

RECONCEPTUALIZING HALAL TOURISM FOR THE DIGITAL INFLUENCE AND SUSTAINABLE AGE

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Abstract: *Halal tourism has typically been conceptualized in a compliance-based paradigm, with a focus on tangible amenities. However, this approach fails to represent the nuances of the modern Muslim traveler, who is heavily impacted by digital media and has a growing commitment to sustainable and ethical consuming practices. Today's Muslim tourist is not only technologically connected and influenced through social media, but they are also more concerned with integrated ethical consumerism, which includes environmental and social sustainability. To address this gap, a theory synthesis strategy will be used to reconfigure and expand the domain theory of Halal tourism. This paper concludes by proposing a novel framework that redefines Halal tourism as a value-driven experience, co-created through digital trust and a commitment to multi-stakeholder well-being. This reconceptualization provides a new theoretical lens for tourism and marketing scholars and offers practical strategies for destinations and influencers to effectively engage the growing market of conscious Muslim travelers.*

Keywords: *Halal tourism, influencer marketing, sustainability practice, Muslim traveler*

Introduction

The global Muslim travel market, which has experienced enormous development and strong purchasing power, has become one of the most vibrant and economically vital sectors of the tourist industry. Forecasts continuously show its promise, highlighting an industry that attracts the interest of travel marketers and decision-makers everywhere. According to Faras Ghani (2025), the growing desire for lavish and religiously compliant vacation experiences is fuelling the rapid growth of the global halal and Muslim-friendly tourism market, which is expected to reach USD 410.9 billion by 2032 from USD 256.5 billion in 2023. In the first half of 2024, there were 80 million Muslim tourists from abroad, and by 2028, that number is predicted to rise to 230 million, according to a report on Global Halal Tourism by Crescent Rating (2025).

In particular, it is anticipated that worldwide halal tourism will reach USD 301.9 billion by 2025 and USD 548.1 billion by 2035, exhibiting a strong compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.1% from 2025 to 2035 (Future Marketing Insights, 2025). The growing number of Muslims, the growing need for pleasant, contemporary travel experiences that adhere to their beliefs, and the growing number of halal-certified lodging, dining, and entertainment alternatives are all responsible for this astounding growth. With access to halal food, prayer spaces, and environments that are in line with Islamic principles, Muslim tourists can now explore a variety of international locations while upholding their religious beliefs thanks to modern Halal tourism, which has advanced beyond simple compliance to offer sophisticated, inclusive, and culturally enriching experiences. Underlying this story of economic opportunity, though, is a fundamental change taking place in the market.

The conventional notion of Halal tourism is still rooted in the past, despite the obvious changes in the contemporary Muslim travel industry (Rasul, 2019). Azam et al. (2019) further discussed that a basic list of material conveniences, such as halal food, places for prayer, and the prohibition of alcohol, nevertheless serves as a major basis for understanding it. This outdated approach is excessively inflexible and ignores two significant contemporary changes: first, the significant importance of digital marketing (Hendrik et al., 2024) especially social media influencers (Ruiz-Muñoz et al., 2025) in influencing travel choices and second, the rising desire from tourists for moral and environmentally friendly travel practices that support local communities (Battour et al., 2021; Khairuldin et al., 2024). As a result, there is now a big disconnect between the more relevant, value-driven aspirations of modern Muslim tourists and this antiquated, compliance-focused concept of Halal tourism.

By proposing updated conceptual lenses, this article seeks to adapt and broaden the conceptual scope of Halal tourism in order to improve upon the elements of sustainable halal tourism. The research goal is to propose a more solid and applicable conceptual framework by redefining the elements within hall tourism to take into account the realities of sustainability and digital influence. In this context, this paper will incorporate knowledge from sustainability research and influencer marketing to question and deepen the understanding of what modern Halal tourism entails.

Literature Review

Halal Tourism

The development of tourism business has developed into a vigorous global sector that significantly boosts employment, cultural interaction, and economic advancement (Sofronov, 2018). As the worldwide mobility increases, there is a request for tourism services to expand in

which serves to multicultural and religious needs. Among these, the Muslim travel market has seen significant growth, driven by a rising number of Muslim travelers seeking destinations and services that align with their faith (Azam, 2024). Muslims can travel freely and safely throughout the vast territory of the Islamic Empire, which includes Asia, Africa, and even areas of Europe. In this regard, halal tourism is becoming a crucial niche that meets the demands of Muslim tourists by offering services that are consistent with Islamic law (Hanafiah, et. al., 2022). As the tourism sector develops, many Muslim and non-Muslim nations aim to attract Muslim tourists by offering the infrastructure, amenities, and tourism items they require (Samori, Md Salleh, & Khalid, 2016).

