

Digital Transformation and Tourist Loyalty in Rural Halal Tourism: Evidence from Aceh, Indonesia

ABSTRACT - Tourism development has increasingly shifted toward digital integration and experience-based services, including within the growing sector of rural halal tourism. In Aceh Province, Indonesia, the expansion of halal tourism reflects not only the region's Islamic identity but also the increasing importance of digital platforms in shaping tourist experiences and destination competitiveness. This study examines the role of digital transformation in rural halal tourism, particularly the influence of social media, destination image, tourist satisfaction, and tourist loyalty. A quantitative approach was employed using survey data collected from 240 respondents who had visited rural halal tourism destinations in Aceh. Data were measured using a five-point Likert scale and analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS. The findings indicate that digital transformation, halal tourism, social media, and destination image significantly influence tourist satisfaction, with social media emerging as the strongest determinant. In relation to tourist loyalty, only social media and tourist satisfaction demonstrate direct significant effects, whereas digital transformation, halal tourism, and destination image affect loyalty indirectly through tourist satisfaction. The results highlight the important mediating role of tourist satisfaction in connecting tourism experiences with revisit intention and positive word-of-mouth behavior. This study contributes to the literature on halal tourism and digital tourism development by offering empirical evidence from rural halal destinations in Aceh and emphasizing the strategic importance of social media and tourist satisfaction in strengthening sustainable tourist loyalty.

ABSTRAK - Transformasi Digital dan Loyalitas Wisatawan pada Wisata Halal Pedesaan: Bukti dari Aceh, Indonesia. Perkembangan industri pariwisata semakin mengarah pada integrasi digital dan pengalaman wisata berbasis layanan, termasuk pada sektor wisata halal pedesaan yang terus berkembang. Di Provinsi Aceh, pengembangan wisata halal tidak hanya mencerminkan identitas keislaman daerah, tetapi juga menunjukkan pentingnya pemanfaatan teknologi digital dalam membentuk pengalaman wisatawan dan daya saing destinasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran transformasi digital dalam wisata halal pedesaan di Aceh, khususnya pengaruh media sosial, citra destinasi, kepuasan wisatawan, dan loyalitas wisatawan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan melibatkan 240 responden wisatawan yang pernah mengunjungi destinasi wisata halal pedesaan di Aceh. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner skala Likert lima poin dan dianalisis menggunakan Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) dengan bantuan AMOS. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa transformasi digital, wisata halal, media sosial, dan citra destinasi berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kepuasan wisatawan, dengan media sosial menjadi faktor yang paling dominan. Dalam kaitannya dengan loyalitas wisatawan, hanya media sosial dan kepuasan wisatawan yang berpengaruh langsung secara signifikan, sedangkan transformasi digital, wisata halal, dan citra destinasi memengaruhi loyalitas secara tidak langsung melalui kepuasan wisatawan. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa kepuasan wisatawan memiliki peran penting sebagai mediator yang menghubungkan pengalaman wisata dengan niat berkunjung kembali dan rekomendasi positif. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi empiris terhadap pengembangan literatur wisata halal dan pariwisata digital, khususnya dalam konteks destinasi wisata halal pedesaan di Aceh, serta menekankan pentingnya optimalisasi media sosial dan peningkatan kepuasan wisatawan dalam memperkuat loyalitas wisatawan secara berkelanjutan.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become one of the strategic sectors contributing significantly to global economic growth and regional development. Over the past decades, the tourism industry has expanded rapidly and created new opportunities for employment, investment, and community empowerment across many countries. Data from the ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism indicate that in 2019 the tourism sector contributed 10.9% to global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), highlighting its substantial role in supporting economic activities worldwide. This condition has encouraged many countries and regions to continuously develop innovative tourism destinations capable of attracting domestic and international visitors. In Indonesia, tourism development has increasingly diversified, particularly through the emergence of alternative and community-based tourism models that integrate local culture, environmental sustainability, and religious values.

One of the tourism models that has gained considerable attention in recent years is halal tourism, particularly halal village tourism. This concept combines rural tourism experiences with Islamic principles in tourism services and destination management. Aceh represents a relevant context for the development of halal village tourism because of its strong Islamic identity, implementation of Sharia law, and abundant natural and cultural resources. The province possesses distinctive characteristics that support the integration of tourism activities with Islamic values, making it potentially competitive as a halal tourism destination. In this context, halal tourism reflects not only contemporary tourism trends but also the sociocultural identity of Acehese society.

Rural halal tourism refers to tourism activities developed within village environments that integrate local culture, natural attractions, and community participation with tourism services that comply with Islamic principles. The concept includes the provision of halal-certified food, worship facilities, Islam-compliant accommodations, and modest recreational activities designed to meet the needs of Muslim travelers. In addition, the management of halal tourism villages emphasizes Islamic ethical values such as *siddiq* (honesty), *tabligh* (communication), *amanah* (trustworthiness), and *fathonah* (wisdom), while also encouraging the growth of creative economic activities and halal-based infrastructure (Kurniasari & Zakik, 2023; Adinugraha et al., 2021; Kamri et al., 2014). The development of halal tourism villages is therefore closely associated with efforts to strengthen local economies and promote sustainable tourism practices.

Despite its potential, the development of halal tourism villages continues to face various structural and managerial challenges. Previous studies have identified several recurring issues, including the duplication of tourism village models, limited diversification of tourism products, weak standardization systems, tourism products that are insufficiently rooted in local potential, and inadequate packaging of tourism experiences (Ladsawut, 2023). In Aceh, these challenges are further intensified by limitations in digital infrastructure and technological capability. Many rural tourism destinations still experience restricted internet connectivity, low utilization of digital platforms, and limited digital literacy among tourism operators. Such conditions reduce the ability of tourism villages to expand market reach, improve visitor experiences, and compete with destinations in other regions.

