



How destination image and trust mediate e-WOM's impact on halal tourism intentions

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines the mediating role of destination image and destination trust in the relationship between Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) and the intention to visit halal tourism destinations, specifically focusing on Bangka Belitung.

Methodology – This study employed a quantitative approach, collecting data from 292 respondents via an online survey. SEM was used to test the relationships among e-WOM, destination image, destination trust, and intention to visit. Validity and reliability tests, as well as goodness-of-fit measures, were applied to assess the model's robustness.

Findings – The results indicate that e-WOM significantly influences both destination trust and destination image. However, neither destination image nor destination trust directly affect the intention to visit, and e-WOM itself does not have a direct significant impact on the intention. These findings suggest that, while e-WOM fosters positive perceptions and trust, other factors are more critical in driving the halal tourism intention.

Implications – This study provides valuable insights for tourism stakeholders, particularly in halal tourism, by highlighting the importance of managing e-WOM to enhance trust and image. However, halal tourism providers must prioritize authenticity, cultural sensitivity, and visitor engagement to attract and retain tourists.

Originality – This study contributes to the literature by exploring the mediating effects of destination image and trust in halal tourism, challenging the assumption that positive perceptions are always translated into behavioral intentions. It expands the understanding of how e-WOM impacts tourist decision making within a specific cultural and religious context.

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Introduction

Halal tourism has emerged as a significant area of interest in tourism research, with studies exploring its role as a new paradigm and lifestyle for tourists (Hall and Prayag 2019). The term "halal" refers to that which is allowed or permitted according to Islamic law, and its application extends beyond food to include products and services such as cosmetics, banking, and tourism (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015; Henderson, 2016). Boğan and Sarıışık (2019) defined halal tourism as an industry catering to the needs of Muslim tourists, ensuring the avoidance of haram food, drinks,

gambling, and other prohibited activities. Notably, halal tourism is not exclusive to Muslim tourists; non-Muslim tourists may also participate, often evaluating halal services based on their intrinsic qualities (Ishak et al., 2016).

Countries worldwide are beginning to recognize the economic potential of halal tourism. Indonesia, in particular, has taken significant steps toward developing this sector. In 2023, the Indonesian tourism industry generated foreign exchange earnings of US\$14 billion (IDR 218 trillion), marking a 240% increase from the previous year's US\$4.28 billion (IDR 64 trillion) (Rainer, 2024). The 2023 Mastercard-CrescentRating Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) ranks Indonesia as the top global halal tourism destination. This ranking was based on four criteria: accessibility, communication, environmental sustainability, and service quality, with the latter two showing notable growth (Mastercard & Crescent Rating, 2023). In particular, service quality assesses the availability of halal food, places of worship, and accommodation that meet the needs of Muslim travelers.

Fifteen provinces in Indonesia have been identified as halal tourism destinations, including Bangka Belitung, which was newly added in the 2023 Indonesian Muslim Travel Index report. With a population of over 1.3 million, 70% of whom are Muslim, Bangka Belitung is well positioned to cater to both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists (Wisnubroto et al., 2021). The province is making active efforts to become a world-class halal tourism destination, supported by thousands of halal-certified establishments and strong government support (Rusaidah, 2022). Halal tourism services in Bangka Belitung aim to accommodate Muslim tourists' religious needs, including appropriate etiquette, destination selection, and culinary preferences (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015). However, these services can also appeal to non-Muslim visitors, provided that the focus remains on high service standards and tourist comfort (Razak, 2018; Suci et al., 2021).

The rise of digital technology and social media has enhanced halal tourism through electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Tourists can share their experiences and recommendations through social media, websites, and travel forums (Setiawan et al., 2021). These reviews, photos, and videos often carry more credibility than traditional advertisements, and can influence a broader audience. Positive e-WOM fosters favorable perceptions of destinations and increases tourist trust (Rahman et al., 2023). By highlighting a destination's welcoming atmosphere, natural beauty, and friendly facilities, e-WOM can boost interest in halal tourism (Caruana & Schembri, 2016).

