

Developing an Integrated Model of Creative Economy and Halal Tourism in Aceh Tengah: An Analytic Network Process Approach

ABSTRACT - This study is situated within the growing importance of creative economy and halal tourism as interconnected drivers of inclusive regional development, particularly in Muslim-majority contexts such as Aceh Tengah Regency. The research aims to examine stakeholder synergy in developing these sectors by identifying key challenges, strategic solutions, and implementation priorities from the perspectives of government, academics, and entrepreneurs. A qualitative approach was employed through expert interviews, supported by the Analytic Network Process (ANP) framework using Super Decisions software to structure and prioritize strategic indicators based on expert judgments. The findings reveal four essential pillars for development: improved accessibility, strengthened creative human resources, enhanced digital marketing, and environmental sustainability. Accessibility emerges as a foundational factor influencing connectivity, economic participation, and regional competitiveness, while human resource development is central to fostering innovation and long-term sector resilience. Digital marketing expands market reach and strengthens halal-oriented promotional strategies, whereas environmental sustainability ensures balance between economic growth, ecological preservation, and social well-being. The study further conceptualizes development through two interlinked pillars: infrastructure and creative ecosystem strengthening, and sustainability with inclusivity integration. These findings imply the need for coordinated policy frameworks that align economic development with Islamic values, local cultural identity, and sustainable growth principles in Aceh Tengah.

ABSTRAK - Pengembangan Model Terintegrasi Ekonomi Kreatif dan Pariwisata Halal di Aceh Tengah: Pendekatan Analytic Network Process. Kajian ini berangkat dari semakin pentingnya ekonomi kreatif dan pariwisata halal sebagai dua sektor yang saling terhubung dalam mendorong pembangunan daerah yang inklusif, khususnya di Kabupaten Aceh Tengah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis sinergi para pemangku kepentingan dalam pengembangan kedua sektor tersebut melalui identifikasi tantangan utama, solusi strategis, serta prioritas implementasi berdasarkan perspektif pemerintah, akademisi, dan pelaku usaha. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah kualitatif melalui wawancara mendalam dengan para ahli, yang kemudian dipadukan dengan kerangka Analytic Network Process (ANP) menggunakan perangkat lunak Super Decisions untuk menyusun dan menentukan prioritas strategi berdasarkan penilaian ahli. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan empat pilar utama pengembangan, yaitu peningkatan aksesibilitas, penguatan sumber daya manusia kreatif, pengembangan digitalisasi pemasaran, serta pelestarian lingkungan. Aksesibilitas menjadi faktor dasar dalam memperkuat konektivitas, meningkatkan partisipasi ekonomi masyarakat, dan daya saing daerah. Sementara itu, penguatan sumber daya manusia berperan penting dalam mendorong inovasi dan keberlanjutan sektor, sedangkan digitalisasi pemasaran membuka perluasan pasar dan memperkuat promosi berbasis nilai-nilai halal. Pelestarian lingkungan menjadi aspek penting dalam menjaga keseimbangan antara pertumbuhan ekonomi, kelestarian alam, dan keberlanjutan sosial. Secara konseptual, pengembangan diarahkan pada dua pilar utama, yaitu penguatan infrastruktur dan ekosistem kreatif serta integrasi prinsip keberlanjutan dan inklusivitas, yang diharapkan membentuk model pembangunan yang inovatif, berkeadilan, dan berdaya saing.

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INTRODUCTION

The creative economy and halal tourism have emerged as strategic sectors in promoting sustainable economic development, particularly in Muslim-majority countries. The creative economy functions as a key driver of innovation, employment generation, and cultural preservation, while demonstrating strong adaptability to rapidly changing market conditions. At the same time, halal tourism has become one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry, driven by increasing demand from Muslim travelers seeking tourism experiences that comply with Sharia principles (Battour & Ismail, 2016).

Recent studies have emphasized the importance of integrating Islamic values, local culture, and digitalization in developing halal tourism ecosystems. Razali and Taufiq (2024) proposed a comprehensive model that harmonizes Islamic principles, cultural arts, historical heritage, natural resources, and digital technology to create authentic halal tourism experiences. This perspective is reinforced by Firlianda and Pujianto (2024), who highlight the role of mosque-based creative economy initiatives and the integration of religious elements in tourism development. However, empirical evidence also points to persistent challenges, including limited infrastructure, inadequate human resource empowerment, weak stakeholder coordination, and insufficient digital readiness (Razali & Taufiq, 2024). Despite these constraints, halal tourism has been shown to contribute positively to regional economic development through job creation and increased local revenue (Musa et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, the creative economy has demonstrated remarkable growth over the past decade. Its contribution to national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has more than doubled, exceeding IDR 1,500 trillion by the end of 2024, while employment absorption reached approximately 26.5 million workers. The export value of creative products increased by nearly 67%, rising from USD 15 billion in 2023 to over USD 25 billion in 2024, accompanied by a 119% increase in value added (Andriyanto, 2025). Tourism likewise plays a strategic role in the national economy, with more than 13 million international tourist arrivals recorded in 2024, generating nearly 25 million jobs and contributing USD 16.7 billion in foreign exchange earnings (Kemenkeu, 2025).

Its strong performance in halal tourism has received international recognition. In 2024, Indonesia ranked first as the world's leading halal tourism destination. However, in 2025 the country fell to fifth place in the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), despite maintaining a stable overall score (Global Muslim Travel Index, 2025). This decline suggests that competing destinations—such as Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates—have progressed more rapidly in enhancing halal-friendly infrastructure, services, and promotion strategies. These developments underscore the need for Indonesia to strengthen its halal tourism ecosystem through more integrated and innovative approaches.

Within this national context, Aceh Province holds a unique strategic position due to its strong Islamic cultural identity and the formal implementation of Sharia law. Aceh has been recognized as one of Indonesia's leading halal tourism destinations and has received international awards, including the World's Best Halal Tourism Destination and Best Halal Tourism Airport (Sarahtika, 2017). Tourist arrivals in Aceh experienced a sharp decline during the COVID-19 pandemic but have shown a strong recovery since 2023, indicating renewed growth potential

(BPS Aceh, 2025; Muis, 2020). This recovery highlights the importance of developing a comprehensive and sustainable model that integrates halal tourism with the creative economy to enhance regional competitiveness and community participation (Mahsun et al., 2022).