The growing importance of digital transformation has altered the way tourism destinations interact with visitors and manage tourism services. Digital technologies such as online reservation systems, mobile applications, and social media platforms increasingly shape tourist experiences and destination competitiveness. Within rural tourism contexts, digital transformation creates opportunities to improve operational efficiency, strengthen destination promotion, and facilitate communication with potential tourists. However, the extent to which digital transformation contributes to tourist satisfaction and loyalty in halal tourism villages remains insufficiently explored, particularly in regions with limited technological readiness such as Aceh.

Tourist satisfaction is widely recognized as an important determinant of destination loyalty (Syahputra et al., 2025). Positive travel experiences encourage tourists to revisit destinations, recommend them to others, and share their experiences through interpersonal communication and digital platforms. Satisfaction is influenced by various factors, including the quality of tourism services, destination image, digital accessibility, and the compatibility of tourism facilities with visitor expectations. In halal tourism destinations, the availability of Sharia-compliant facilities such as halal food and worship spaces can strengthen tourists' trust and comfort, particularly among Muslim travelers. At the same time, digital transformation and social media engagement increasingly influence tourists' perceptions, travel decisions, and emotional attachment to destinations.

Social media has become an essential component of tourism marketing because it enables destinations to communicate with broader audiences and distribute visual content interactively and in real time. Social media marketing also contributes to increasing awareness, recognition, and recall among consumers regarding tourism brands and destinations (Ikramuddin et al., 2021). Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter facilitate the dissemination of travel experiences, tourist reviews, and destination information that may influence travel intentions and visitor expectations. Previous studies suggest that effective social media marketing can strengthen destination attractiveness and positively affect tourist satisfaction (Rusydi et al., 2021). Nevertheless, limited research has examined how social media marketing contributes to tourist satisfaction and loyalty within the context of halal tourism villages in Aceh.

Another important factor associated with tourist satisfaction is destination image. Destination image refers to a set of impressions, beliefs, and perceptions regarding a destination that are formed through information, experiences, and interactions from multiple sources (Chiu et al., 2016). Rajesh (2013) explains that destination image plays an important role in travel decision-making, while Mbira (2024) argues that destination image develops through individual perceptions and interpretations of a destination. Tourist experiences, promotional activities, and levels of satisfaction may all shape destination image (Puh, 2014). The concept encompasses cognitive, affective, and unique dimensions that collectively influence tourists' evaluations of destinations. Prior studies have identified a positive relationship between destination image and tourist satisfaction. Chia et al. (2021) found that destinations capable of meeting or exceeding tourist expectations tend to generate higher satisfaction and stronger loyalty through revisit intentions and recommendations. Conversely, discrepancies between promoted images and actual experiences may create dissatisfaction and negatively affect destination reputation (Rajesh, 2013).

Although previous studies have discussed halal tourism, social media marketing, digital transformation, destination image, and tourist satisfaction, limited attention has been directed toward understanding the interconnected role of these factors within rural halal tourism destinations in Aceh. Existing research has not sufficiently examined how digital transformation and destination image collectively contribute to tourist satisfaction and loyalty in halal tourism villages, particularly within regions characterized by strong Islamic cultural identity and developing digital infrastructure. This study therefore seeks to examine the relationships among digital transformation, social media marketing, destination image, tourist satisfaction, and tourist loyalty in the context of halal tourism villages in Aceh.

The study is expected to contribute theoretically to the growing literature on halal tourism and destination management by expanding understanding of the role of digital transformation and destination image in shaping tourist behavior within rural tourism settings. Practically, the findings may provide insights for tourism managers, local communities, and policymakers in designing sustainable tourism strategies that strengthen the competitiveness of halal tourism villages in Aceh while supporting local economic development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Transformation

Digital transformation has become an important aspect of contemporary tourism development, particularly in improving tourism services, destination promotion, and visitor experiences through digital technology. The integration of digital systems into tourism activities has changed the way destinations communicate with tourists and deliver tourism services. According to Cuomo et al. (2021), digital transformation enables the co-creation of tourism experiences through the utilization of social big data, allowing interactions between tourists and destinations to become more personalized and relevant. The increasing use of digital platforms also facilitates broader access to tourism information and enhances communication between tourism providers and visitors.

Within the context of halal tourism, digital innovation plays a strategic role in supporting the needs of Muslim tourists. Azam et al. (2024) explain that digital technologies contribute to improving Muslim tourist experiences through features such as halal travel applications, digital maps for worship facilities, and recommendations for halal-certified restaurants. These technological developments help tourists obtain information more efficiently and support convenience during travel activities. Similarly, Yap et al. (2025), through a systematic review, found that smart tourism technologies (STT) have a direct influence on tourist satisfaction and may strengthen tourist loyalty. Digital transformation in tourism therefore extends beyond technological infrastructure and includes the growing role of digital communication and social media engagement in shaping tourism experiences (Floris & Campagna, 2014; Putra et al., 2025).

Rural Halal Tourism

Rural tourism has developed as an alternative tourism model that emphasizes local identity, community participation, and sustainable development. Although the concept continues to

evolve, Rosalina et al. (2021) identify four central dimensions of rural tourism, namely location, sustainability, community-based characteristics, and tourism experiences. In many regions, rural tourism has become an instrument for promoting local economic development while preserving cultural and environmental resources.

Halal tourism represents a tourism concept that integrates Islamic principles into tourism products and services. This includes the availability of halal food, worship facilities, and family-friendly accommodations designed to meet the spiritual and practical needs of Muslim tourists (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Suhartanto et al., 2021). In the context of rural tourism, halal tourism combines Islamic values with the cultural uniqueness and natural potential of tourism villages. Rural halal tourism therefore refers to tourism activities in village areas that provide tourism services consistent with Islamic Sharia principles while maintaining local traditions and community identity.