This study explored the impact of e-WOM on the intention to visit halal tourism destinations in Bangka Belitung. Specifically, it investigated the mediating roles of destination image and destination trust in this relationship. While previous studies have explored the direct influence of e-WOM on travel intentions (Abubakar et al., 2017), research examining the mediating roles of destination image and trust remains limited. Destination image and trust are crucial as they shape tourists' perceptions and confidence in a destination. Earlier research has explored other mediators, such as perceived value (Rosid, 2021) and attitude (Doosti et al., 2016; Shome, 2021), but this study fills this gap by focusing on the roles of destination image and trust in the context of halal tourism. These findings are expected to provide new insights into how e-WOM shapes tourist intentions and inform marketing strategies for halal tourism in Bangka Belitung.

Literature Review

Social exchange theory (SET)

Social exchange theory (SET) has been widely applied in business and social research to explain the dynamics of interpersonal interactions and relationships. SET posits that social behavior results from a cost-benefit exchange process, whereby individuals seek to maximize rewards while minimizing costs (Cook et al., 2013). This framework is highly relevant for understanding how e-WOM influences tourist behavior in the context of halal tourism. Positive online reviews by past tourists serve as social exchanges that benefit potential visitors by providing valuable information about the destination. These exchanges ultimately create a favorable image of the destination, which in turn fosters trust and encourages visit intentions (Tong et al., 2007). However, the application of SET in tourism research goes beyond the sharing of experiences. In the context of halal tourism, this theory explains how trust and reciprocity can be built through online

communities. Travelers who post positive reviews may not gain immediate personal benefits, but contribute to a collective pool of knowledge that benefits future tourists. This social exchange, as highlighted by [Garcia-Haro et al. \(2021\)](#), is particularly evident in platforms where tourists influence others' perceptions of halal tourism destinations, shaping both destination image and trust.

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM)

E-WOM is recognized as one of the most influential factors in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in the tourism industry. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, e-WOM can reach a broader audience through digital platforms, offering both tourists and potential visitors a wealth of information ([Doosti et al., 2016](#)). Research has shown that positive e-WOM plays a critical role in enhancing the reputation of tourist destinations, thereby influencing tourists' perceptions and decisions ([Gosal et al., 2020](#)). In the context of halal tourism, e-WOM not only influences general tourist behavior but is particularly important for Muslim tourists who rely on peer reviews to assess the Sharia compliance of services and facilities at their chosen destinations. This is because Muslim travelers may have specific concerns regarding halal food, prayer facilities, and the overall Islamic environment of the destination. According to [Battour et al. \(2014\)](#), positive reviews from fellow Muslim travelers build confidence in the destination, which enhances both destination image and trust, leading to a higher intention to visit. What remains underexplored, however, is how e-WOM interacts with other mediating variables, such as destination image and trust, which are critical in influencing visit intention. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how e-WOM indirectly affects tourists' visit intentions through these mediating factors.

Destination image

Destination image is one of the most widely researched topics in tourism and is often seen as a key driver shaping tourists' intentions to visit a location ([Kock et al., 2016](#)). Destination images comprise cognitive and affective components, including tourists' beliefs about the quality of services, attractions, and overall atmosphere of the destination. Previous research indicates that a positive destination image significantly boosts visit intentions ([Tan & Wu, 2016](#)). In halal tourism, the formation of a positive destination image is crucial because it helps Muslim tourists assess whether their religious needs are met. For instance, a destination that is perceived as being Muslim-friendly, with adequate halal food options and prayer facilities, is likely to attract more Muslim tourists ([Liu et al., 2018](#)). E-WOM plays a critical role here by offering travelers the opportunity to read real-life experiences of others, thus forming an accurate and trustworthy image of the destination ([Said et al., 2022](#)). This study extends the literature by investigating how e-WOM shapes destination image in the context of halal tourism, particularly in the case of Bangka Belitung, which is emerging as a key player in this tourism sector.