Aceh Tengah Regency holds strong potential for the development of halal tourism and the creative economy due to its abundant natural resources, Islamic cultural heritage, and distinctive local products. Key attractions such as Lake Lut Tawar and the Gayo Highlands function not only as tourism assets but also as important sources of livelihood for local communities (Sabri et al., 2022). While domestic tourist visits have increased in recent years, foreign arrivals remain limited, indicating substantial unrealized international potential (BPS Aceh, 2025). The presence of creative products, including Gayo coffee, handicrafts, Islamic cultural arts, and halal culinary offerings, further strengthens the region's prospects for a creative economy grounded in Islamic values.

Despite these advantages, the integration of halal tourism and the creative economy in Aceh Tengah faces persistent challenges, including weak stakeholder coordination, limited infrastructure, low digital literacy among micro and small enterprises, and insufficient promotion and destination branding (Razali & Taufiq, 2024). Previous studies have highlighted the economic benefits of halal tourism and creative economy development, particularly in employment creation and local revenue generation (Musa et al., 2021). Integrative frameworks combining Islamic values, cultural assets, natural resources, and digitalization, as well as collaborative governance models such as the pentahelix approach, have been proposed as effective mechanisms for strengthening halal tourism ecosystems (Razali & Taufiq, 2024; Santoso & Cahyani, 2022).

However, existing studies have not sufficiently explained how an integrative and context-specific model can systematically connect halal tourism and the creative economy within a unified regional development framework. Limited attention has been devoted to regions with strong Islamic institutional settings, such as Aceh, where the formal implementation of Sharia law and distinct socio-cultural characteristics create unique opportunities for building a cohesive and sustainable ecosystem. Moreover, the interaction between local potential, stakeholder collaboration, and sustainability-oriented strategies remains underexplored, particularly at the sub-regional level.

Therefore, this study aims to develop and analyze an integrative model for halal tourism and the creative economy in Aceh Tengah Regency. Emphasis is placed on stakeholder collaboration, digital transformation, human resource capacity, and sustainability principles. This research is expected to contribute theoretically to the literature on halal tourism and creative economy development, while offering practical insights for policymakers and regional stakeholders seeking to strengthen inclusive and sustainable tourism ecosystems in Indonesia and comparable contexts. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature, Section 3 outlines the research methodology, Section 4 presents and discusses the findings, and Section 5 concludes the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Creative Economy

The potential of the creative economy as a driver of economic transformation has been widely recognized in contemporary development discourse. Over the past decade, economic systems have shifted from industrial-based models toward frameworks that emphasize knowledge, creativity, and sustainability. Within this transformation, the creative economy has emerged as a key contributor to economic growth, employment generation, and national competitiveness (Sung, 2015). In Indonesia, the sector holds strategic importance due to its reliance on cultural diversity, local skills, and innovation, which collectively generate high added value and export opportunities.

The relationship between the creative economy and tourism development has been explored in various studies, particularly in the context of halal tourism. The creative economy enhances the attractiveness of tourism destinations through cultural products, experiences, and services (Cerisola & Panzera, 2021). In addition, halal standards and certification play a crucial role in strengthening destination competitiveness by ensuring compliance with Islamic principles and increasing consumer trust (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Bibliometric analyses further indicate that research in halal tourism has predominantly focused on marketing, consumer behavior, and certification (Misbah & Johari, 2024), leaving broader structural dimensions less examined.

Beyond economic contributions, the creative economy is closely associated with inclusive development. It supports improvements in community welfare, reinforces cultural identity, and expands access to markets for local products. Participatory approaches, skill development, and digital technology adoption are identified as key drivers of sustainability in this sector (Khuamir, 2025). Tourism, in this regard, functions as a platform that connects creative outputs with wider audiences, facilitating economic transformation through innovation (Aldebert et al., 2011).

Empirical evidence also illustrates the role of culture-based creative industries in local economic development. The case of Kerawang Gayo artisans demonstrates how traditional crafts can generate income when supported by innovation and cultural appreciation, while simultaneously reflecting Islamic economic values such as justice, responsibility, and truthfulness (Nisfah et al., 2023). Similarly, regional initiatives such as those observed in Cirebon highlight how cultural and religious assets can support the positioning of destinations within the halal tourism market (Jaelani, 2016). However, existing studies often emphasize economic outcomes and destination branding, while the inclusivity dimension remains insufficiently addressed.

Halal Tourism

Halal tourism has developed rapidly as a distinct segment within the global tourism industry, supported by demographic growth and increasing awareness of halal consumption. The provision of services that align with Islamic principles—such as halal food, prayer facilities, and culturally appropriate environments—has become a central feature of this sector (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population, holds considerable potential to expand halal tourism in ways that integrate economic, social, and cultural objectives.

The concept of halal tourism is closely linked to inclusive development, which emphasizes equitable access to opportunities and fair distribution of economic benefits (UNDP, 2020). Nevertheless, structural challenges such as limited infrastructure, regulatory constraints, and restricted access to resources continue to hinder its development.

Various studies have proposed models and approaches to halal tourism development. Research in South Sulawesi highlights the importance of regulatory support and infrastructure in strengthening the creative economy within halal tourism (Amiruddin, 2022). Bibliometric studies reveal emerging trends, including the need for interdisciplinary collaboration and targeted marketing strategies (Misbah, 2024). At the local level, initiatives such as Kampung Canting demonstrate how creative economy-based tourism villages integrate cultural and religious elements (Adinugraha & Ma'ruf, 2023).

Innovative approaches have also been identified in different regions. The development of halal tourism in Lombok introduces niche segments such as halal honeymoon tourism, reflecting the integration of multiple industries (Bazin et al., 2024). Analytical approaches, including the use of the Analytical Network Process (ANP), provide structured frameworks for prioritizing development strategies while aligning them with Islamic principles (Mukti & Andriyanto, 2024; Wahab et al., 2023). Community-based models, as observed in Aceh villages, emphasize active participation in tourism development, allowing local communities to maintain cultural identity while benefiting economically (Amsal et al., 2022; Yusuf et al., 2021).