Rising earnings, improved connectivity, and increased awareness of Muslim-friendly options have all contributed to the continuous rise of the worldwide halal tourism business, which is expected to see Muslim tourists spending over USD 225 billion by 2028 (Crescent Rating, 2025). The market for halal tourism includes Millennials and Gen Z tourists from nations like Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey, as well as segments from Europe and North America as they look for eco-friendly, religiously-based, and meaningful travel experiences (Atia et al., 2022; Moshin et al., 2020)

Since Muslims started travelling to different regions of the world at the dawn of Islamic civilization, halal tourism has been a fundamental idea that bases travel activities aligned with Shariah components. According to Battour and Ismail (2016), halal tourism is generally understood to be a type of travel that adheres to Islamic principles, guaranteeing services like halal cuisine, places for prayer, amenities that are gender-segregated, modest dress rules, and places that are alcohol-free. Halal tourism also has been defined as travel that follows Islamic values, primarily Shariah law, while also incorporating the concept of *Toyyiban*, which means "good" or "wholesome" as stated by (Azam et al., 2019). The researchers further stated that this dual emphasis assures that halal tourism is not only religiously acceptable, but also socially responsible, safe, and valuable to human well-being. According to more recent research, halal tourism is a component of a larger ethical and ecological travel movement as well as a commercial response to religious demands (Rahman et al., 2024; Saffinee et al., 2025).

Halal tourism has been explored by Shariah law, maqasid al-shariah (objectives of Islamic law), and Islamic consumption ethics as the core theoretical lens. In article by Supardin et al. (2025), the main features of halal tourism centre on the provision of surroundings and services that are in line with Islamic principles in order to meet the needs of Muslim tourists. The availability of halal-certified food and beverages is essential to halal tourism and has a big impact on travellers' choice of destinations. Islamic-friendly lodgings that include places for prayer, gender-neutral amusement areas, and an environment that encourages religious adherence are equally crucial. In order to ensure that every element of the trip complies with Sharia law, halal tourism also places a strong emphasis on the prohibition of gambling, alcohol, and other prohibited activities (Suban et al., 2023). These qualities appeal to non-Muslim tourists looking for experiences that are safe, clean, and culturally sensitive in addition to meeting the spiritual and moral needs of Muslim tourists. The idea has developed into a multifaceted approach to tourism that combines comfort, inclusivity, and faith. Tangible components now include halal certification labels, while intangible parts include Islamic hospitality and morals (Henderson, 2016).

Besides Islamic view, halal tourism also being investigated by exploring existing theories. Three main theories are frequently used in halal tourism research according to Ruiz-Muñoz et al. (2025): the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which explains how attitudes and social

norms influence Muslim travellers' decisions and is helpful in forming marketing and service strategies (Azzam, 2024; Ekka, 2024; Ilham et al., 2024; Ithnan & Ariffin, 2020); the Emotional Solidarity Framework (ESF), which emphasises how empathy and shared values foster cultural understanding (Chen et al., 2025; Düşmezkalender et al., 2024; Erul & Woosnam, 2024); and the Social Exchange Theory (SET), which examines the cultural tensions and mutual benefits between tourists and host communities (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Iskandar & Sulaiman, 2024). Another theory utilized in halal tourism studies is The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) that describes how a person's attitudes, perception of control over the behaviour (perceived behavioural control), and perceived social pressures (subjective norms) all influence their intentions to engage in a behaviour (Ambara et al., 2025; Farizkhan et al., 2023; Hanafiah & Hamdan, 2021; Mohammed et al., 2023; Yaumidin et al., 2025).

Sustainable Tourism

In addition to being about religious observance, halal tourism which includes lodging, dining options, entertainment, and travel experiences that adhere to Islamic principles also strongly relates to sustainability (Vargas-Sánchez & Moral-Moral, 2020). Halal tourism has the potential to make a significant contribution to the global sustainability agenda by fostering environmentally sensitive activities, ethical consumption, and community-based travel.

