second, halal tourism research has primarily focused on destination image, religiosity, halal literacy, and consumer behavior, while relatively few studies have explored the interaction between official tourism promotion and peer-generated online communication (Aji et al., 2020; Handayani et al., 2024). Moreover, recent research by Wijaya et al. (2025) demonstrated that social media content significantly influences Muslim travelers' attitudes and visit intentions; however, the study emphasized the comparison between user-generated content and firm-generated content rather than examining the moderating role of electronic word-of-mouth.

Addressing these gaps, this study proposes that electronic word-of-mouth functions as a moderating variable in the relationship between social media tourism promotion and Muslim tourists' travel intention. Theoretically, positive eWOM enhances the credibility of promotional messages, strengthens tourists' trust in destination information, and reduces uncertainty, thereby amplifying the influence of social media promotion on travel intention. Conversely, negative eWOM may weaken promotional effectiveness despite intensive digital marketing efforts. Therefore, integrating social media tourism promotion with electronic word-of-mouth provides a more comprehensive understanding of Muslim tourists' decision-making processes in digital environments. This study contributes to the halal tourism literature by extending the application of the Theory of Planned Behavior through the inclusion of eWOM as a moderating mechanism and offers practical implications for destination marketing organizations in designing more effective digital marketing strategies to attract Muslim tourists..

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Social Media Tourism Promotion

Social media tourism promotion refers to the use of social networking platforms to communicate destination-related information, create destination awareness, and influence tourists' travel decision-making processes. Unlike traditional promotional channels, social media enables two-way communication through interactive content, visual storytelling, and user engagement, allowing destinations to establish closer relationships with potential visitors. Tourism organizations increasingly utilize platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube to promote attractions, local culture, accommodation, and tourism experiences in an efficient and cost-effective manner. As a result, social media has become one of the most influential digital marketing tools in the tourism industry because it enhances destination visibility and facilitates tourists' information search before traveling (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

In the context of halal tourism, social media tourism promotion plays a more strategic role because Muslim tourists require comprehensive information regarding halal food, prayer facilities, Islamic hospitality, and Muslim-friendly tourism services before deciding to visit a destination. Promotional content that effectively communicates these attributes can reduce uncertainty, improve destination image, and strengthen tourists' confidence in selecting halal destinations. Recent empirical evidence demonstrates that both firm-generated content (FGC) and user-generated content (UGC) shared through social media significantly influence Muslim travelers' attitudes, destination image, and visit intention. Therefore, effective social media tourism promotion contributes directly to increasing Muslim tourists' travel intention by providing reliable, attractive, and informative destination content (Wijaya et al., 2025; Husin et al., 2020).

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) refers to positive or negative opinions, reviews, recommendations, and experiences shared by consumers through digital platforms, including social media, online review websites, blogs, and travel communities (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Compared with traditional word-of-mouth, eWOM has a wider reach, greater accessibility, and a longer lifespan because online information can be continuously accessed by prospective tourists

worldwide. In tourism marketing, eWOM has become one of the most trusted information sources because it originates from actual tourists who voluntarily share their travel experiences without direct commercial interests (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

For Muslim tourists, eWOM is particularly important because travel decisions often involve religious considerations that cannot always be verified through official promotional materials. Reviews regarding halal restaurants, mosque accessibility, prayer facilities, Muslim-friendly accommodations, and Islamic hospitality are frequently used to evaluate destination suitability before travel. Positive eWOM enhances destination credibility, reduces perceived risk, strengthens destination trust, and increases travel intention, whereas negative online reviews may weaken the effectiveness of tourism promotion. Consequently, recent studies have suggested that eWOM not only directly influences travel intention but may also strengthen the effectiveness of social media tourism promotion by increasing tourists' trust in destination information (Purwanto & Rofiah, 2020; Chen et al., 2026).