Destination trust

Trust is another critical factor in tourism, particularly in choosing a destination. In tourism literature, trust is defined as the confidence tourists have in the ability of a destination to meet their expectations ([Bligh, 2017](#)). Previous studies have shown that trust positively affects tourists' willingness to visit a destination ([Su et al., 2017](#)). In the context of halal tourism, trust is especially significant, because Muslim tourists have specific religious requirements that must be fulfilled. High levels of trust in a destination's ability to comply with Sharia principles, such as providing halal food and prayer spaces, will positively influence the intention to visit ([Aji et al., 2021](#)). This study explores how e-WOM contributes to building trust and, in turn, affects visit intention.

Intention to visit halal tourism

Intention to visit is a well-established predictor of actual travel behavior ([Soliman, 2021](#)). In the context of halal tourism, Muslim tourists' intention to visit is shaped by several factors including the availability of Sharia-compliant facilities and the overall perception of the destination's alignment with Islamic principles. Understanding the intention to visit halal tourism destinations is

critical for developing effective marketing strategies to attract Muslim tourists (Battour et al., 2014). While many studies have focused on the direct impact of e-WOM on travel intention, this study adds depth by examining the mediating roles of destination image and trust in this relationship. This study seeks to contribute to the halal tourism literature by offering a nuanced understanding of how these mediating variables influence visit intention in an emerging destination, such as Bangka Belitung.

Hypotheses

The role of e-WOM in halal tourism

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) plays a critical role in influencing tourists' perceptions and shaping destination images. Positive e-WOM, such as reviews, comments, and recommendations shared on online platforms, allows potential visitors to gain valuable insights into a destination's offering and quality. This information helps form favorable impressions and enhance the attractiveness of the destination. For halal tourism, in particular, e-WOM serves as a key tool in establishing a destination as Muslim-friendly and compliant with sharia principles. According to Aimon and Zulvianti (2023), positive e-WOM highlights key attributes, such as halal-certified facilities, prayer amenities, and adherence to Islamic customs, reinforcing the destination's appeal to Muslim travelers.

Furthermore, e-WOM can significantly impact destination trust by providing credible and user-generated information that aligns with tourist values and expectations. Setiawan et al. (2021) emphasize that the reliability and authenticity of e-WOM play a crucial role in building confidence among potential visitors, especially in the context of halal tourism. When e-WOM highlights a destination's compliance with Islamic values and its ability to meet the needs of Muslim tourists, it reduces uncertainty and fosters trust. This trust not only assures potential visitors about the destination's credibility but also increases their likelihood of considering it for their travel. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H₁: e-WOM has a positive influence on destination trust.

E-WOM plays a significant role in shaping both destination trust and image, which are crucial for halal tourism. By sharing authentic experiences and recommendations, Muslim travelers project a destination by adhering to Islamic principles, reinforcing trust among potential visitors (Battour et al., 2014). The perceived credibility of e-WOM content further amplifies its impact as travelers value information from individuals with shared cultural and religious perspectives (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019). For destinations like Bangka Belitung, this highlights the importance of promoting positive e-WOM, particularly on platforms that emphasize halal-friendly services, safety, and cultural authenticity, to align with travelers' expectations and foster a strong destination image. However, the direct influence of e-WOM on the intention to visit is less pronounced, as external factors, such as affordability, accessibility, and personal motivations, often mediate this relationship. Luong and Nguyen (2024) emphasize that perceived behavioral control and individual preferences are critical in translating positive e-WOM into actionable intentions. For Bangka Belitung, practical improvements in the halal-certified infrastructure and more robust promotional campaigns are necessary to address these barriers. While e-WOM significantly enhances trust and image, it alone may not suffice to drive visitation intention. A comprehensive approach integrating e-WOM strategies with tangible enhancements in facilities and targeted marketing initiatives is essential for converting favorable perceptions into increased tourist arrivals. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H₂: e-WOM has a positive influence on destination image.

Moreover, e-WOM has the potential to directly influence tourists' intention to visit a destination. Positive feedback and experiences shared by other Muslim travelers who have visited halal tourism destinations often serve as persuasive tools for encouraging potential visitors to explore these locations. By highlighting the availability of halal-certified amenities, cultural sensitivity, and sharia-compliant practices, e-WOM provides the information needed to build

interest and align itself with the values of Muslim tourists (Choirisa et al., 2021). This alignment reinforces the relevance of e-WOM in shaping perceptions and decision-making processes.