The idea of sustainable tourism prioritizes in minimizing negative environmental impacts, respecting local traditions and culture, and ensuring long-term benefits for host communities. In principle, sustainability means being able to meet current requirements without sacrificing the capacity of future generations to meet theirs. Many organisations, including the World Tourism Organisation, ICOMOS, and other studies, have defined sustainable tourism. According to World Tourism Organisation (WTO) has defined sustainable tourism as tourism which fully considers its present and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities (Sustainable Tourism | Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.)

Stakeholder participation is increasingly recognized as essential for achieving sustainability goals in the tourism industry. Organisations should take into account the interests of all stakeholders, not just shareholders, when making decisions, according to stakeholder theory (Mahajan et al., 2023). According to Parmar et al. (2010), there are three main components of stakeholder theory are normative, instrumental, and descriptive. The normative dimension highlights that businesses have moral duties to stakeholders, contending that moral principles such as responsibility, fairness, and respect rather than just profit plus should guide business choices. When taken as a whole, these factors provide a comprehensive understanding of how companies might generate ethical and sustainable value. By attending to the requirements of communities, workers, consumers, and the environment, it fosters moral responsibility, long-term value creation, and sustainable prosperity (Mardi & Chandrasekar, 2025). It has developed over time into a paradigm that is frequently used in domains such as corporate governance, marketing, sustainability, and strategic management.

Taufik et al., (2023) emphasized the importance of collaboration among governments, tourism operators, local communities, and tourists in an effort to promote the tourism sector in a sustainable manner which remains highly relevant today. Recent literature also underscores the integration of ethical, cultural, and religious values into sustainable tourism frameworks. In this context, halal tourism has emerged as a growing niche that aligns Islamic principles with sustainability through community-based tourism, ethical consumption, and environmental

stewardship (Azam et al., 2019; Saffinee et al., 2024; & Jabeen et al., 2025). Researchers also point out that halal tourism is becoming more and more aligned with sustainability principles, especially in its promotion of cultural sensitivity, ethical consumption, and community-based tourism models that put socioeconomic justice and environmental stewardship first (Samori, Salleh, & Khalid, 2021).

Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is a strategic technique in which individuals, often ordinary people who have significant internet followings promote businesses by incorporating them into their personal content and lifestyle (Joshi et al., 2025). By fostering relatability and trust through genuine self-presentation and parasocial connections, these influencers set themselves apart from conventional celebrities.

Joshi et al. (2025) further highlighted four crucial themes regarding influencer marketing which are; credibility, engagement, sponsorship transparency and content aesthetics. Credibility is crucial since it influences followers' level of confidence in an influencer's advice (Saima & Khan, 2020). When influencers appear trustworthy, knowledgeable, and reliable, people are more inclined to trust them (Nafees et al., 2020; Safitri et al., 2020). It is more probable that followers will trust a company and desire to purchase a product if they believe the influencer actually uses and supports it. Engagement refers to the extent to which influencers communicate with their followers via messages, shares, likes, and comments. solid interactions demonstrate a solid bond and increase the impact of their material (Kay et al., 2023).

Numbers are important, but so is emotional connection. Influencers that reply to their followers, share personal anecdotes, and include them in material increase their credibility and improve the efficacy of their campaign (Archer et al., 2021). Being transparent about paid promotions is vital because viewers are more aware of them (Cao & Belo, 2024). Using obvious hashtags like *#sponsored* or *#ad* makes the influencer seem more trustworthy to followers. It can increase trust even though it may make the message less compelling to other people. Mir (2024) stressed on influencer posts' appearance and tone, including their photographs, layout, and tone, greatly contribute to drawing attention to them and improving brand perception. Influencers frequently create their feeds to portray a chic and reliable lifestyle, which makes goods appear appealing. However, content that is too flawless may come across as less authentic. Therefore, to maintain followers' attention and trust, it's critical to strike a balance between authentic vibes and attractive graphics (Dwisayah et al., 2025).