Muslim Tourists' Travel Intention

Travel intention represents an individual's willingness or readiness to visit a tourism destination in the future and is widely recognized as one of the strongest predictors of actual travel behavior. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), intention is determined by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Within tourism research, travel intention reflects tourists' psychological commitment to selecting a particular destination after evaluating available information and perceived benefits.

In halal tourism, Muslim tourists' travel intention is influenced not only by destination attractiveness but also by the availability of halal-friendly facilities, religious compatibility, destination trust, and the credibility of tourism information. Social media promotion provides destination information that shapes favorable attitudes, while electronic word-of-mouth reinforces tourists' confidence through authentic travel experiences shared by previous visitors. Recent studies indicate that digital marketing communication significantly influences Muslim tourists' intention to visit halal destinations because it reduces information asymmetry and improves destination credibility. Therefore, understanding the determinants of Muslim tourists' travel intention is essential for developing effective

halal tourism marketing strategies (Aji et al., 2020; Wijaya et al., 2025).

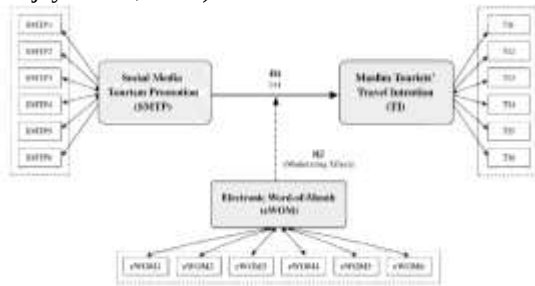


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the influence of social media tourism promotion on Muslim tourists' travel intention, with electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) serving as a moderating variable. The target population consisted of Muslim tourists who actively use social media to search for tourism-related information and have an interest in visiting halal tourism destinations. Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms and social media platforms.

The study adopted a purposive sampling technique because respondents were selected based on specific criteria: (1) being Muslim, (2) at least 18 years old, (3) actively using social media (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, or YouTube) to obtain tourism information, and (4) having an intention to visit a halal tourism destination. A total of 250 valid responses were collected and analyzed. This sample size exceeds the minimum recommendation for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which generally requires at least 100–200 observations or a sample size determined using the 10-times rule, making it adequate for structural model estimation and hypothesis testing.

The research instrument consisted of measurement items adapted from previous validated studies and was assessed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4, following the PLS-SEM procedure. The analysis included evaluation of the measurement model (indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity) and the structural model (path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to test the significance of direct and moderating effects). This

analytical approach is widely recommended for prediction-oriented tourism research involving latent constructs and moderation analysis.

Respondents' Demographic Profile

A total of 250 valid questionnaires were analyzed in this study. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. The profile includes gender, age, education level, occupation, and the most frequently used social media platform for obtaining tourism information.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 250)

Characteristics	Category	Freq	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	112	44.8
	Female	138	55.2
Age	18–24 years	86	34.4
	25–34 years	104	41.6
	35–44 years	42	16.8
	≥45 years	18	7.2
Education	High School	52	20.8
	Diploma	38	15.2
	Bachelor's Degree	132	52.8
	Postgraduate	28	11.2
Occupation	Student	69	27.6
	Employee	101	40.4
	Entrepreneur	42	16.8
	Civil Servant	21	8.4
	Others	17	6.8
Most Frequently Used Social Media	Instagram	96	38.4
	TikTok	82	32.8
	YouTube	39	15.6
	Facebook	21	8.4
	Others	12	4.8

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents were female (55.2%), while 44.8% were male. This distribution suggests that female Muslim tourists were slightly more represented in the sample, indicating their active participation in searching for tourism information through digital platforms.

Regarding age, the largest proportion of respondents was between 25 and 34 years old (41.6%), followed by 18–24 years (34.4%). These findings indicate that the respondents were predominantly young adults, a demographic group widely recognized as the most active users of social media for travel planning and destination information. Younger travelers are generally more familiar with digital technologies and tend to rely heavily on online content when making tourism decisions.