Despite its potential, the effectiveness of e-WOM in influencing the intention to visit may also depend on other moderating factors such as accessibility, personal motivation, and perceived behavioral control. Even if positive e-WOM highlights the attractiveness of a destination, practical considerations such as travel costs and ease of access to halal services can act as barriers to translating interest into action (Doosti et al., 2016). This underscores the need for integrated efforts to amplify the influence of e-WOM, including improving infrastructure and addressing tourists' practical concerns. Based on these considerations, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H₃: E-WOM has a positive influence on the intention to visit halal tourism.

The role of destination image in halal tourism

Destination image plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between e-WOM and trust. Positive e-WOM that emphasizes Muslim-friendly features, such as the availability of halal-certified facilities, adherence to Sharia principles, and cultural sensitivity, contributes to the formation of a favorable destination image. This favorable image helps potential visitors perceive the destination as not only attractive, but also aligned with their religious and cultural values, which reinforces their confidence in its suitability for halal tourism (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Such perceptions are particularly significant in building trust because tourists often rely on positive imagery to assess the reliability and appeal of a destination. Furthermore, the impact of destination image on trust is strengthened when information provided through e-WOM is consistent and credible. When travelers share authentic experiences that highlight a destination's safety, hospitality, and adherence to Islamic guidelines, they further solidify the trustworthiness of the destination. This alignment between e-WOM and destination image serves as a critical factor that influences tourists' decision-making processes. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H₄: Destination image has a positive influence on destination trust.

A favorable destination image can mediate the relationship between e-WOM and destination trust because positive e-WOM contributes significantly to shaping a destination's image. When travelers encounter positive online reviews or recommendations, they form the perception that the destination is reliable, safe, and appealing. This perception is critical because it influences tourists' trust in the destination. Studies by Rahman et al. (2023) and Abubakar et al. (2017) demonstrated that e-WOM, through personal experiences shared online, significantly shapes the image of a destination, ultimately building trust among tourists. Positive e-WOM signals quality and satisfaction, which reinforces trust in the destination.

Moreover, a positive destination image built through e-WOM acts as a mediator in shaping trust because it communicates consistency and credibility to potential visitors. When a destination is perceived positively, tourists are more likely to trust it, as the image reflects not only the attractiveness of the destination but also its quality and security. According to Al-Ansi and Han (2019), a strong destination image is a crucial factor in influencing trust, as it serves as a reliable indicator of the destination's capabilities and reputation. This suggests that when a destination's image is favorable, it strengthens the relationship between e-WOM and destination trust, making tourists more confident in their decision to visit. Therefore, destination image mediates the relationship between e-WOM and destination trust, influencing tourists' behavior and decisions. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H_{4a}: Destination image mediates the relationship between e-WOM and destination trust.

Similarly, destination image plays a significant role in influencing tourists' intentions to visit, particularly when it aligns with the needs and preferences of specific tourist groups. The image of a destination, shaped by its facilities and services, is crucial for attracting Muslim tourists. A well-formed image that includes the availability of Muslim-friendly facilities, such as halal food, prayer spaces, and adherence to sharia principles, significantly increases the appeal of the destination. According to Hidayatullah et al. (2021), Muslim tourists are more likely to consider a destination that aligns with their religious and cultural values as these factors directly impact their comfort and

experience while traveling. Therefore, the destination's image, when tailored to meet these specific needs, influences Muslim tourists' perceptions, which, in turn, increases their intention to visit. [De La Hoz-Correa and Muñoz-Leiva \(2019\)](#) support this notion, highlighting that a destination's image that incorporates culturally sensitive aspects enhances tourists' trust and interest in visiting. This image not only affects the emotional and cognitive evaluation of the destination, but also creates a sense of familiarity and comfort, which is essential for building tourists' trust and engagement. Furthermore, a positive image reflecting Muslim-friendly attributes assures travelers that their needs will be met, thus fostering a stronger connection with the destination. As a result, the alignment of a destination's image with Muslim tourists' expectations not only enhances trust, but also directly influences their intention to visit. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₅: Destination image has a positive influence on the intention to visit halal tourism.