In a study by Bogoevska and Ciunova (2022), it was found that influencer does influence Instagram user's purchase intention. Customers' intention to buy is positively impacted by influencers' attractiveness and reliability. Another study by Ahmad et al. (2025) examines how Muslim tourists' pleasure and trust in halal hotels are enhanced by social media influencers. It was discovered that travellers' confidence in halal hotels is greatly influenced by an influencer's expertise, attractiveness, and most importantly, trustworthiness. Additionally, being trustworthy increases general satisfaction. Hovland and Weiss (1951) introduced a theory known as the Source Credibility Theory (SCT) that mostly used in influencer marketing studies. Hovland and Weiss first characterised source credibility as a combination of two important factors: trustworthiness and knowledge.

According to Sokolova and Kefi (2020), trustworthiness relates to the audience's perception of the source's honesty and impartiality whether the communicator appears truly committed to

giving accurate information. Expertise refers to the source's perceived level of knowledge or expertise in the subject matter. In their study, they investigated these theories by presenting the identical information as if it came from a recognised expert (such as a scientist in a top journal) or a less credible figure (such as a tabloid writer), demonstrating how perceptions of credibility can change depending on the source. This theory was further extended by Kelman (1961) and McGuire (1985) by adding attractiveness as another variable in source credibility theory.

Methodology

To further theoretical understanding, this study uses a conceptual research design. The principal aim is to clarify and elaborate on the relationship among sustainable practices, influencer marketing, and the changing perception of Halal tourism. The paper uses a theory synthesis strategy Jaakkola (2020) to do this, which to integrate and summarize existing theories or literature streams to offer a new or enhanced understanding of a concept or phenomenon.

This study does not use empirical data collection techniques like surveys or experiments because it is a conceptual analysis. Rather, the approach is based on a systematic analysis of the body of existing literature (Kipper, 2025). With an emphasis on three primary areas; halal tourism, influencer marketing theory, and sustainability frameworks, a thorough and in-depth analysis of academic sources, including journal articles and industry reports, is used to collect data.

A qualitative content analysis of the chosen literature is part of the data analysis process. This involves recognising, combining, and analysing important ideas, theoretical claims, and academic perspectives from several fields. The analysis specifically focusses on how the conventional, compliance-based paradigm of Halal tourism might be challenged and modified through the integration of theories from sustainability and influencer marketing. A new conceptual framework that reinterprets Halal tourism as a value-driven experience co-created through digital trust and multi-stakeholder well-being is the result of this analytical process. This framework offers fresh theoretical perspectives and useful implications for destination marketing.

Finding

Sustainable halal tourism adopts a comprehensive strategy that honours and benefits all parties involved, going beyond merely providing Muslim tourists with Shariah-compliant services as highlighted by Jabeen et al. (2025). With the basis of stakeholder theory, it guarantees visitors access to halal cuisine, places for prayer, and morally upright experiences that are consistent with Islamic principles. At the local level, it fosters social empowerment, cultural sensitivity, and equitable economic involvement, enabling residents to gain significant advantages from tourism. With methods aimed at preserving natural ecosystems, cutting waste, and conserving resources, environmental sustainability is also crucial. It promotes fair pay, moral business practices, and long-term financial sustainability for workers and companies, establishing a tourist model that is not only acceptable for religious reasons but also socially and environmentally responsible.

This study synthesises three major theoretical areas to create an integrated model that allows for a thorough analysis of the role of influencers in Halal tourism. The fundamental principles of persuasion, behavioural techniques for preserving authenticity, and the interpersonal relationships that support digital influence are all taken into consideration by this model.

The Source Credibility Theory that aims to clarify how various aspects of an information source can affect consumers' adoption and application of the source message serves as the basis. As a complex concept necessary for influencer effectiveness, source credibility is the fundamental elements for this model. In accordance with Hovland and Weiss (1951) fundamental work that extended by McGuire (1985) and Kelman (1961), this theory concentrate on three primary perceptions. First, trustworthiness which refers to the source's alleged honesty and moral character. Second is expertise that highlight the perceived proficiency and understanding in the field. Third is the source's perceived physical and social likeability which is known as attractiveness. In addition to this model is on the behavioural reinforcements that will be based on the framework of Audrezet et al. (2020). The crucial aspect of trustworthiness in the commercialised social media environment is not a fixed characteristic, but rather is continuously developed and preserved by particular actions that highlight on authenticity. Authenticity then has been absorbed in trustworthiness. Last addition to the model is relatability through para-social interaction which is the relational bridge (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