In terms of educational background, more than

half of the respondents (52.8%) held a Bachelor's degree, while 20.8% had completed high school, 15.2% held a diploma, and 11.2% had postgraduate qualifications. This educational profile suggests that the respondents possessed relatively high educational attainment, which may facilitate their ability to evaluate tourism information critically before deciding to visit a destination.

Regarding occupation, private employees (40.4%) constituted the largest group, followed by students (27.6%), entrepreneurs (16.8%), civil servants (8.4%), and respondents with other occupations (6.8%). This composition indicates that the majority of respondents were economically active individuals with sufficient purchasing power to engage in tourism activities.

Finally, Instagram emerged as the most frequently used social media platform for obtaining tourism information (38.4%), followed by TikTok (32.8%), YouTube (15.6%), Facebook (8.4%), and other platforms (4.8%). These findings demonstrate that visual-based social media platforms dominate tourists' information search behavior, emphasizing the importance of attractive digital content and interactive marketing strategies in promoting halal tourism destinations.

Table 1. Measurement Model

Construct	Indicator	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	R ²
Social Media Tourism Promotion	SM	0.84	0.913	0.932	0.69	0.66
	TP1	0.87				
	SM	0.83				
	TP3	0.79				
	TP4	0.85				
	TP5	0.82				
Electronic Word-of-Mouth	EW	0.86	0.924	0.940	0.72	0.74
	OM	0.87				
	EW	0.83				
	OM	0.85				
	EW	0.84				
	OM	0.84				

Construct	Indicator	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	R ²
Travel Intention	OM	0.89	0.918	0.936	0.74	0.64
	EW	0.81				
	OM	0.89				
	TI1	0.87				
	TI2	0.85				
	TI3	0.88				
Travel Intention	TI4	0.83	0.918	0.936	0.74	0.64
	TI5	0.85				
	TI6	0.85				

Table 1 demonstrates that all measurement items satisfy the recommended threshold for indicator reliability, with outer loading values ranging from 0.798 to 0.893, exceeding the minimum criterion of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2022). The results indicate that all indicators adequately represent their respective latent constructs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Measurement Model

The measurement model was evaluated by examining indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and the explanatory power of the structural model. Indicator reliability was assessed using outer loading values, while internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). Convergent validity was determined using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). According to Hair et al. (2022), acceptable values are outer loading ≥ 0.70 , Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0.70 , Composite Reliability ≥ 0.70 , and AVE ≥ 0.50 . The coefficient of determination (R^2) was also examined to evaluate the predictive accuracy of the endogenous construct.

Regarding internal consistency reliability, the Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.913 to 0.924, while Composite Reliability values range from

0.932 to 0.940. These values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming excellent internal consistency among the indicators measuring each construct (Hair et al., 2022).

Furthermore, all constructs achieved AVE values above 0.50, ranging from 0.696 to 0.746, indicating satisfactory convergent validity because each construct explains more than 50% of the variance in its indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The structural model also demonstrates satisfactory predictive accuracy. The R^2 value for Travel Intention is 0.648, indicating that 64.8% of the variance in Muslim tourists' travel intention is explained by Social Media Tourism Promotion, Electronic Word-of-Mouth, and their interaction effect. According to Hair et al. (2022), this value represents a moderate to substantial explanatory power.

Structural Model Assessment

Bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples) was conducted to test the significance of structural paths.

Table 2. Structural Model (Path Coefficients)

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value
H1	Social Media Tourism Promotion → Travel Intention	0.546	9.873	0.000
H2	eWOM × Social Media Tourism Promotion → Travel Intention	0.218	3.421	0.001

Discussion

The Effect of Social Media Tourism Promotion on Muslim Tourists' Travel Intention

The findings of this study reveal that Social Media Tourism Promotion has a positive and significant effect on Muslim tourists' travel intention, supporting the first hypothesis (H1). This result indicates that effective tourism promotion through social media significantly enhances Muslim tourists' willingness to visit halal tourism destinations. The positive path coefficient ($p < 0.000$) suggests that as the quality, attractiveness, and informativeness of social media promotional content improve, Muslim

tourists are more likely to develop stronger intentions to travel. This finding reflects the growing role of digital marketing in shaping tourists' decision-making processes, particularly in the context of halal tourism where access to credible and comprehensive information is essential.