Furthermore, destination image can mediate the relationship between e-WOM and tourists' intentions to visit. Positive e-WOM such as favorable online reviews and recommendations plays a significant role in shaping the image of a destination. When potential tourists are exposed to positive feedback from others, they form perceptions of the destination, which enhances their attractiveness. This image, whether shaped by the experiences of others or by the destination's marketing efforts, influences tourists' trust in and emotional connection to the destination. As a result, a positive destination image increases the likelihood that tourists will intend to visit, bridging the gap between e-WOM and travel intention. Previous research supports the mediating role of destination image in the relationship between e-WOM and tourists' intention to visit. According to [González-Rodríguez et al. \(2016\)](#), e-WOM can effectively shape tourists' perceptions of a destination, creating a favorable image that influences their decision-making process. When tourists encounter positive e-WOM, the information they receive contributes to their image of the destination, which increases their intention to visit. Additionally, [Chaulagain et al. \(2019\)](#) demonstrated that a strong and favorable destination image significantly affects tourists' travel intentions by making the destination more desirable and trustworthy. Thus, the positive influence of e-WOM on destination image strengthens the connection between e-WOM and tourists' intention to visit, making destinations appear more attractive and worth considering. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H_{5a}: Destination image mediates the relationship between e-WOM and the intention to visit halal tourism.

The role of destination trust in halal tourism

Trust is essential for shaping tourists' decisions to visit a particular destination. Trust plays a critical role in ensuring that Muslim tourists' unique needs and preferences are met, particularly in halal tourism. A high level of trust in a halal tourism destination, derived from perceptions of Sharia compliance, safety, and reliability, significantly increases the likelihood of tourists choosing to visit. Trust acts as a psychological assurance, reducing perceived risks and uncertainties, while strengthening tourists' confidence in the destination's ability to provide services aligned with their values ([Su et al., 2017](#)). This is especially relevant for Muslim tourists, who prioritize compliance with Islamic principles and safety in their travel decisions.

Moreover, trust in a destination serves as a key determinant of tourists' behavioral intentions, as it assures them that their expectations will be fulfilled. Research has shown that trust fosters a sense of reliability and satisfaction, encouraging tourists to choose their destination over alternative destinations. For halal tourism, this trust is built through the consistent delivery of sharia-compliant services such as halal-certified food, prayer facilities, and gender-segregated amenities. As trust assures Muslim tourists that their spiritual and practical needs will be respected, it becomes a vital factor that influences their intention to visit a destination. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H₆: Destination trust has a positive influence on intention to visit halal tourism.

Finally, destination trust serves as a crucial mediator between e-WOM and tourists' visit intentions. Positive e-WOM, such as favorable reviews, recommendations, or testimonials, helps build trust in a destination by reducing uncertainty and addressing potential concerns that tourists may have. When tourists perceive a destination as trustworthy based on the experiences and opinions shared by others, they are more likely to feel confident about their decision to visit. This trust, cultivated through e-WOM, acts as a bridge connecting tourists' exposure to positive information with their willingness to travel to their destination. Research has highlighted the mediating role of destination trust in the relationship between e-WOM and the intention to visit. For instance, [Jalilvand et al. \(2011\)](#) demonstrate that e-WOM significantly enhances tourists' trust in a destination by providing reliable, user-generated content that tourists consider authentic and credible. This trust, in turn, reduces perceived risk and increases tourists' motivation to visit. Furthermore, in the context of halal tourism, trust is even more critical, as it assures Muslim travelers that their specific cultural and religious needs will be met. When positive e-WOM fosters a high level of trust, tourists are more likely to view a destination as safe, accommodating, and worth visiting. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H_{6a}: Destination trust mediates the relationship between e-WOM and intention to visit halal tourism.

In summary, the hypotheses are visually represented in the proposed research model, as outlined in [Figure 1](#).