The integration of local wisdom and technological innovation further enriches halal tourism development. Studies highlight the role of cultural representation in shaping tourism experiences (Arintyas & Budiman, 2023) and the contribution of halal ecotourism models in supporting sustainability and income generation (Sonjaya et al., 2024). The adoption of digital technologies, including smart tourism applications, enhances accessibility and personalization for Muslim travelers (Hidayat, 2023), while the development of Muslim-friendly destinations expands market opportunities (Mandalia, 2023).

Theoretical Lens

This study is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives that provide a foundation for analyzing the integration of the creative economy and halal tourism. First, the framework of Islamic economics, particularly the concept of *Maqasid al-Shariah*, emphasizes the achievement of human well-being through the preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth. Within the context of halal tourism and the creative economy, this perspective highlights the importance of ethical business practices, social justice, and balanced development. The integration of Sharia principles into tourism and economic activities ensures that growth is aligned with moral and societal values, as reflected in prior studies on halal tourism development (Mukti & Andriyanto, 2024; Yusuf et al., 2021).

Second, inclusive development theory provides a framework for understanding how economic growth can be distributed equitably across different segments of society. This perspective emphasizes participation, access to opportunities, and the reduction of inequality, particularly for marginalized groups such as women, youth, and MSMEs (UNDP, 2020). In the context of this study, inclusive development highlights the need to ensure that the benefits of halal tourism

and the creative economy extend beyond economic indicators to encompass social welfare and community empowerment.

Third, the pentahelix model offers a collaborative framework that involves five key stakeholders: government, academia, industry, community, and media. This model underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement and cross-sectoral coordination in achieving sustainable development outcomes. Previous studies indicate that effective collaboration among these actors enhances the development of halal tourism ecosystems and supports innovation within the creative economy (Santoso & Cahyani, 2022). These theoretical perspectives collectively provide a comprehensive lens for examining how the integration of halal tourism and the creative economy can contribute to inclusive and sustainable regional development.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative design integrated with the Delphi–Analytic Network Process (ANP) approach to formulate an inclusive model for the development of the creative economy and halal tourism. The qualitative design facilitates an in-depth exploration of expert perspectives, while the Delphi–ANP framework supports structured consensus-building and multi-criteria decision analysis.

Descriptive analysis aims to present factual conditions and provide accurate interpretations of observed phenomena. According to Ibrahim (2023), this approach emphasizes the systematic description of events, relationships, and conditions to enhance understanding of social realities. In this study, descriptive analysis was utilized during the initial phase to capture insights from experts and practitioners regarding the dynamics of creative economy and halal tourism development. These insights informed the preliminary conceptualization of the integration model and provided a contextual basis for further analysis.

The research design also incorporates elements of stakeholder collaboration, drawing on the Triple Helix framework, which highlights the interaction between academia, industry, and government in fostering innovation and policy development (Ranga & Etzkowitz, 2013). Respondents were selected purposively to represent these key stakeholder groups, ensuring that the model reflects diverse perspectives relevant to the development of the creative economy and halal tourism.

Data Collection Method

Data were collected through multiple techniques to ensure depth and triangulation of information, including in-depth interviews, literature review, and structured questionnaires. In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format with selected respondents from three stakeholder groups: academics, regulators, and practitioners. Academic respondents were drawn from IAIN Takengon, particularly those involved in Sharia tourism studies and human resource development. Regulatory perspectives were represented by officials from the Aceh Tengah Tourism Office and the Aceh Tengah Industry and Trade Office, focusing on policies related to halal tourism, halal products, and supporting infrastructure. Practitioner respondents included business actors in the halal tourism and creative economy sectors, particularly those

engaged in production and marketing activities. These interviews facilitated the collection of detailed insights into challenges, opportunities, and strategic considerations in developing an inclusive model.

Literature review served as a foundational component for constructing the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study. Literature research involves systematic reading and critical analysis to support research design and conceptual development (Li & Wan, 2022). Sources included peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and SINTA, as well as relevant books and policy documents related to the creative economy and halal tourism in Indonesia.

Questionnaires were administered in two forms. First, open-ended and structured Delphi questionnaires were distributed to gather and refine expert judgments across multiple rounds. Second, pairwise comparison questionnaires were employed to support the ANP analysis, enabling respondents to assess the relative importance of criteria and sub-criteria. These instruments were designed to capture both qualitative insights and quantitative evaluations necessary for model development.

Data Analysis Method

The data analysis process integrates the Delphi method and the Analytic Network Process (ANP) to generate a structured and comprehensive model. The Delphi method involves iterative rounds of questionnaires designed to achieve consensus among experts (Ismail & Taliep, 2023). This method has been widely utilized in policy analysis, forecasting, and complex decision-making contexts (Al-Qutaish, 2025). In this study, the Delphi process was conducted to identify, refine, and prioritize key criteria and sub-criteria relevant to the integration of the creative economy and halal tourism. The iterative nature of this process allowed respondents to reconsider their evaluations in light of group feedback, leading to a more stable and reliable consensus.

Following the Delphi stage, the Analytic Network Process (ANP), as illustrated in Figure 1, was employed to examine the interrelationships among the identified criteria. Unlike hierarchical models, ANP accommodates interdependencies and feedback loops among decision elements, allowing for a more comprehensive representation of complex systems. The pairwise comparison data obtained from respondents were processed using Super Decisions software to calculate priority weights and assess the relative influence of each component within the network.

The overall analytical procedure was conducted in four sequential stages. The first stage involved data collection and identification through interviews, literature review, focus group discussions, and Delphi questionnaires, culminating in the prioritization of criteria. The second stage focused on model development, where the ANP structure was constructed and reviewed through expert consultation. The third stage involved data analysis using pairwise comparisons to generate quantitative inputs for the ANP model. The final stage emphasized interpretation and validation, where the results were examined and aligned with expert perspectives to ensure consistency and relevance.