The integration between the model and the concept of sustainable halal tourism which harmonizes the usage of technological and modern marketing strategies with the Islamic values as shown in Figure 1. Building on the core values of sustainability, this assimilation not only focused on Shariah-compliant services, such as opportunity to halal cuisine, prayer facilities, and ethically guided experiences, but also empower social connection, cultural sensitivity, and environmental preservation within local communities. In parallel, the integration of digital influencer marketing in halal tourism redefines how those values are perceived and accepted globally. Guided by the Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; McGuire, 1985; Kelman, 1961), social media influencers are crucial in ensuring influencer-consumer trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness to increase engagement with Halal tourism brands. Authenticity, as reinforced through behavioural practices (Audrezet et al., 2020), and relatability through digital interactions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), strengthen the emotional connection between Muslim travellers and destinations. Thus, in a sustainable and digitally connected collaborative network, Halal tourism becomes not only a religiously compliant and environmentally responsible practice but also a socially engaging and digitally empowered movement that supports long-term ethical and economic growth.

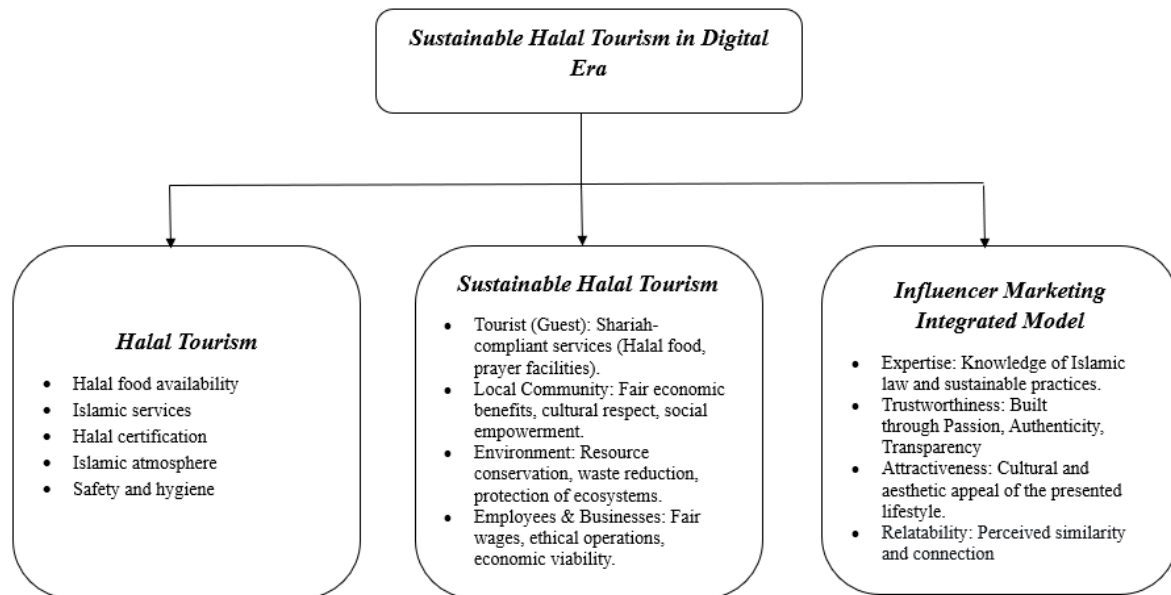


Figure 1: Reconceptualization of Halal Tourism

Source: Author

Discussion

The two elements of trustworthiness and expertise are important for verifying religious and ethical assertions within the framework of Halal tourism. In the context of tourism, attractiveness which is often linked to physical appeal is extended to include cultural and aesthetic allure, or the influencer's ability to portray the Halal travel experience in a way that is both motivational and enticing, appealing to the aesthetics and values of the current modern Muslim tourists.

Framework proposed by Audrezet et al. (2020) suggested the elements of passion, authenticity and transparency. In his study, passion denotes to exhibit a sincere love for the subject (such as travel or Islamic culture). Meanwhile, authenticity was defined as keeping the self that appears on film and off screen consistent and reasonable. Transparency refers to being transparent and honest about business relationships and incentives gained. It is believed that the audience's opinion and actions on the influencer's reliability heavily depends on these three elements.

Relatability, in accordance with Sokolova & Kefi (2020), is the sense of similarity and connection that fosters the digital, as well as in-person relationship between the followers and the influencers. This engagement aspect turns the influencer-follower dynamic into a "digital relationship" in which the decisions and perspectives feel more personally meaningful, rather than just a digital yet reliable source. This is achieved in halal tourism via mutual interests, beliefs, and lifestyle patterns.