Several dimensions characterize rural halal tourism. These include Sharia compliance (Battour & Ismail, 2016), Islamic spiritual capital (Kurniasari & Zakik, 2023), community empowerment, sustainability, and the integration of creative economic activities (Adinugraha et al., 2021). The development of halal tourism villages is closely associated with the role of local communities in preserving Islamic values while creating tourism products that are economically productive and culturally authentic.

Previous studies also indicate that the success of halal tourism development is influenced by both spiritual and technological factors. Adinugraha et al. (2021) and Kurniasari and Zakik (2023) emphasize the importance of spiritual capital and creative economic activities in strengthening halal tourism destinations. In addition, Martaleni et al. (2025) demonstrate that tourist religiosity strengthens the relationship between halal service quality and tourist loyalty. The role of digital transformation has also become increasingly significant in halal tourism development. Smart tourism technologies and digital innovations facilitate access to halal-related information and tourism services, contributing to more positive tourist experiences and stronger loyalty intentions (Azam et al., 2024; Yap et al., 2025).

Social Media

Social media has transformed communication patterns within the tourism industry and has become an important medium for tourism marketing and tourist engagement. As an internet-based technology, social media enables individuals and organizations to create, exchange, and distribute information interactively and in real time. Kerpen (2017) notes that social media has changed the media landscape by providing users with broad access to information sharing and communication activities.

In recent years, the rapid growth of social media platforms has significantly influenced tourism promotion and destination marketing strategies (Chu et al., 2020). Tourism destinations increasingly utilize platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to disseminate visual content, interact with tourists, and strengthen destination branding. Intensive social media use may increase awareness of tourism products and services and enhance destination visibility among potential visitors (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Positive reviews and tourism-related

information shared through social media also contribute to shaping favorable public perceptions regarding tourist destinations (Rialti et al., 2023).

The effectiveness of social media in influencing tourist behavior has been highlighted in several studies. Priskila (2018) explains that social media marketing represents an effective approach for attracting tourists to visit specific destinations. Acharjee and Ahmed (2025) found that social media significantly affects tourists' decision-making processes, particularly in relation to emerging tourism destinations. Likewise, Keelson et al. (2024) identify social media as one of the major factors influencing tourist decisions in developing countries. These findings indicate that social media not only functions as a promotional tool but also shapes tourist perceptions, expectations, and travel intentions.

Destination Image

Destination image is an important concept in tourism studies because it reflects tourists' perceptions and evaluations of a destination. Jebbouri et al. (2022) define destination image as the image of core tourism products associated with tourist attractions and tourism facilities that directly fulfill tourists' primary needs. Destination image generally develops through information obtained from multiple sources, including advertisements, travel experiences, recommendations, and online reviews.

The formation of destination image plays an important role in influencing tourist expectations and experiences. Tourists who perceive a destination positively are more likely to expect enjoyable and satisfying travel experiences. A destination that is viewed as attractive, safe, culturally unique, and accessible tends to generate stronger tourist interest and positive emotional responses. Social media and digital communication platforms also increasingly contribute to the formation of destination image, particularly through visual content and user-generated reviews that shape tourist perceptions before visiting a destination.

The relationship between destination image and tourist satisfaction has received considerable attention in tourism research. A positive destination image may strengthen tourist confidence and increase the likelihood of satisfaction when the tourism experience aligns with visitor expectations. Conversely, inconsistencies between the promoted image and actual tourist experiences may negatively affect visitor perceptions and reduce satisfaction levels.

Tourist Satisfaction

Tourist satisfaction refers to tourists' evaluations of their travel experiences after comparing perceived performance with their initial expectations. Satisfaction emerges when tourism products, services, and experiences meet or exceed visitor expectations, whereas dissatisfaction occurs when experiences fail to fulfill anticipated standards. Nisco et al. (2015) explain that tourist satisfaction reflects feelings of pleasure or disappointment arising from comparisons between expectations and actual experiences.

In tourism contexts, satisfaction is influenced by various aspects, including service quality, destination attractiveness, accessibility, digital convenience, and emotional experiences during visits. Satisfied tourists are generally more likely to revisit destinations, provide positive recommendations, and share favorable experiences with others. Consequently, tourist

satisfaction is widely recognized as an important factor in maintaining destination competitiveness and encouraging long-term tourism sustainability.

Loyalty

Tourist loyalty is commonly understood as tourists' intentions to revisit destinations and recommend them to others through positive word-of-mouth communication. Loyalty reflects a favorable relationship between tourists and destinations that develops through positive travel experiences and emotional attachment. Rajesh (2013) explains that destination loyalty is closely associated with tourist perceptions, destination image, and tourist satisfaction.

Previous studies have demonstrated the important role of destination image and tourist satisfaction in strengthening tourist loyalty. Mbira (2024) found that a positive destination image contributes to higher tourist satisfaction, which subsequently encourages loyalty intentions. In addition, Torabi et al. (2023) report that smart tourism technologies may strengthen revisit intentions and positive word-of-mouth behavior, particularly within smart rural tourism destinations. These findings indicate that technological innovation, destination image, and tourist satisfaction collectively shape tourists' loyalty toward tourism destinations.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine digital transformation in rural halal tourism destinations in Aceh Province, with particular attention to the role of social media in shaping destination image, tourist satisfaction, and tourist loyalty. A survey design was selected because it allows the collection of standardized data from a relatively large number of respondents and facilitates the examination of relationships among variables within a structured research model. The study focused on tourists who visited rural halal tourism destinations in Aceh and evaluated their perceptions regarding digital transformation and tourism experiences.

The research population consisted of domestic tourists from various regions in Indonesia who had visited halal tourism villages in Aceh. Since the entire population could not be reached, the sample size was determined according to the recommendation of Hair et al. (2019), who suggest a minimum sample size of five to ten times the number of research indicators in Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Given that this study employed 24 indicators, the minimum required sample ranged between 120 and 240 respondents. Accordingly, the study utilized 240 respondents, which was considered sufficient to represent the research population and support multivariate statistical analysis.