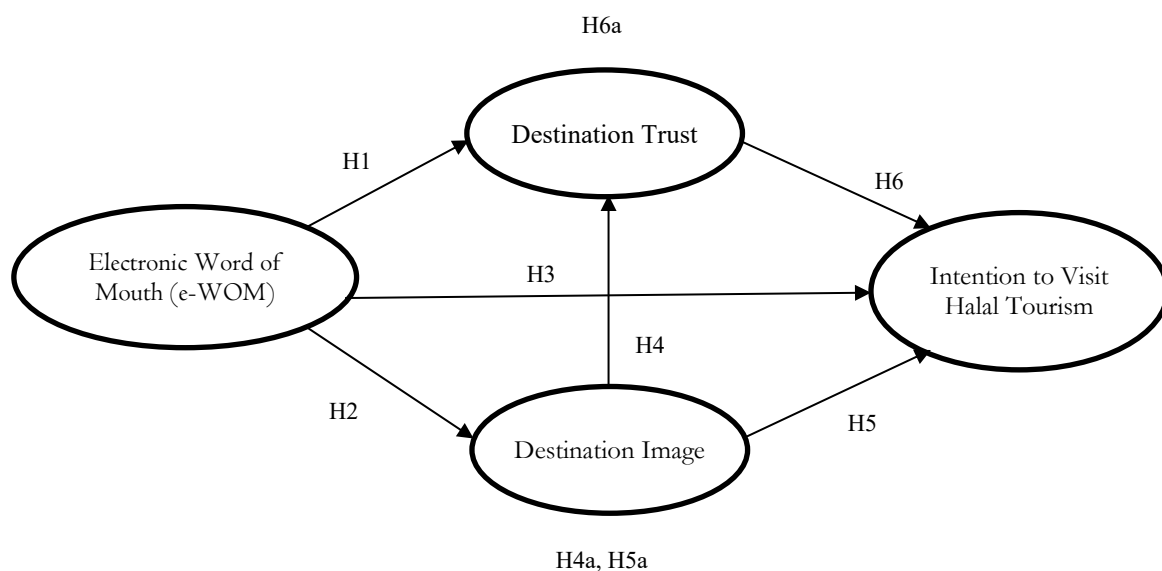


Figure 1. Proposed model

Source: Authors own work

Research Methods

Measures

The questionnaire employed in this study consisted of four main constructs: e-WOM, destination trust, destination image, and travel intention.

- The e-WOM construct was measured using six items adopted from [Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold \(2011\)](#). For example, one item stated, *"I frequently peruse the reviews of other travelers on social media to ascertain which halal tourist destinations are perceived favorably."*
- Destination trust is measured using four items adapted from [Mohammed Abubakar \(2016\)](#). An example item is: *"Bangka Belitung as a nascent halal tourist destination aligns with my expectations."*
- Destination image was measured using six items adapted from [Al-Ansi and Han \(2019\)](#). One example is *"Halal tourism in Bangka Belitung provides facilities for prayer."*
- Travel intention was measured by three items adopted from [Aji et al. \(2021\)](#). An illustrative example is: *"I am likely to visit Bangka Belitung halal tourism in the future."*

Demographic variables include age, gender, educational attainment, monthly income, and regional origin, which provide context for the responses and allow for better control over demographic biases.

Procedure sampling

This study used a random sampling approach, which ensured that each subject in the target population had an equal chance of being selected as a sample for the study. To address the critique of vagueness, the participants were selected based on specific criteria: they had to visit Bangka Belitung in the past year and read social media reviews before deciding to visit. This criterion ensures that the sample is relevant to the study's objectives and that respondents can provide accurate feedback about their experiences. The questionnaire was distributed using Google Form through social media platforms to tourists who visited Bangka Belitung as a tourist destination. The focus on respondents who have visited Bangka Belitung is to capture insights from individuals who have firsthand experience and are able to reflect on the factors that influenced their *intention to visit* prior to their trip. During the eight-week data collection period, multiple reminders were sent to maximize response rates. A pre-test of the questionnaire was conducted with ten participants to identify potential ambiguities in the questions. Feedback was collected and used to refine the questionnaire, ensuring clarity and a better understanding of the respondents.

Validity and reliability tests

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to ensure construct validity and reliability. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) to ensure that the items consistently measured the respective constructs. Convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with a threshold of 0.5 indicating adequate convergent validity (Hair et al., 1998). Discriminant validity was also tested using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which ensures that each construct is distinct from the others.