Within the sphere of Halal tourism, the influencer marketing integrated model points toward a distinctly rational and evidence-driven aspect of persuasion. An influencer's attractiveness increases the appeal of their message, while their expertise establishes their fundamental credibility as discussed by (Ahmad et al., 2025). A display of transparency, authenticity, and passion immediately builds and maintains the influencer's credibility online. Additionally, the

quality of relatability, enable them to establish a profound parasocial bond with their audience. This multidimensional form of credibility—encompassing expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and dependability—combined with the emotionally resonant element of relatability, serves as the key catalyst for persuasive influence among discerning Muslim travellers. Together, these elements open a more refined perspective in understanding how influencers legitimize and shape the evolving ideals that define contemporary Halal tourism.

The previous compliance-oriented framework has been shifted away through the reconceptualization of Halal tourism proposed in this study. The previous concept focused mainly on the provision of palpable Islamic facilities, has now moved toward a model grounded in values and sustainability. This change recognises that today's Muslim travellers are driven by more than the need to comply in adherence to religious tenets. Muslim travellers increasingly pursue travel that reflects personal meaning, ethical awareness, and digital connectivity, seeking experiences that integrate religious beliefs into modern living. The integration of sustainability principles and digital influence highlights the progression of Halal tourism into a dynamic, value-driven system shaped by perceptions and co-created experiences across both digital and physical domains.

The influencer marketing integrated model redefined the perspective of Sustainable Halal in which it produces significant outcomes across two key aspects: Tourist Response and Stakeholder Impact. Based on the principles of Source Credibility Theory (SCT), the model demonstrates how authenticity, openness, and a sense of relatability seeing how audiences' perceptions towards Halal destinations are influenced and shaped by digital influencers. Influencers who demonstrate real knowledge, moral consistency, and trust are considered effective intermediaries who connect the concepts of sustainable tourism with the traveler's emotional and ethical travelling. Through their social media engagements, the ideals of sustainability—like being responsible for the environment, protecting culture, and empowering communities—are considered as influential lifestyles that really resonate with people and influence them to make changes for the better.

This has caused the elements of sustainable tourism has shaped the perception of other people, focusing on Muslim travellers, to become more emotionally engaged and personal. Reliable and credible digital influencers whom portray the same values express messages about sustainability, travellers feel a sense of digital trust and religious consonance. This dynamic directly has moulded the Tourist Response, where travellers show more trust in their destination, are happier with it, and are more likely to recommend it or come back. Integral and transparent influencers about their lives digitally make people think they are viewed as a more reliable source. This reinforces the notion that ethical travel can be fun and comfortable at the same time. Also, travellers are more likely to share positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) content, which spreads the influencer's message about sustainability across networks and makes the destination more visible.

In this paper, Halal Tourism has been redefined beyond its traditional compliance-oriented framework by taking into account the factors of sustainability principles and digital influence as fundamental aspects of its development throughout the modernisation of the current era. This new design of Halal tourism turns it into a value-driven ecosystem where digital influence, ethical engagement, and sustainability all combined in order to improve upon the present concept.

This ensures a theoretical contribution by expanding the domain theory of Halal tourism to accommodate digital co-creation and multi-stakeholder well-being—domains that have been insufficiently explored in the current literature. In practice, it gives destinations and marketers opportunities to develop a strategy in shifting focus from material compliance to creating impactful narratives that focused on ethical authenticity, cultural sensitivity, and ecological stewardship.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper highlights that Sustainable Halal Tourism combined with the Influencer Marketing Integrated Model, would change the goal of Islamic compliant travel from merely following religious rules to crafting more valuable experiences together.

As this is a conceptual paper, thus it requires empirical studies to explore the validity of the conceptual framework. In addition, this conceptual framework is limited to certain segments of tourists such as millennials and younger generation.

Halal tourism is presented as a progressive model that aligns with Islamic values while promoting global sustainability objectives and ethical tourism practices. This conceptual framework promotes future empirical studies to evaluate its validity across diverse cultural contexts and to explore how emerging technologies—such as AI-driven personalisation and immersive digital storytelling—may enhance the credibility, authenticity, and impact of Halal tourism in the context of sustainability.

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