Data Collection Method

Data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire distributed to tourists who had experience visiting rural halal tourism destinations in Aceh. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended statements designed to measure the research variables, including digital transformation, social media, destination image, tourist satisfaction, and tourist loyalty. The measurement items were adapted from established theories and previous empirical studies to ensure conceptual relevance and measurement consistency.

The study utilized a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree to assess respondents' perceptions of each indicator. This scale was selected because it enables respondents to express varying levels of agreement toward the proposed statements and is widely used in tourism and behavioral research (Ibrahim, 2023).

Respondents were recruited through a combination of online and offline survey distribution techniques. Online questionnaires were disseminated through social media platforms and travel-related forums to reach tourists from different regions. In addition, on-site intercept surveys were conducted at several rural halal tourism destinations in Aceh to capture responses directly from visitors during their tourism activities. The combination of these approaches was intended to obtain a more diverse and representative sample of tourists.

Data Analysis Method

The collected data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the assistance of AMOS software. SEM was selected because it enables the simultaneous examination of complex relationships among multiple latent variables and observed indicators within a single analytical framework. This method is considered appropriate for studies involving mediating relationships and multidimensional constructs.

The analysis process included two main stages: measurement model evaluation and structural model evaluation. The measurement model was assessed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to examine the validity and reliability of the research indicators. This stage aimed to ensure that each indicator adequately represented its corresponding latent construct. Subsequently, the structural model analysis was conducted to evaluate the causal relationships among digital transformation, social media, destination image, tourist satisfaction, and tourist loyalty. The SEM approach therefore provided a comprehensive framework for examining both the measurement quality and the hypothesized relationships among the study variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

The profile of respondents is presented in Table 1. The majority of respondents were female, accounting for 61.3% of the sample, while male respondents represented 38.8%. In terms of age distribution, most respondents were between 20 and 29 years old (35.4%), followed by respondents aged below 20 years (24.2%) and those aged 30–39 years (25.0%). This distribution indicates that the respondents were predominantly within the young and productive age groups, which are generally more active in tourism activities and digital platform usage.

Regarding educational background, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (47.9%), followed by senior high school or vocational education graduates (21.3%) and respondents with master's or doctoral degrees (18.3%). This composition suggests that the respondents generally possessed relatively high educational attainment, which may influence their perceptions of digital transformation and tourism services. In terms of marital status, the majority of respondents were single (61.3%), while 36.3% were married.

The respondents originated from various regions in Indonesia, with the largest proportions coming from Lhokseumawe (17.9%), Medan (11.3%), and Aceh Utara (8.8%). Respondents from Java and other regions collectively accounted for 52.9%, indicating that rural halal tourism destinations in Aceh attracted visitors not only from local areas but also from broader domestic regions.

Table 1. Research Respondent Profile

Attribute	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	93	38.8
	Female	147	61.3
Age	< 20 years	58	24.2
	20–29 years	85	35.4
	30–39 years	60	25.0
	40–49 years	26	10.8
	≥ 50 years	11	4.6
Education	Elementary School or equivalent	1	0.4
	Junior High School	23	9.6
	Senior High School/Vocational School	51	21.3
	Diploma (D3)	6	2.5
	Bachelor's Degree (S1)	115	47.9
	Master's/Doctoral Degree (S2/S3)	44	18.3
Marital Status	Single	147	61.3
	Married	87	36.3
	Others	6	2.5
Domicile	Lhokseumawe	43	17.9
	Aceh Utara	21	8.8
	Bireuen	5	2.1
	Banda Aceh	4	1.7
	Langkat	4	1.7
	Medan	27	11.3
	Jakarta	9	3.8
	Java and other regions	127	52.9
Travel Frequency	Once	71	29.6
	2–3 times	84	35.0
	4–5 times	26	10.8
	> 5 times	59	24.6
Main Social Media Platform	Instagram/TikTok/Facebook/YouTube	190	79.0
	Others	50	21.0
Tourism Purpose	Recreation	Majority	–
	Religious	Minority	–
	Educational	Minority	–
	Culinary	Minority	–

(Source: Processed research data, 2025)

Most respondents reported visiting rural halal tourism destinations two to three times (35.0%), followed by respondents who visited once (29.6%) and more than five times (24.6%). This finding suggests the presence of both first-time visitors and repeat tourists within the sample. In addition, social media usage among respondents was relatively high, with 79% indicating Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, or YouTube as their primary platforms for accessing tourism-related information. Recreational purposes dominated tourist visits, while religious, educational, and culinary motivations were reported by smaller proportions of respondents.

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model evaluation results are presented in Table 2. The analysis demonstrates that all indicators achieved satisfactory factor loading values, ranging from 0.748 to 0.962, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50. These findings indicate that the indicators adequately represented their respective latent constructs.

Table 2. Measurement Model Statistic

Construct	Indicator	Loading	CR	CA	AVE	VIF	\sqrt{AVE}
Digital Transformation (DT)	Online booking applications (halal-friendly)	0.822	0.885	0.860	0.658	3.086	0.811
	Augmented reality (AR) for virtual tours	0.836				3.322	
	Social media platforms and halal tourism forums	0.748				2.273	
	Halal food delivery applications	0.835				3.300	
Halal Tourism (HT)	Availability of halal food and beverages	0.874	0.913	0.880	0.724	4.219	0.851
	Worship facilities (mosques/prayer rooms and prayer time guidance)	0.800				2.778	
	Alcohol-free and family-friendly environment	0.834				3.289	
	Privacy and modesty in accommodation	0.894				4.950	
Social Media (SM)	Social media provides relevant tourism content	0.798	0.893	0.870	0.676	2.747	0.822
	Social media effectively promotes tourist destinations	0.830				3.205	
	Social media inspires travel decisions	0.797				2.740	
	Social media influences travel decisions	0.863				3.922	
Destination Image (DI)	Natural and cultural attractions	0.962	0.963	0.950	0.869	13.514	0.932
	Infrastructure and facilities	0.958				12.195	
	Accessibility	0.921				6.579	
	Local community hospitality	0.885				4.608	
Tourist Satisfaction (TS)	Enjoyment of the overall visit	0.847	0.892	0.870	0.674	3.546	0.821
	Tourism needs fulfilled	0.783				2.584	
	Destination meets/exceeds expectations	0.835				3.300	
	Satisfaction with cost and time spent	0.816				2.994	
Tourist Loyalty (LY)	Intention to revisit	0.865	0.950	0.935	0.826	3.984	0.908
	Willingness to recommend the destination	0.910				5.848	
	Positive word-of-mouth	0.933				7.692	
	Preference for the destination over alternatives	0.924				6.897	