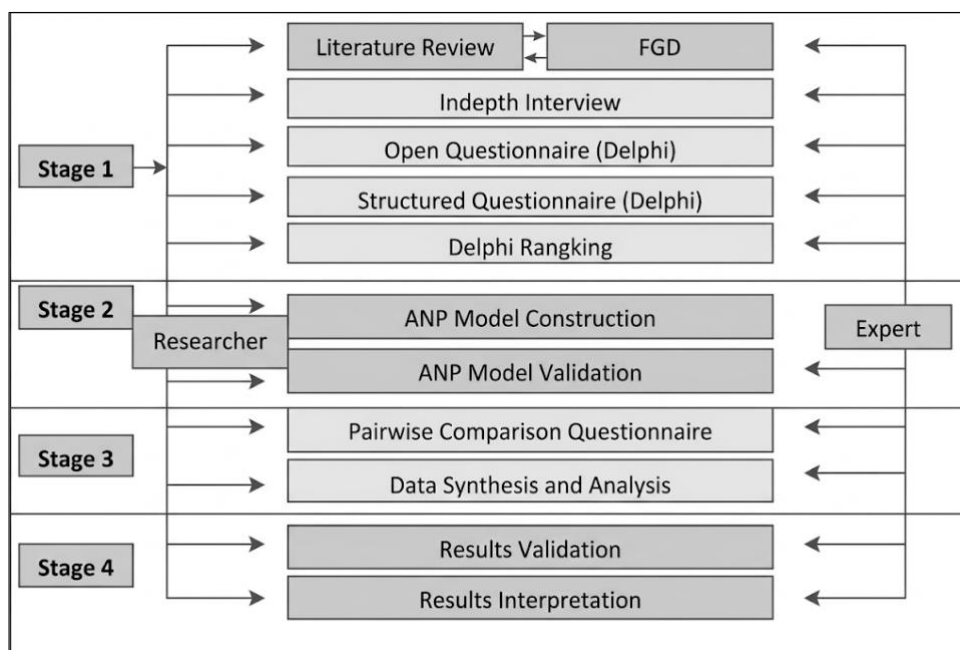


Figure 1. Research Stages in the Delphi-ANP Integration Process

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings derived from the Delphi–Analytic Network Process (ANP) analysis and examines their implications within the context of developing an inclusive creative economy and halal tourism model. The results reflect structured expert judgments regarding key issues, priority solutions, and strategic directions, as processed through the Super Decisions software. These findings are subsequently interpreted in relation to existing theoretical perspectives and prior studies, allowing for a deeper understanding of the interconnected challenges and opportunities within the sector. The discussion focuses on how the identified priorities—ranging from accessibility and human resources to marketing and environmental considerations—interact within a broader development framework that emphasizes inclusivity, sustainability, and alignment with Islamic economic principles.

Results

ANP Model Construction and Priority Issues

The formulation of the development model for the creative economy and halal tourism was conducted through several analytical stages. The initial stage involved constructing the Analytic Network Process (ANP) framework, which systematically maps the relationships among problems, solutions, and strategic priorities. The resulting framework is illustrated in Figure 2.

The analysis, processed using Super Decisions software, was based on expert responses collected through structured questionnaires. These responses were quantified and incorporated into the ANP model to generate priority rankings. The results identified four primary categories of issues: accessibility, human resources, marketing, and environment. The prioritization was determined using the geometric mean (Geomean) of expert assessments.