Data analysis

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS version 3 was used for the data analysis. The justification for PLS-SEM over other methods, such as covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM), lies in the nature of this study. PLS-SEM is more suitable for exploratory research and effective when dealing with complex models with many indicators and constructs, especially when the sample size is a constraint. PLS-SEM also allows for the simultaneous examination of measurement and structural models, providing robust estimates even with non-normal data distributions, which is a potential concern in this study. The analysis follows the two-step approach outlined by Hair et al. (1998). In the first step, CFA was conducted to test the measurement model and evaluate its fit, construct validity, and reliability. Second, the structural model was tested in alignment with the theoretical framework to evaluate the relationships between e-WOM, destination image, destination trust, and travel intention. The hypotheses were then tested and the overall model fit was assessed.

Results and Discussion

Respondent profile

A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed and 312 valid samples were returned. Twenty of these samples could not be processed owing to incomplete data. Consequently, only 292 participants were included in this analysis. 292 data are sufficient to represent the population as they provide a large enough sample to achieve a reasonable margin of error and confidence level, ensuring that the results are statistically reliable for making generalizations. This yielded a return rate of 83% for the distributed questionnaires. Table 1 shows that 67% of the respondents were female, and 33% were male. Similarly, 82% of the respondents were single and 18% were married. The majority of respondents (68%) were between the ages of 18 and 25, 27% were between 26 and

33, and 5% were above the age of 33. The majority of participants (54%) reported a monthly income (in rupiah) of between 3,000,000 and 5,000,000. Further, 38% reported a monthly income of more than 5,000,000, while 8% reported a monthly income between 1,000,000 and 3,000,000.

Table 1. Respondent profile

Description		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	97	33
	Female	195	67
Age	18 – 25 years old	198	68
	26 – 33 years old	80	27
	>33 years old	14	5
Income/Month (In Rupiah)	1.000.000 – 3.000.000	22	8
	3.000.000 – 5.000.000	158	54
	>5.000.000	112	38

Source: Authors own work

Validity and reliability test

The objective of this study was to evaluate the validity and reliability of the data collected. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure was employed to assess the feasibility of the data. The results indicate that the KMO value for all variables is 0.500, which is close to 1.000. Therefore, the statistical results indicate that each variable possesses a distinct value, and is represented by each item posed by the researcher. The lowest KMO value (0.782) was obtained for the destination trust variable. Nevertheless, this KMO value meets the standards set by [Cooper and Schindler \(2014\)](#) and [Hair et al. \(2014\)](#). Consequently, the data in this study were found to exhibit convergent and discriminant validity. Additionally, this study employs the Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MSA) to assess the adequacy of the sampling procedure. [Table 4](#) indicates that the MSA values for all variables reached 0.500. Consequently, this study fulfills the criteria for convergent and discriminant validity.

This study concluded that all variables were assigned values without errors, which is influenced by other factors ([Cooper & Schindler, 2014](#); [Hair et al., 2014](#)). Moreover, this study employed data reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability tests. The results of the data analysis demonstrated that all variables were reliable, as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceeding 0.700 ([Hair et al., 2014](#)). A comprehensive account of the validity and reliability testing is presented in [Table 2](#).

Goodness of fit result test

The suitability of the research model was evaluated by examining the values of several indices, including CMIN/DF, TLI, CFI, and RMSEA. This study presents a cutoff value that is indicative of a value that is relatively small and proximate to AIC saturated ([Yu, 2002](#)). CMIN/DF is one of the indicators used to assess the degree of fit of the research model. The statistical results indicate that the CMIN/DF ratio for the model is 1.318, which suggests that the model is acceptable. The expected TLI value serves as a reference for the acceptance of a model, with a value ≥ 0.950 indicating an acceptable fit. A value approaching 1.000 suggests a highly fit research model.