From the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this finding can be explained by the role of social media in shaping favorable attitudes toward a destination before the actual travel decision is made. According to Ajzen (1991), behavioral intention is primarily influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Social media tourism promotion contributes to all three components by providing visual information, destination narratives, promotional campaigns, and interactive communication that help tourists evaluate destination attractiveness. Attractive promotional content showcasing halal restaurants, prayer facilities, Islamic cultural experiences, and Muslim-friendly accommodations creates positive perceptions, ultimately strengthening travelers' intention to visit halal tourism destinations (Ajzen, 1991).

The findings also indicate that social media functions not merely as a promotional medium but as an important source of travel information that reduces uncertainty during the pre-travel decision stage. Tourism products are characterized by intangibility because tourists cannot directly evaluate the quality of a destination before arrival. Consequently, they actively search for online information to minimize perceived risk. Social media facilitates this information search by presenting destination images, videos, testimonials, virtual experiences, and updated tourism information that enable tourists to imagine their future travel experiences. This information acquisition process increases destination familiarity, improves destination image, and strengthens travel confidence, leading to higher travel intention (Leung et al., 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2023).

These findings are particularly relevant within the context of halal tourism because Muslim tourists generally require more detailed information than conventional tourists before making travel decisions. Besides evaluating natural attractions and tourism facilities, Muslim travelers also assess the availability of halal food, prayer facilities, gender-sensitive services, Muslim-friendly accommodations, and destinations that accommodate Islamic values. Social media enables tourism destinations to communicate these attributes effectively through photographs, short videos, destination storytelling, influencer marketing, and

interactive communication. Consequently, well-designed promotional campaigns reduce information asymmetry and enhance destination attractiveness among Muslim tourists (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Aji et al., 2020).

The significant influence of social media tourism promotion also reflects changes in contemporary tourist behavior. Unlike traditional tourists who relied on brochures, travel agencies, or television advertising, modern tourists increasingly depend on digital platforms throughout the travel planning process. Before deciding to visit a destination, tourists commonly compare multiple destinations, watch travel videos, read destination descriptions, follow tourism influencers, and interact with official destination accounts. This digital information search behavior enables tourists to develop more informed evaluations regarding destination suitability and expected travel experiences. Therefore, the effectiveness of social media promotion lies not only in increasing destination awareness but also in facilitating tourists' cognitive evaluation and emotional attachment toward the destination (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Another important explanation relates to the characteristics of social media communication itself. Compared with traditional promotional media, social media allows destinations to continuously update tourism information, respond directly to potential visitors, and personalize promotional messages according to audience preferences. Such interactivity enhances consumer engagement and creates stronger relationships between destinations and prospective tourists. Interactive communication also encourages tourists to spend more time exploring destination-related content, thereby increasing familiarity and strengthening destination preference. This finding supports the argument that social media promotion is no longer limited to information dissemination but has evolved into a strategic communication tool capable of influencing tourists' behavioral intentions through continuous engagement (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Tuten & Solomon, 2022).

The empirical findings of this study are consistent with numerous previous studies that reported a positive relationship between social media marketing and travel intention. Han et al. (2022) found that social media marketing significantly influences tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions because digital promotional content enhances destination attractiveness and perceived value. Similarly, Dwivedi et al. (2023) emphasized that social media has become one of the most influential digital marketing instruments affecting

consumer behavior through information quality, interactivity, and customer engagement. Within the halal tourism context, Wijaya et al. (2025) demonstrated that both firm-generated content and user-generated content significantly improve Muslim travelers' attitudes and destination image, which subsequently increase visit intention toward halal tourism destinations. The consistency of these findings indicates that social media promotion has become an indispensable component of tourism marketing regardless of destination characteristics.