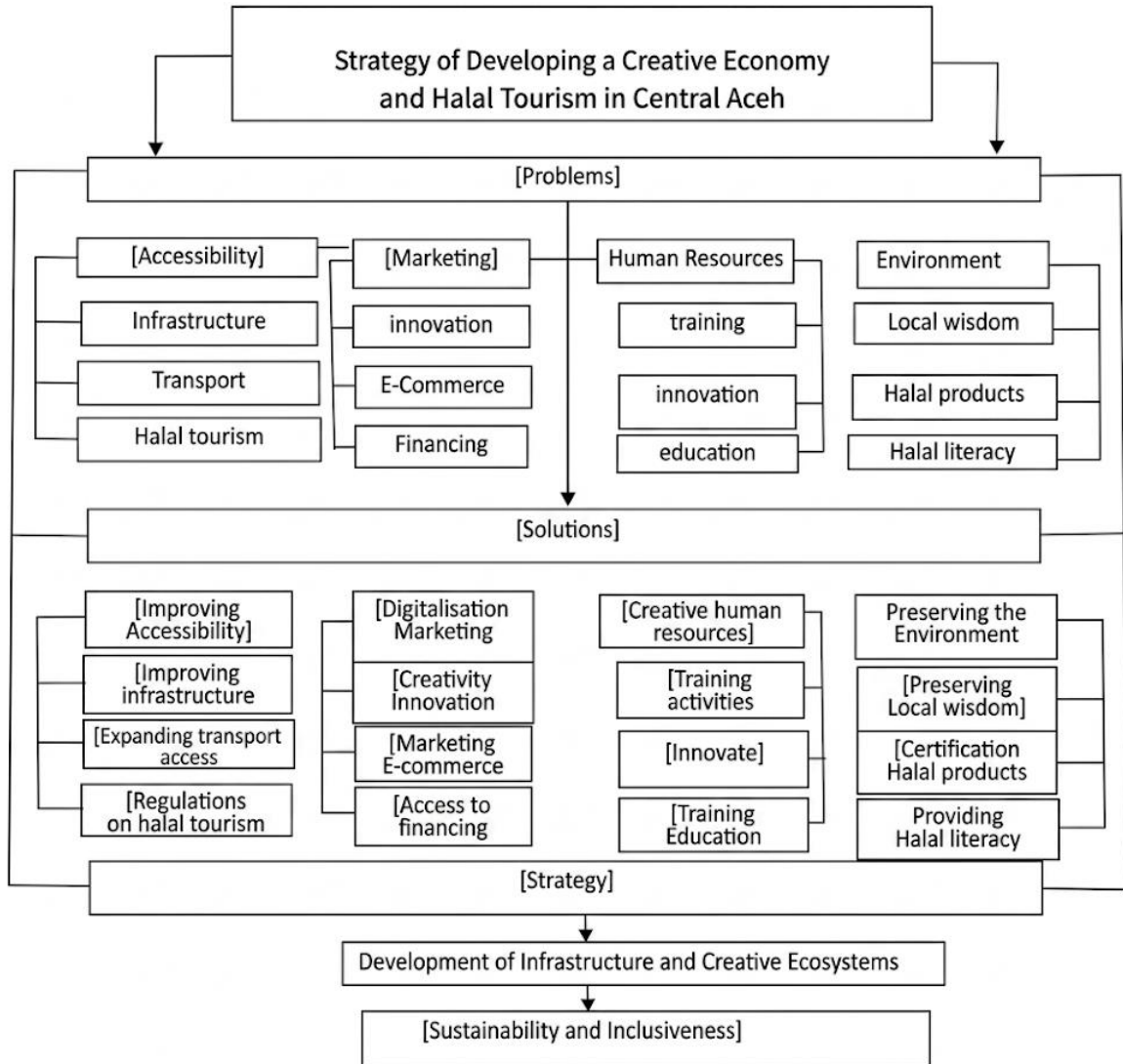


Figure 2. Model Construction ANP

Accessibility emerged as the most critical issue, with a weight of 0.602, followed by human resources (0.322), marketing (0.284), and environment (0.174). The Kendall’s W coefficient of 0.383 indicates a moderate level of agreement among experts regarding these priorities (Figure 3).

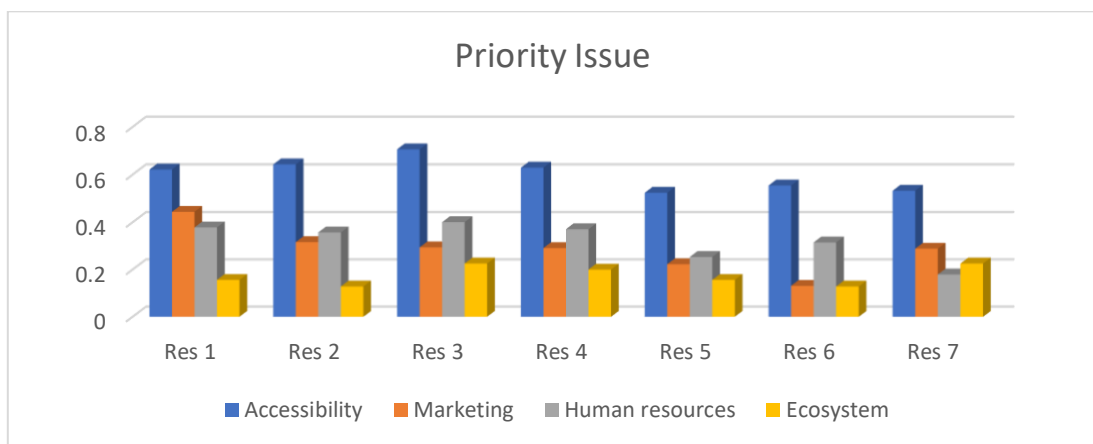


Figure 3. Priority Criteria for Issues

Further analysis of sub-criteria (Figure 4) highlights several key concerns: infrastructure development (0.60), limited training and capacity-building (0.28), insufficient promotion of halal products (0.32), and underutilization of e-commerce platforms (0.17). These findings reflect the multidimensional challenges faced in integrating the creative economy with halal tourism.

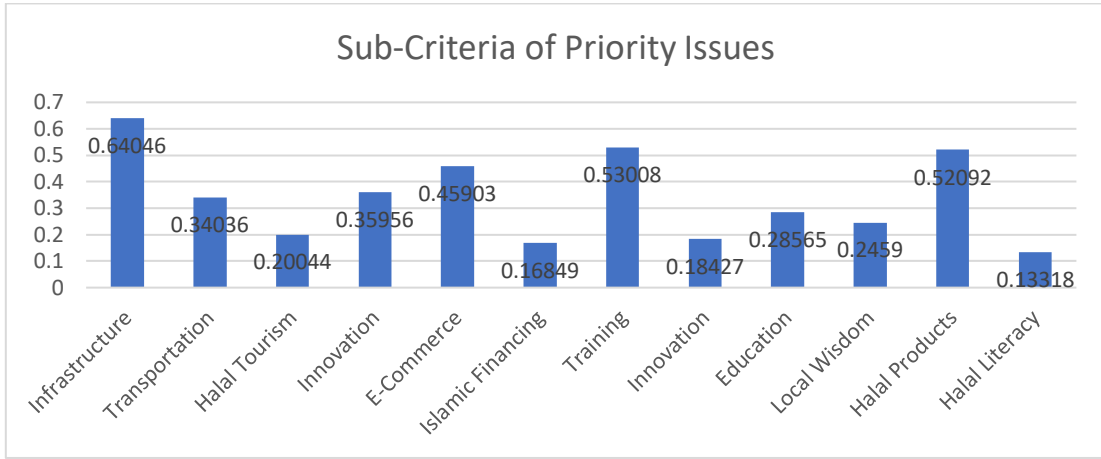


Figure 4. Sub-Criteria of Priority Issues

Priority Solutions

The prioritization of solutions was derived from the same analytical process using Super Decisions software. Four main solution criteria were identified: enhancing accessibility, developing creative human resources, digitalizing marketing, and preserving the environment (Figure 5).