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; CA = Cronbach's Alpha; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

(Source: Processed research data, 2025)

The construct reliability (CR) values for all variables ranged from 0.885 to 0.963, while Cronbach's alpha (CA) values ranged from 0.860 to 0.950. Both CR and CA values exceeded the recommended minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency and

reliability among the measurement items. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.658 to 0.869, surpassing the acceptable threshold of 0.50. This result confirms the convergent validity of the constructs used in the study.

The square root values of AVE for each construct were higher than the correlations between constructs, indicating adequate discriminant validity. In addition, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranged from 2.273 to 13.514. Although several indicators within the destination image construct showed relatively high VIF values, the overall values remained within acceptable limits for SEM analysis, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a critical issue in the model.

Among the indicators, destination image demonstrated the highest loading values, particularly for natural and cultural attractions (0.962) and infrastructure and facilities (0.958), indicating that these aspects strongly reflected tourists' perceptions of destination image. Tourist loyalty also showed high loading values across all indicators, especially positive word-of-mouth communication (0.933) and preference for the destination over others (0.924), suggesting that loyalty was strongly associated with recommendation intentions and destination preference.

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural equation model (SEM) was evaluated to assess the relationships among digital transformation, halal tourism, social media, destination image, tourist satisfaction, and tourist loyalty. The full SEM model is illustrated in Figure 1.

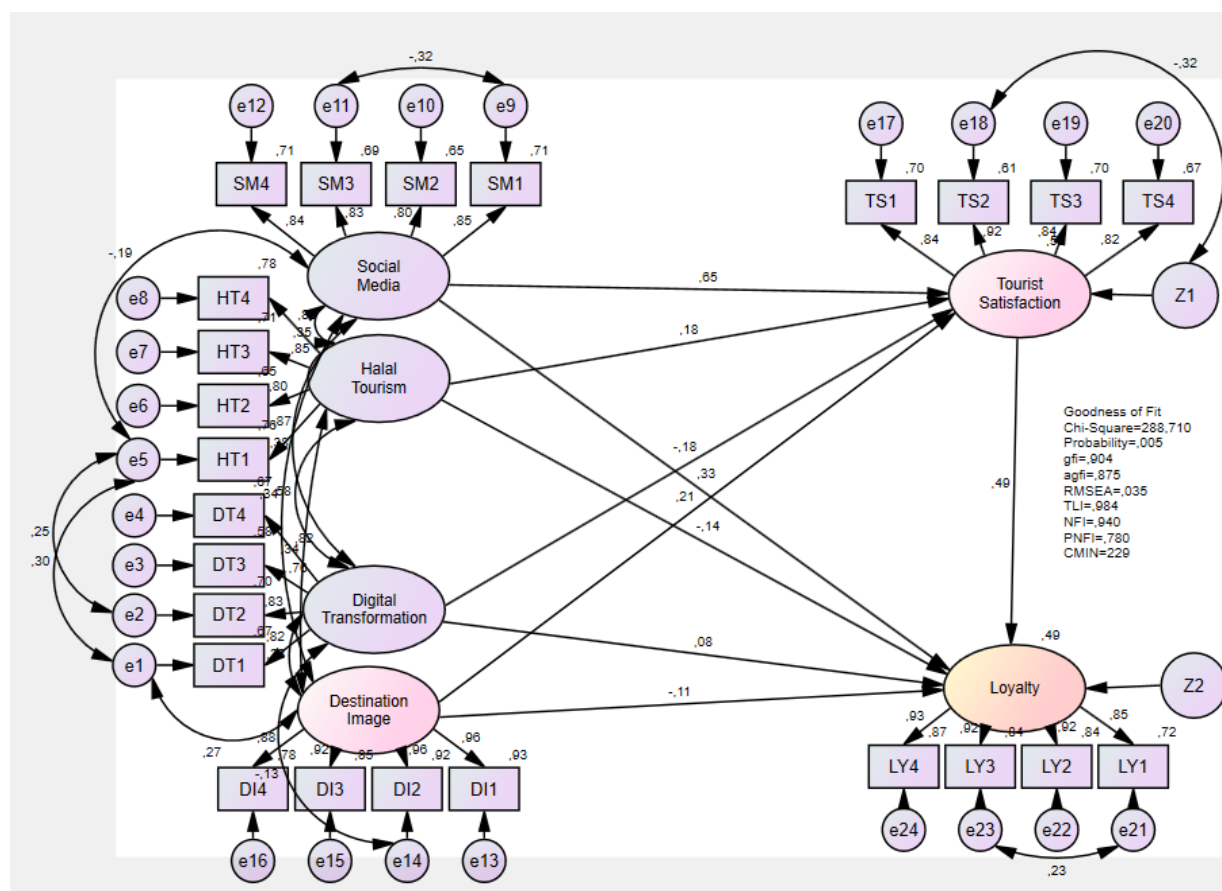


Figure 1. Structural SEM Full Model

The goodness-of-fit indices presented in Table 3 indicate that the proposed model achieved an acceptable level of fit. The Chi-square value of the model was 288.710, while the CMIN/DF value was 2.29, which falls within the recommended range for an acceptable model fit. The Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) reached 0.904, indicating a good fit. Although the Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI) value of 0.875 was categorized as marginal fit, the remaining indices demonstrated strong model adequacy. The Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) both achieved values of 0.984, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.95. Similarly, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) reached 0.940, while the Parsimonious Normed Fit Index (PNFI) was 0.777. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value of 0.035 further indicated that the structural model possessed a satisfactory level of fit.