However, this study extends previous literature in several important ways. While earlier studies primarily focused on the direct relationship between social media marketing and travel intention, the present research specifically investigates Muslim tourists within the halal tourism context, where religious considerations substantially influence travel decisions. The findings suggest that promotional effectiveness is not solely determined by attractive destination images or persuasive advertising messages but also by the ability of promotional content to communicate halal attributes that satisfy Muslim tourists' religious requirements. Therefore, this study broadens the application of the Theory of Planned Behavior by demonstrating that destination-specific information related to Islamic values contributes significantly to the formation of travel intention among Muslim travelers.

The findings also imply that Muslim tourists demonstrate relatively high information involvement before making travel decisions. Unlike impulse purchases commonly observed in consumer goods, tourism decisions involve considerable financial investment, time commitment, and perceived risk. Consequently, Muslim tourists carefully evaluate destination information before developing travel intentions. High-quality social media promotion therefore functions as an important information source that reduces uncertainty and facilitates more confident decision-making. This finding supports information search theory, which argues that consumers intensify information acquisition when perceived purchase risk is high because additional information improves decision quality and reduces uncertainty (Beatty & Smith, 1987).

From a managerial perspective, these findings provide several practical implications for destination marketing organizations (DMOs), tourism businesses, and government tourism agencies. First, tourism promotion should move beyond merely displaying destination scenery and instead emphasize information relevant to Muslim travelers, such as halal-certified restaurants, mosque

accessibility, prayer rooms, Muslim-friendly hotels, halal culinary experiences, and Islamic cultural attractions. Second, destination marketers should consistently produce high-quality visual content through short-form videos, virtual tours, and storytelling to create stronger emotional engagement with potential visitors. Third, collaboration with Muslim travel influencers and content creators may further improve promotional effectiveness because influencers are perceived as more relatable and capable of communicating authentic travel experiences. Finally, tourism authorities should adopt integrated digital marketing strategies combining official promotional campaigns with interactive communication to maintain long-term engagement with Muslim tourists.

Overall, the results confirm that Social Media Tourism Promotion is an important antecedent of Muslim tourists' travel intention. The findings reinforce the relevance of the Theory of Planned Behavior in explaining travel decision-making within digital tourism environments while simultaneously extending halal tourism literature by demonstrating the strategic importance of digital promotional communication in attracting Muslim travelers. Nevertheless, although social media promotion directly influences travel intention, its effectiveness may depend on additional external factors that shape tourists' trust in destination information. One such factor is Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), which may strengthen or weaken the influence of promotional activities. Therefore, the moderating role of eWOM is discussed in the following section.

The Moderating Role of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

The results indicate that Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) positively and significantly moderates the relationship between Social Media Tourism Promotion and Muslim Tourists' Travel Intention, thereby supporting the second hypothesis (H2). The positive interaction effect ($p < 0.001$) demonstrates that the influence of social media tourism promotion on travel intention becomes stronger when Muslim tourists are exposed to positive electronic word-of-mouth. In other words, promotional activities conducted through social media are more effective when they are accompanied by favorable online reviews, recommendations, testimonials, and travel experiences shared by previous visitors. This finding confirms that eWOM is not merely an additional source of tourism information but functions as a boundary condition that determines the

effectiveness of digital tourism promotion.

Unlike direct-effect variables, a moderating variable changes the strength or direction of the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable (Hair et al., 2022). In the present study, eWOM does not independently explain how social media promotion influences travel intention; rather, it strengthens the persuasive effect of social media tourism promotion. This means that even when destination marketing organizations develop attractive promotional campaigns, their impact on Muslim tourists' travel intention will be considerably greater if potential tourists simultaneously encounter positive online experiences shared by other travelers. Conversely, if online reviews are predominantly negative or inconsistent with official promotional messages, the effectiveness of social media promotion may be weakened. Therefore, eWOM serves as a reinforcing mechanism that enhances the credibility and persuasiveness of tourism marketing communications.