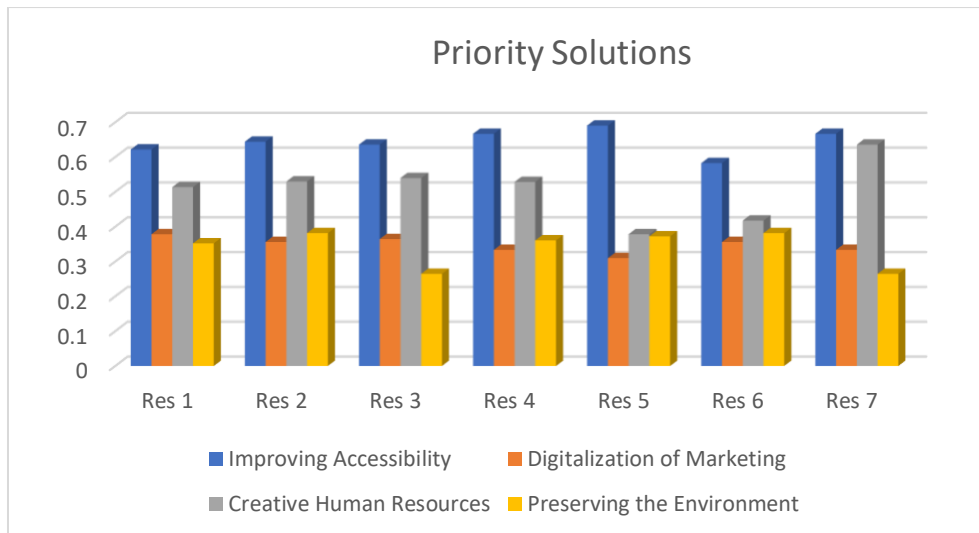


Figure 5. Priority Criteria for Solutions

Based on the Geomean values, enhancing accessibility ranked highest (0.644), followed by human resource development (0.506), marketing digitalization (0.347), and environmental preservation (0.340). The Kendall’s W value of 0.608 reflects a relatively strong level of consensus among experts.

At the sub-solution level (Figure 6), the most prominent priorities include infrastructure development (0.64), training and capacity-building initiatives (0.53), strengthening halal products (0.52), and expanding e-commerce utilization (0.45). These components collectively represent the core elements of the proposed development model.

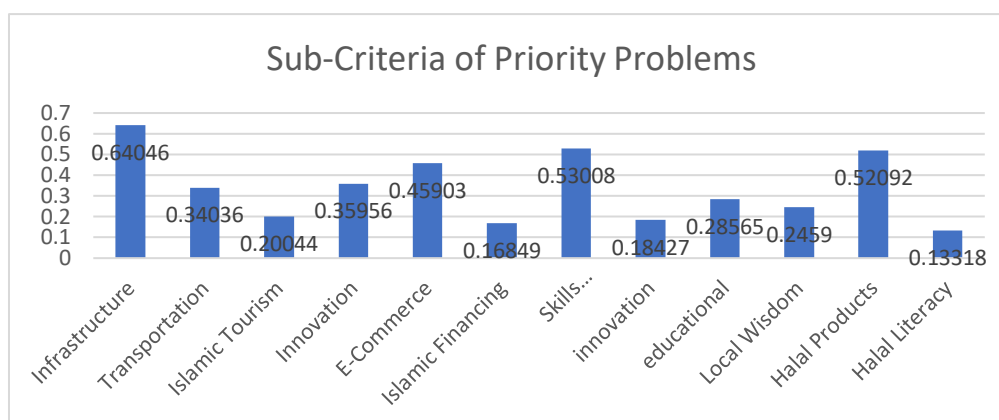


Figure 6. Priority criteria for solutions among the sub-criteria

Strategic Framework

The analysis further identified two principal strategic orientations for advancing the creative economy and halal tourism (Figure 7). The first focuses on the development of creative infrastructure and ecosystem strengthening, encompassing both physical and digital dimensions. The second emphasizes sustainable and inclusive development, integrating environmental considerations with socio-economic objectives.



Figure 7. Strategic Priorities

Discussion

Accessibility as a Structural Constraint and Enabler

The prominence of accessibility as the highest-priority issue reflects a structural constraint that extends beyond physical mobility and intersects with broader processes of regional economic integration. In Aceh Tengah, geographical characteristics, including mountainous terrain and routes that are prone to landslides, create persistent barriers to connectivity among production centers, tourism destinations, and markets. These conditions limit not only tourist mobility but

also the distribution of creative economy products, such as Gayo coffee, handicrafts, and local culinary offerings.

From an analytical standpoint, accessibility functions as a foundational variable within the regional development system. Its influence operates across multiple dimensions, shaping market access, determining cost efficiency, and affecting the inclusiveness of economic participation. The high weight assigned to accessibility (0.602) indicates that experts perceive infrastructure limitations as a binding constraint that reduces the effectiveness of other development components. This interpretation aligns with Absah et al. (2024), who emphasize that accessible halal tourism infrastructure enhances destination competitiveness and strengthens brand positioning. Similarly, Chwaja et al. (2025) identify accessibility as a central determinant of inclusive tourism, highlighting its contribution to quality of life and broader participation.

At the same time, accessibility should not be understood solely as a technical or logistical concern. The findings suggest that infrastructure development remains uneven and insufficiently aligned with the specific requirements of halal tourism. The limited availability of integrated facilities, including gender-sensitive prayer spaces and halal-certified rest areas, indicates that infrastructure planning has yet to fully internalize Sharia-compliant standards. This situation reveals a misalignment between physical development and the normative framework underlying halal tourism. In addition, digital accessibility introduces an additional layer of complexity. Although physical access remains constrained, digital platforms offer potential pathways to reduce these limitations. However, the relatively low prioritization of e-commerce (0.17) suggests that digital integration has not yet been effectively leveraged as a complementary mechanism to address existing accessibility challenges.

Capacity Gaps of Human Capital Innovation Potential

Human resources emerge as the second most critical issue, highlighting the centrality of human capital in driving both the creative economy and halal tourism. The relatively high priority assigned to human resources (0.322) reflects persistent concerns regarding skills, knowledge, and service quality. These concerns are particularly relevant in sectors that rely heavily on creativity, cultural interpretation, and service delivery aligned with Islamic values.

The findings indicate that human resource challenges are not merely quantitative but qualitative in nature. The issue is less about workforce availability and more about the alignment of competencies with industry needs. This includes the ability to integrate creativity with Sharia-compliant service standards, as well as the capacity to adapt to digital transformation. Wildan (2024) highlights that while demographic factors do not directly influence innovation, structured training significantly enhances creative output. This suggests that the effectiveness of human capital development depends on targeted interventions rather than general workforce expansion.

Moreover, Yoshinta et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of cultural competence and service orientation within halal tourism. This introduces an additional layer of complexity, as human resources must navigate both professional standards and religious expectations. The findings of this study suggest that existing training programs remain fragmented and insufficiently institutionalized, as reflected in the relatively high weight assigned to training as a sub-issue (0.28).