Table 3. Goodness-of-Fit Statistics

No.	Goodness-of-Fit Index	Recommended Value	Model Value	Assessment
1	Chi-square	Lower value preferred	288.710	Good Fit
2	CMIN/DF	≤ 3.00	2.290	Good Fit
3	GFI	≥ 0.90	0.904	Good Fit
4	AGFI	≥ 0.90	0.875	Marginal Fit
5	TLI	≥ 0.95	0.984	Good Fit
6	CFI	≥ 0.95	0.984	Good Fit
7	NFI	≥ 0.90	0.940	Good Fit
8	PNFI	≥ 0.60	0.777	Good Fit
9	RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.035	Good Fit

(Source: Processed research data, 2025)

Overall, these goodness-of-fit statistics suggest that the structural model was appropriate for examining the relationships among the proposed variables.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis testing results are presented in Table 4. The findings indicate that digital transformation had a positive and significant effect on tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.180$; $p = 0.007$). This result suggests that improvements in digital tourism services and technologies contributed positively to tourists' satisfaction levels.

Table 4. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Standardized Estimate	Unstandardized Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	p-value	Decision
H1	DT → TS	0.180	0.178	0.066	2.687	0.007	Supported
H2	HT → TS	0.182	0.162	0.059	2.727	0.006	Supported
H3	SM → TS	0.647	0.605	0.066	9.162	<0.001	Supported
H4	DI → TS	0.206	0.165	0.043	3.821	<0.001	Supported
H5	HT → LY	0.145	0.135	0.072	1.891	0.060	Not Supported
H6	SM → LY	0.332	0.326	0.095	3.423	<0.001	Supported
H7	TS → LY	0.492	0.518	0.110	4.706	<0.001	Supported
H8	DT → LY	0.079	0.082	0.079	1.029	0.304	Not Supported
H9	DI → LY	-0.114	-0.096	0.053	-1.829	0.067	Not Supported

(Source: Processed research data, 2025)

Halal tourism also demonstrated a positive and significant effect on tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.182$; $p = 0.006$). This finding indicates that the availability of halal-compliant tourism facilities and services enhanced tourists' travel experiences and satisfaction. Social media showed the strongest influence on tourist satisfaction among all exogenous variables ($\beta = 0.647$; $p < 0.001$), highlighting the important role of digital communication and online tourism content in shaping tourist experiences. Destination image likewise had a positive and significant effect on tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.206$; $p < 0.001$).

Regarding tourist loyalty, social media exerted a positive and significant influence ($\beta = 0.332$; $p < 0.001$), while tourist satisfaction also significantly affected loyalty ($\beta = 0.492$; $p < 0.001$). These results indicate that both positive social media engagement and satisfying tourism experiences contributed to stronger revisit intentions and positive word-of-mouth behavior.

In contrast, halal tourism did not significantly influence tourist loyalty directly ($\beta = 0.145$; $p = 0.060$). Similarly, digital transformation did not show a significant direct effect on loyalty ($\beta = 0.079$; $p = 0.304$). Destination image also did not significantly influence tourist loyalty directly ($\beta = -0.114$; $p = 0.067$). These findings suggest that the effects of halal tourism, digital transformation, and destination image on loyalty may operate indirectly through tourist satisfaction rather than through direct relationships.

Mediation Analysis

The mediation analysis was conducted using the Sobel test to examine the indirect effects of digital transformation, halal tourism, social media, and destination image on tourist loyalty through tourist satisfaction. The results are presented in Figures 2–5 and Table 5.

Table 5. Mediation Effects of Tourist Satisfaction

Hypothesis	Mediation Path	Sobel t-value	p-value	Result
H10	DT → TS → LY	2.329	0.019	Moderate Support
H11	HT → TS → LY	2.541	0.011	Moderate Support
H12	SM → TS → LY	4.076	<0.001	Strong Moderate Support
H13	DI → TS → LY	2.914	0.003	Moderate Support

Source: Processed research data (2025).

The findings reveal that tourist satisfaction significantly mediated the relationship between digital transformation and tourist loyalty ($t = 2.329$; $p = 0.019$), indicating moderate mediation support. Tourist satisfaction also significantly mediated the influence of halal tourism on tourist loyalty ($t = 2.541$; $p = 0.011$).

Input:		Test statistic:		Std. Error:	p-value:
a	0.180	Sobel test:	2.32981492	0.03808886	0.01981594
b	0.493	Aroian test:	2.28861204	0.03877459	0.0221019
s _a	0.066	Goodman test:	2.37332643	0.03739056	0.01762868
s _b	0.110	Reset all	Calculate		

Figure 2. DT-TS-LY

(Source: <https://www.quantpsy.org/sobel/sobel.htm>)

Input:		Test statistic:	Std. Error:	p-value:
a	0.182	Sobel test: 2.54103421	0.03531082	0.01105251
b	0.493	Aroian test: 2.49917241	0.03590229	0.01244837
s _a	0.059	Goodman test: 2.58507262	0.03470928	0.00973585
s _b	0.110	Reset all	Calculate	

Figure 3. HT-TS-LY

(Source: <https://www.quantpsy.org/sobel/sobel.htm>)

Input:		Test statistic:	Std. Error:	p-value:
a	0.647	Sobel test: 4.07603118	0.07825529	0.00004581
b	0.493	Aroian test: 4.05860264	0.07859134	0.00004937
s _a	0.066	Goodman test: 4.09368618	0.07791779	0.00004246
s _b	0.110	Reset all	Calculate	