This moderating effect can be explained through the Information Adoption Model (IAM), which argues that individuals adopt information and use it in decision-making when they perceive it as useful, credible, and trustworthy (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). In digital tourism environments, official promotional content introduces destination attributes and stimulates tourists' initial interest, whereas eWOM provides independent evaluations that help tourists verify the accuracy of promotional claims. Muslim tourists are therefore more likely to accept promotional information when it is supported by authentic experiences from previous visitors. Consequently, positive eWOM increases information usefulness and destination credibility, thereby amplifying the influence of social media promotion on travel intention.

The findings are also consistent with Social Influence Theory, which emphasizes that individuals' decisions are shaped by information and opinions received from others, particularly those perceived as credible or experienced (Kelman, 1958). In tourism, prospective travelers frequently rely on online communities because tourism products cannot be evaluated prior to consumption. Reviews, ratings, travel blogs, and social media comments therefore become important social cues that influence travel decisions. When these cues consistently support official destination promotions, tourists perceive lower uncertainty and develop greater confidence in their travel choices. This mechanism explains why eWOM strengthens the relationship between social media tourism

promotion and travel intention rather than acting solely as an independent predictor.

From the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), positive eWOM also reinforces both attitudinal evaluation and subjective norms, which are two important determinants of behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1991). Positive online recommendations strengthen favorable attitudes by confirming that the destination offers satisfactory experiences and appropriate Muslim-friendly facilities. At the same time, recommendations from family members, friends, influencers, or fellow Muslim travelers create normative pressure that encourages individuals to consider the destination more seriously. As a result, official promotional messages become more convincing because they are supported by social validation from other travelers. Therefore, eWOM complements the TPB framework by strengthening the psychological processes through which promotional information influences travel intention.

The moderating role of eWOM is particularly important within the context of halal tourism because Muslim tourists generally demonstrate higher levels of information sensitivity before making travel decisions. Beyond evaluating destination attractiveness, Muslim travelers seek assurance that destinations provide halal-certified food, accessible prayer facilities, Muslim-friendly accommodations, and services that respect Islamic values. Such information is not always available through official promotional channels. Consequently, tourists often depend on reviews and travel experiences shared by previous Muslim visitors to verify whether promotional claims accurately reflect actual destination conditions. Positive eWOM therefore reduces perceived uncertainty and increases destination trust, making official promotional content more persuasive and effective.

Another explanation concerns the concept of source credibility. Marketing literature consistently demonstrates that consumers assign greater credibility to information generated by fellow consumers than to information produced directly by companies because user-generated information is perceived as more objective and less commercially motivated (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Within tourism contexts, travelers frequently assume that previous visitors have no financial incentive to exaggerate destination quality, making online reviews more trustworthy than advertisements. Consequently, positive eWOM functions as independent validation of official promotional messages. When promotional campaigns and online

reviews communicate consistent information regarding halal facilities and destination quality, Muslim tourists experience greater confidence and are more likely to form strong travel intentions.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous empirical evidence emphasizing the strategic importance of eWOM in tourism marketing. Cheung and Thadani (2012) concluded that eWOM significantly influences consumer attitudes and purchase intentions because of its credibility and informational value. Similarly, Abubakar et al. (2017) found that online reviews substantially increase destination trust while reducing perceived travel risk, particularly for international tourists. Within halal tourism, Purwanto and Rofiah (2020) reported that eWOM positively affects tourists' intention to visit halal destinations because authentic online information improves destination evaluation. More recently, Handayani et al. (2024) demonstrated that eWOM significantly contributes to Muslim tourists' intention to visit halal tourism destinations through improved destination image and consumer confidence. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that eWOM should not only be viewed as an independent predictor but also as a moderating variable that strengthens the effectiveness of social media tourism promotion.