A critical observation is that human resource development has not yet been fully integrated into a systemic innovation framework. While training initiatives exist, they often lack continuity, coordination, and alignment with broader development strategies. This fragmentation limits their impact and reduces the sector's ability to generate sustained innovation. In this regard, the role of educational institutions and industry collaboration becomes crucial, particularly within the framework of the Triple Helix model (Ranga & Etzkowitz, 2013).

The Untapped Potential in Marketing and Digitalization

Marketing-related challenges reflect a combination of conceptual ambiguity and operational limitations. The relatively lower priority assigned to marketing (0.284) compared to accessibility and human resources does not diminish its importance; rather, it suggests that marketing issues are often perceived as secondary to structural constraints. However, this perception may obscure the strategic role of marketing in shaping demand, positioning destinations, and integrating the creative economy with tourism.

One of the key issues identified is the lack of clear positioning for halal tourism. The sector operates within a dual framework, targeting both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists while maintaining compliance with Islamic principles. This duality creates tension in branding and communication strategies. Aziz (2017) notes that effective marketing in this sector requires careful alignment with cultural and religious sensitivities. Without such alignment, promotional efforts risk being either too generic or too narrowly focused.

The limited utilization of e-commerce platforms (0.17) further highlights the gap between potential and practice. In an increasingly digital economy, the underuse of digital tools represents a missed opportunity to expand market reach and enhance value chain efficiency. Mahjudin et al. (2025) argue that ineffective marketing can hinder regional economic growth, particularly when it fails to integrate stakeholders and leverage tourism's strategic role.

The discussion also points to the transformative role of digitalization. Dinanty and Nawawi (2025) emphasize that digital marketing, when aligned with Sharia principles such as transparency and trust, can enhance both competitiveness and ethical integrity. However, the findings suggest that digital transformation remains uneven, with limited integration into broader development strategies. This indicates a need for more coordinated efforts to bridge the gap between technological capability and practical implementation.

Environmental Sustainability

Environmental considerations, although ranked lowest (0.174), represent a critical dimension of long-term sustainability. The relatively low prioritization suggests that environmental issues are often overshadowed by more immediate economic concerns. However, this imbalance raises important questions regarding the sustainability of current development approaches.

Tourism development inherently interacts with natural ecosystems, and in regions such as Aceh Tengah—where natural landscapes constitute a primary attraction—environmental degradation poses a direct threat to the viability of the sector. The findings indicate that environmental considerations are not consistently integrated into planning processes, leading to potential risks associated with resource depletion and ecological imbalance. This observation is consistent with

Anggraeni et al. (2024), who demonstrate that green economy practices contribute positively to community income and long-term resilience. The challenge, therefore, lies in reconciling short-term economic objectives with long-term environmental sustainability. The relatively low prioritization of environmental issues may reflect a lack of awareness or limited institutional capacity to address these concerns.

A more critical interpretation suggests that environmental sustainability remains peripheral in decision-making frameworks, rather than being embedded as a core principle. This marginalization limits the potential for developing a truly sustainable halal tourism model, particularly one that aligns with Islamic principles of stewardship (*khalifah*) and balance (*mizan*).

Interdependence of Solutions

The prioritization of solutions—particularly the emphasis on accessibility (0.644) and human resource development (0.506)—indicates a recognition of the need for structural and capacity-based interventions. However, the ANP framework reveals that these elements are not independent; rather, they are interconnected within a complex system.

Infrastructure development, for instance, not only improves accessibility but also facilitates human resource mobility, enhances market access, and supports digital connectivity. Similarly, human capital development influences the effectiveness of marketing strategies and the adoption of digital technologies. The role of halal products (0.52) as a strategic differentiator further illustrates the integration between production, branding, and consumer trust. The inclusion of e-commerce (0.45) highlights the potential for digital platforms to act as enablers across multiple dimensions. However, its relatively lower prioritization suggests that digital transformation is still perceived as a supporting factor rather than a central driver. This perception may limit the extent to which digital tools are integrated into development strategies.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce the relevance of the pentahelix model, which emphasizes collaboration among government, academia, industry, community, and media (Santoso & Cahyani, 2022). The interdependence of solutions suggests that isolated interventions are unlikely to produce optimal outcomes. Instead, coordinated and systemic approaches are required to address the complexity of the development process.

Institutional and Implementation Challenges

The development of halal tourism presents unique challenges that distinguish it from conventional tourism. The requirement to comply with Sharia principles introduces additional layers of regulation, standardization, and cultural sensitivity. These requirements affect multiple dimensions, including infrastructure design, service delivery, and marketing strategies. The findings indicate that existing systems have not fully adapted to these requirements. For example, the lack of standardized halal facilities in transportation and tourism infrastructure reflects a gap between policy intentions and implementation. Similarly, human resource limitations suggest that training systems have not been sufficiently aligned with industry needs.

Marketing challenges further illustrate the complexity of positioning halal tourism within a competitive global market. The absence of a clear and consistent narrative creates fragmentation and reduces the effectiveness of promotional efforts. At the same time, social and cultural

environments may not always align with halal values, creating inconsistencies in the tourist experience. These challenges highlight the need for integrated policy frameworks that address the specific requirements of halal tourism while leveraging the potential of the creative economy. The interaction between regulatory structures, institutional capacity, and stakeholder coordination emerges as a critical factor in shaping development outcomes.

Research Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on Islamic economics, halal tourism, and the creative economy through the development of an integrative analytical perspective. Existing studies have often examined these domains separately or have focused on specific dimensions such as certification, marketing, or consumer behavior (Adinugraha et al., 2024). The present findings extend this literature by demonstrating the interdependence between structural factors (e.g., accessibility), human capital, and market mechanisms within a unified framework.

The incorporation of the *Maqasid al-Shariah* perspective provides an important theoretical extension. The findings suggest that the development of halal tourism and the creative economy cannot be understood solely through economic indicators but must also consider ethical, social, and environmental dimensions. The relatively low prioritization of environmental factors, for instance, reveals a gap between normative Islamic principles—such as balance (*mizan*) and stewardship (*khalifah*)—and current development practices. This indicates the need to further conceptualize how Islamic economic principles can be operationalized within contemporary tourism and creative industry frameworks.