Figure 4. SM-TS-LY

(Source: <https://www.quantpsy.org/sobel/sobel.htm>)

Input:		Test statistic:	Std. Error:	p-value:
a	0.165	Sobel test: 2.91482367	0.02790735	0.0035589
b	0.493	Aroian test: 2.87383805	0.02830535	0.00405517
s _a	0.043	Goodman test: 2.95761441	0.02750359	0.0031003
s _b	0.110	Reset all	Calculate	

Figure 5. DI-TS-LY

(Source: <https://www.quantpsy.org/sobel/sobel.htm>)

Among all mediation pathways, social media demonstrated the strongest indirect effect on tourist loyalty through tourist satisfaction ($t = 4.076$; $p < 0.001$), indicating strong mediation support. In addition, tourist satisfaction significantly mediated the relationship between destination image and tourist loyalty ($t = 2.914$; $p = 0.003$).

These results indicate that tourist satisfaction played a central role in connecting digital transformation, halal tourism, social media, and destination image with tourist loyalty within the context of rural halal tourism destinations in Aceh.

Discussion

Digital Transformation and Tourist Satisfaction

The findings of this study demonstrate that digital transformation has a positive and significant effect on tourist satisfaction in rural halal tourism destinations in Aceh. The availability of digital services such as online booking applications, digital payment systems, tourism information platforms, and social media-based promotion appears to improve tourists' convenience and accessibility during their travel experiences. Digital technology allows tourists to access tourism

information more efficiently and supports smoother interactions with tourism providers throughout their visits.

These findings support the argument of Cuomo et al. (2021), who emphasize that digital transformation enhances tourism experiences through the integration of smart technologies and data-driven communication systems that facilitate more personalized interactions between tourists and destinations. Similarly, Sustacha et al. (2023) explain that digital technology contributes to improving tourist experiences in smart tourism destinations through greater efficiency and accessibility. Yap et al. (2025) further argue that smart tourism technologies increase tourist satisfaction because they simplify access to tourism services and improve travel convenience. Within the context of rural halal tourism in Aceh, digital transformation appears to function primarily as a facilitating factor that enhances tourists' overall travel experiences and satisfaction levels.

Halal Tourism and Tourist Satisfaction

The results also reveal that halal tourism positively influences tourist satisfaction. The provision of halal food and beverages, worship facilities, Muslim-friendly environments, and tourism services consistent with Islamic values contributes to tourists' feelings of comfort and security during their visits (Musa et al., 2021). For Muslim tourists, the availability of halal facilities supports not only practical travel needs but also emotional and spiritual comfort.

These findings are consistent with Suhartanto et al. (2021), who report that halal tourism experiences supported by Sharia-compliant facilities enhance tourist value perceptions and satisfaction. In the context of Aceh, where Islamic values are strongly embedded within social and cultural life, halal tourism facilities may strengthen tourists' confidence and trust toward tourism destinations. The findings also reinforce the view that halal tourism extends beyond religious compliance and contributes to creating tourism experiences that align with tourists' cultural and spiritual expectations.

Social Media and Tourist Satisfaction

Among all independent variables examined in this study, social media demonstrated the strongest influence on tourist satisfaction. This finding suggests that social media plays a central role in shaping tourists' perceptions and expectations before visiting destinations. Through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube, tourists are exposed to visual content, reviews, travel recommendations, and tourism experiences shared by other users. Such exposure appears to create positive expectations that contribute to higher levels of satisfaction when actual experiences align with promoted destination images.

These findings align with Keelson et al. (2024), who identify social media as a major factor influencing tourist decision-making processes, particularly in developing countries. Similarly, Acharjee and Ahmed (2025) argue that social media significantly affects tourists' destination choices, especially for emerging tourism destinations. Previous studies conducted by Situmorang et al. (2020), Martinez-Navarro et al. (2020), Dini et al. (2023), Ramanathan et al. (2017), and Saayman et al. (2018) also demonstrate that social media engagement positively influences tourist satisfaction. In the context of rural halal tourism in Aceh, social media appears to function

not only as a promotional tool but also as an important source of travel inspiration and destination evaluation.

Destination Image and Tourist Satisfaction

Destination image was also found to positively and significantly influence tourist satisfaction. This result indicates that tourists who perceive Aceh's rural halal tourism destinations as attractive, culturally authentic, accessible, and hospitable are more likely to experience satisfaction during their visits. Positive destination image formation may emerge from tourists' perceptions regarding natural landscapes, local culture, tourism infrastructure, and community hospitality.

The findings are consistent with Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020), who through a meta-analysis identify destination image as one of the main determinants of tourist satisfaction and behavioral intention. Similarly, Yen et al. (2024), Khuan et al. (2024), Wang et al. (2024), Maldonado-López et al. (2024), Alcocer and Ruiz (2020), and Vien (2021) report that destination image significantly shapes tourist evaluations and satisfaction levels. Within the context of Aceh's rural halal tourism, destination image appears to strengthen tourists' emotional impressions and influence their overall evaluations of travel experiences.

Halal Tourism and Tourist Loyalty

The findings indicate that halal tourism does not have a significant direct effect on tourist loyalty. Although halal tourism facilities contribute positively to tourist satisfaction, their direct influence on revisit intention and recommendation behavior appears limited. This finding suggests that the availability of halal-compliant services alone may not be sufficient to encourage loyalty unless accompanied by memorable and emotionally satisfying tourism experiences.

The results differ from Martaleni et al. (2025), who found that religiosity and halal service quality significantly influence tourist loyalty. However, the findings may indicate that in Aceh's tourism context, halal tourism facilities are perceived as expected or standard tourism attributes rather than distinctive factors capable of independently generating loyalty. As a result, tourists may consider halal facilities as basic service requirements rather than determinants of long-term attachment to destinations.