This research therefore contributes theoretically by extending previous tourism marketing literature. Most earlier studies have examined social media promotion and eWOM as separate constructs with independent effects on travel intention. In contrast, the present study integrates both variables into a single conceptual model by demonstrating that the influence of social media tourism promotion depends on the quality and valence of electronic word-of-mouth. This interaction perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of digital consumer behavior because official promotional communication and consumer-generated communication operate simultaneously throughout tourists' information search and decision-making processes. Accordingly, this study enriches the application of the Theory of Planned Behavior by incorporating social validation mechanisms that reinforce behavioral intention in digital tourism environments.

The practical implications of these findings are equally important. Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) should recognize that successful social media promotion depends not only on producing attractive promotional content but also on encouraging positive post-visit experiences that stimulate favorable eWOM. Tourism managers

should actively motivate satisfied visitors to share reviews, upload photographs, create travel videos, and provide destination ratings on digital platforms. In addition, tourism authorities should monitor online reviews, respond promptly to visitor complaints, and improve service quality to maintain positive online sentiment. Collaborating with Muslim travel influencers and respected content creators can also increase promotional credibility because their experiences are often perceived as authentic by prospective travelers. Through these strategies, official promotional campaigns and consumer-generated content can complement one another, producing a stronger influence on Muslim tourists' travel intention.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that **Electronic Word-of-Mouth** functions as a positive moderator, meaning that it strengthens the positive relationship between Social Media Tourism Promotion and Muslim Tourists' Travel Intention. The significance of the interaction effect confirms that digital tourism promotion becomes substantially more persuasive when reinforced by credible online experiences shared by previous travelers. Therefore, effective halal tourism marketing should not rely exclusively on institutional promotional activities but should simultaneously encourage positive consumer engagement capable of generating high-quality electronic word-of-mouth. Integrating these two forms of digital communication represents an important strategy for increasing travel intention and enhancing the competitiveness of halal tourism destinations.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effect of Social Media Tourism Promotion on Muslim Tourists' Travel Intention and investigated the moderating role of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) in the relationship. The findings reveal that social media tourism promotion has a positive and significant effect on Muslim tourists' travel intention, indicating that attractive, informative, and interactive promotional content shared through digital platforms effectively encourages Muslim tourists to visit halal tourism destinations. These results confirm that social media has become an essential marketing communication tool capable of influencing tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions by reducing information asymmetry and increasing destination attractiveness, consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) positively moderates the relationship between social media tourism promotion and travel intention. Positive online reviews, recommendations, and travel experiences shared by previous visitors strengthen the persuasive impact of official promotional content by increasing information credibility, destination trust, and tourists' confidence in making travel decisions. Accordingly, the effectiveness of social media tourism promotion is significantly enhanced when supported by favorable consumer-generated content. This finding extends previous tourism marketing literature by positioning eWOM not only as an independent determinant of travel intention but also as a contextual factor that reinforces the effectiveness of digital tourism promotion.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the tourism and halal tourism literature by extending the application of the Theory of Planned Behavior within digital marketing environments. Specifically, the findings demonstrate that travel intention among Muslim tourists is influenced not only by promotional communication from destination marketers but also by the interaction between institutional marketing efforts and peer-generated online communication. This integrated perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of tourist decision-making behavior in the era of digital tourism.

Practically, the findings suggest that Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), tourism businesses, and government tourism authorities should not rely solely on official social media campaigns. Instead, they should encourage satisfied tourists to actively share positive travel experiences, reviews, photographs, and recommendations across digital platforms. Strengthening collaboration with Muslim travel influencers, maintaining high service quality, and facilitating authentic user-generated content can enhance the credibility of promotional messages and ultimately increase Muslim tourists' travel intention toward halal tourism destinations.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The sample consisted only of Muslim tourists, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other tourist segments. In

addition, the cross-sectional research design captures respondents' perceptions at a single point in time and therefore cannot explain changes in travel intention over time. Future research is encouraged to employ longitudinal designs, involve respondents from different countries or cultural backgrounds, and incorporate additional variables such as destination trust, perceived risk, halal destination image, tourist engagement, religiosity, or destination loyalty to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Muslim tourists' travel behavior in digital tourism contexts.

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