In addition, the results reinforce the relevance of inclusive development theory. The prominence of accessibility and human resource issues highlights structural inequalities that limit participation in economic activities. This supports the argument that inclusive development requires not only equitable distribution of outcomes but also equitable access to enabling conditions such as infrastructure, education, and digital resources (UNDP, 2020).

The study also advances the application of the pentahelix model (Santoso & Cahyani, 2022) within the context of halal tourism and the creative economy. The identified interdependencies among solutions suggest that collaboration across government, academia, industry, community, and media is not merely supportive but foundational. This finding calls for a more dynamic interpretation of the pentahelix framework, where stakeholder interactions are viewed as part of a complex adaptive system rather than a linear coordination mechanism.

Methodological Implications

From a methodological standpoint, this study demonstrates the value of integrating the Delphi method with the Analytic Network Process (ANP) in examining complex and multidimensional development issues. The Delphi approach enables the incorporation of expert judgment and iterative consensus-building, while ANP captures the interdependencies among variables that are often overlooked in linear models.

The use of ANP, in particular, provides a more nuanced understanding of priority structures, as it allows for feedback loops and relational analysis between criteria. This is especially relevant in the context of halal tourism and the creative economy, where factors such as infrastructure, human resources, and marketing are deeply interconnected. The findings suggest that future research can benefit from adopting similar hybrid approaches to address complex socio-economic systems.

However, the reliance on expert judgment also introduces certain limitations, particularly in terms of subjectivity and contextual specificity. This highlights the need for future studies to complement ANP-based findings with empirical data, such as quantitative surveys or longitudinal analyses, to enhance generalizability and robustness.

Practical and Policy Implications

The findings provide several important insights for policymakers and practitioners involved in the development of halal tourism and the creative economy. First, the prioritization of accessibility underscores the need for infrastructure development that goes beyond basic connectivity. Infrastructure planning should incorporate halal-compliant facilities, digital accessibility, and integration with local economic systems to ensure both functionality and inclusivity.

Second, the emphasis on human resource development highlights the importance of targeted training programs that align with industry needs. These programs should focus not only on technical skills but also on cultural competence, service quality, and understanding of Sharia principles. Collaboration between educational institutions and industry actors becomes critical in this regard.

Third, the role of digitalization in marketing and distribution suggests that policy interventions should prioritize the development of digital ecosystems. This includes expanding access to e-commerce platforms, improving digital literacy among entrepreneurs, and promoting ethical digital marketing practices aligned with Islamic values (Dinanty & Nawawi, 2025).

Fourth, the relatively low prioritization of environmental factors calls for stronger policy integration of sustainability principles. Environmental considerations should be embedded within tourism planning and creative industry development, rather than treated as supplementary concerns. This includes the adoption of green economy practices and sustainable tourism standards, as highlighted by Anggraeni et al. (2024).

Finally, the interdependent nature of the identified solutions indicates that isolated policy interventions are unlikely to produce optimal outcomes. Instead, a coordinated approach involving multiple stakeholders is required. The pentahelix model provides a useful framework for facilitating such collaboration, particularly in aligning policy objectives with local needs and industry dynamics.

Managerial Implications

For practitioners and industry actors, the findings highlight the importance of strategic alignment between business practices and broader development objectives. Entrepreneurs in the creative

economy and halal tourism sectors need to adopt a more integrated approach that combines product innovation, digital marketing, and adherence to halal standards.

The role of halal products as a strategic differentiator suggests that businesses can enhance competitiveness through quality assurance, certification, and branding that emphasizes ethical values. At the same time, the expansion of e-commerce platforms offers opportunities to reach wider markets and improve operational efficiency.

Managers also need to recognize the importance of collaboration, both within and across sectors. Partnerships with local communities, government agencies, and academic institutions can enhance resource access, knowledge sharing, and innovation capacity. This collaborative approach is particularly important in addressing shared challenges such as infrastructure limitations and market access.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the development of the creative economy and halal tourism in Aceh Tengah Regency requires a more integrated and sustainability-oriented strategic direction. Expert analysis highlights four key priority areas that shape this development process, namely improving accessibility, strengthening creative human resources, promoting digital marketing, and ensuring environmental preservation. Accessibility emerges as a foundational concern that influences regional connectivity, community participation, and overall competitiveness. Creative human resource development plays a central role in fostering innovation and productivity, while also supporting the long-term continuity of both sectors. Digital marketing introduces new avenues for expanding market reach and promoting tourism in ways that remain aligned with Sharia principles. At the same time, environmental preservation provides the essential basis for maintaining ecological balance and ensuring the sustainability of tourism destinations. Conceptually, the development direction is anchored in two main pillars: strengthening infrastructure alongside the creative ecosystem, and embedding principles of sustainability and inclusiveness within regional development practices. The interaction between these pillars reflects an effort to build a development model that is not only economically productive but also culturally rooted and socially balanced.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the understanding of how creative economy and halal tourism can be integrated within a unified development framework grounded in Islamic economic values. The findings reinforce the relevance of inclusive development theory, particularly in emphasizing equitable access to infrastructure, human capital development, and digital opportunities. In addition, the study extends the application of the pentahelix approach by illustrating how collaboration among stakeholders becomes essential in addressing interconnected development challenges. Practically, the results offer important insights for policymakers and practitioners in designing development strategies that prioritize infrastructure improvement, human resource empowerment, digital transformation, and environmental sustainability in a more coordinated manner. These elements collectively support the creation of a regional development model that is innovative, inclusive, and competitive, while also strengthening local cultural identity and Islamic values as guiding principles for sustainable growth.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The reliance on expert-based judgments through the Delphi–ANP approach may introduce subjectivity and limit the generalizability of the findings beyond the specific context of Aceh Tengah. In addition, the study focuses primarily on structural and strategic dimensions, while behavioral and longitudinal dynamics of stakeholders were not extensively examined. Future research may expand the scope by incorporating empirical quantitative validation, comparative regional analysis, or longitudinal studies to capture the evolution of halal tourism and the creative economy over time. Further studies may also explore the integration of digital transformation and environmental sustainability in greater depth, particularly in relation to community-level impacts and Islamic economic ethics in practice.

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