Social Media and Tourist Loyalty

Social media was found to have a positive and significant direct effect on tourist loyalty. This finding suggests that active engagement through social media platforms strengthens tourists' intentions to revisit destinations and recommend them to others. Continuous exposure to tourism-related content may reinforce tourists' emotional attachment and maintain destination awareness even after visits have ended.

These findings are consistent with Mirzaalian and Halpenny (2021), who demonstrate that social media analytics can predict tourist loyalty toward nature-based tourism destinations. Social media therefore functions not only as a communication channel but also as an important mechanism for maintaining long-term relationships between destinations and tourists. In the

context of rural halal tourism in Aceh, social media appears to strengthen tourists' behavioral intentions through ongoing interaction and digital engagement.

Digital Transformation and Tourist Loyalty

The results show that digital transformation does not significantly influence tourist loyalty directly. Although digital technologies contribute to convenience and satisfaction, technological accessibility alone appears insufficient to establish long-term loyalty among tourists. Tourists may appreciate digital convenience during their visits, but revisit intentions and recommendation behavior appear to depend more strongly on emotional experiences and overall satisfaction.

This finding supports the argument of Mirzaalian and Halpenny (2021), who suggest that emotional experiences and satisfaction play more important roles in shaping loyalty than technological convenience itself. Similarly, Wong and Li (2023) argue that tourist loyalty is more strongly influenced by experiential and emotional dimensions than by functional tourism attributes. Within rural halal tourism destinations, digital transformation may therefore operate indirectly through satisfaction rather than through direct behavioral attachment.

Destination Image and Tourist Loyalty

Destination image was also found not to directly affect tourist loyalty. This finding indicates that positive perceptions of destinations may attract tourists initially, but loyalty formation depends more strongly on actual tourism experiences and post-visit satisfaction. A favorable destination image alone may encourage tourists to visit, yet repeat visits and recommendation behavior require experiences that meet or exceed expectations.

The findings differ from Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020), who report that destination image directly influences tourist loyalty. However, Marques et al. (2021) explain that destination image often affects loyalty indirectly through tourist satisfaction. In the context of Aceh's rural halal tourism, destination image may function primarily as a pre-visit perception factor, while loyalty develops after tourists directly experience the destination environment, services, and tourism activities.

The Mediating Role of Tourist Satisfaction

The mediation analysis further confirms the central role of tourist satisfaction in shaping tourist loyalty. Tourist satisfaction significantly mediated the relationships between digital transformation, halal tourism, social media, destination image, and tourist loyalty (Syahputra et al., 2025). These findings indicate that technological innovation, halal tourism facilities, social media engagement, and destination image do not automatically generate tourist loyalty unless tourists experience satisfaction during their visits.

Among the mediation pathways, social media demonstrated the strongest indirect effect on loyalty through tourist satisfaction, suggesting that digital communication and online engagement play a particularly influential role in shaping tourist experiences and post-visit behavioral intentions. The findings reinforce the theoretical perspective that tourist loyalty is primarily formed through satisfying tourism experiences rather than solely through destination attributes or technological facilities.

Within the context of rural halal tourism in Aceh, tourist satisfaction emerges as an important mechanism connecting digital transformation, halal tourism practices, social media engagement, and destination image with tourists' long-term behavioral intentions.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that tourist satisfaction in rural halal tourism destinations in Aceh is significantly influenced by digital transformation, halal tourism, social media, and destination image. Among these variables, social media emerged as the most influential factor in shaping tourist satisfaction, highlighting its important role in influencing tourists' perceptions, expectations, and travel experiences. The study also found that only social media and tourist satisfaction had a direct and significant effect on tourist loyalty, whereas digital transformation, halal tourism, and destination image did not directly influence loyalty. These results indicate that the existence of halal facilities, digital services, and positive destination perceptions contributes more strongly to tourists' satisfaction than directly encouraging revisit intentions and recommendation behavior. In addition, tourist satisfaction was proven to significantly mediate the relationships between digital transformation, halal tourism, social media, destination image, and tourist loyalty. This finding confirms that tourist satisfaction serves as the primary mechanism connecting tourism experiences with long-term behavioral intentions, particularly repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth communication.

The findings of this study provide several important implications for the development of rural halal tourism in Aceh. Tourism operators and local stakeholders need to strengthen strategies that focus on improving tourist satisfaction through the optimization of digital technology, enhancement of halal tourism services, strengthening of destination image, and more effective utilization of social media platforms. Aceh possesses several competitive advantages that support its development as a rural halal tourism destination, including its strong Islamic identity as the only province in Indonesia that formally implements Islamic law, its rich natural and cultural resources, and the existence of regional policies supporting halal tourism development. In addition, Aceh's geographical position near western Indonesia, Malaysia, Southern Thailand, and Muslim-majority countries in South Asia provides strategic opportunities for attracting broader Muslim tourist markets. With its reputation as the "Veranda of Mecca," Aceh has strong potential to strengthen its positioning within the halal tourism sector. The development of rural halal tourism may also contribute to local economic development through employment creation, strengthening village-based micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), increasing community income from tourism-related sectors, reducing urban migration, and supporting the development of a sustainable economy aligned with the principles of *Maqasid al-Shariah*.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The research focused only on rural halal tourism destinations in Aceh, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other tourism contexts or regions with different sociocultural characteristics. The study also relied on cross-sectional survey data, which captured tourists' perceptions at a single point in time and may not fully reflect changes in tourist behavior over longer periods. In addition, the study primarily examined domestic tourists, while international Muslim tourists may possess different expectations and travel experiences. Future research may expand the geographical scope of the study, include international tourist perspectives, and utilize longitudinal approaches to better

understand changes in tourist satisfaction and loyalty over time. Further studies may also explore additional variables such as tourist trust, religiosity, service quality, cultural authenticity, and sustainability practices to enrich the understanding of rural halal tourism development.

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