The CFI value in this study was 0.992, which is nearly equivalent to 1.000. This signifies the highest level of acceptance for the model. CFI is an exemplary index for gauging the level of acceptance of a model ([Hulland et al., 1996](#); [Rigdon, 1998](#)). The RMSEA value in this study was 0.033, which is less than the 0.080 threshold and indicates a satisfactory goodness of fit when the model is estimated in the population ([Hair et al., 2014](#)). As stated by [Hair et al. \(2014\)](#), Goodness of Fit is divided into three categories: excellent, acceptable, and poor. In conclusion, the research model met the goodness-of-fit standard at an excellent level. The results of the model fit analysis are presented in [Table 3](#).

Table 2. Results of validity and reliability test

Variable	Item	Statement	KMO	MSA	AVE	α	CR
Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)	WOM4	I gather a lot of information from other travelers' reviews on social media.	0.884	0.840	0.848	0.922	0.946
	WOM5	If I don't read other travelers' reviews on social media, I will be worried about the decision I make		0.847			
	WOM6	Other travelers' reviews on social media make me confident when traveling to the halal tour		0.930			
Destination Trust	DT1	Bangka Belitung as a new halal tourist destination according to my expectations	0.782	0.808	0.928	0.961	0.957
	DT2	I feel confident visiting Bangka Belitung as a new halal tourist destination		0.748			
	DT3	I will not be disappointed with the services in Bangka Belitung halal tourism		0.782			
Destination Image	DI1	The atmosphere in Bangka Belitung halal tourist attractions adheres to Islamic rules	0.824	0.800	0.802	0.876	0.942
	DI2	Halal tourism in Bangka Belitung provides facilities for prayer		0.716			
	DI3	Halal tourism in Bangka Belitung provides halal food and drinks		0.724			
	DI4	There is information about halal facilities in Bangka Belitung tourist attractions		0.824			
	DI5	In the halal tourism location of Bangka Belitung, workers there are very aware of halal products and services		0.714			
	DI6	Bangka Belitung is an exciting new halal tourism destination		0.776			
Intention to Visit	INT2	I will visit Bangka Belitung as a halal tourism destination compared to other tourism.	0.862	0.942	0.888	0.874	0.924
	INT3	If I need halal travel, I will visit Bangka Belitung.		0.886			

Note: Kaiser Mayer Olkin (KMO); Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MSA); Average Variance Extracted (AVE); Cronbach's alpha (α); Composite Reliability (CR)

Source: Authors own work

Table 3. Goodness of fit results

Criteria	Cut-off Standards	Proposed Model
Chi-square	-	129.157
Probability	≥ 0.05	0.019
CMIN/DF	≤ 5.00	1.318
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.033
TLI	≥ 0.95	0.985
CFI	≥ 0.95	0.992
AIC	-	313.157

Note: CMIN/DF = chi-square discrepancy/degree of freedom; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA); Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI); Comparative Fit Index (CFI); Akaike Information Criterion (AIC).

Source: Authors own work

Hypotheses testing

The results of hypothesis testing are presented in Table 4 and Figure 2. The analysis demonstrates that e-WOM and destination trust are statistically significant ($\beta = .567, p < .01$). The coefficient of determination (R^2) of e-WOM on destination trust is 0.54, indicating that e-WOM engagement contributes 54 % to travelers' destination trust. Consequently, H1 is supported. This is consistent with the findings of Abubakar (2016), who observed that positive online reviews could mitigate the perception of risk and uncertainty among medical tourists when selecting a destination. Moreover, e-WOM exerts a considerable positive influence on destination image, with a value of ($\beta = .439, p < .01$). The coefficient of determination (R square) of e-WOM on destination image is 0.48, indicating that e-WOM engagement contributes 48 % to tourists' destination image. Consequently, H2 was supported. This result is corroborated by the findings of Chorisa et al. (2021), which indicate that tourists seek out information from other tourists on the TripAdvisor platform to ascertain the veracity of positive reviews and to convince themselves that Komodo Island has a favorable destination image and is a worthwhile destination. In addition, destination image and destination trust have a significant effect ($\beta = .356, p < .01$), thereby supporting H4. This finding aligns with the research of Jebbouri et al. (2022), which posits that a favorable destination image of a tourist destination conveyed by online visitors can instill additional confidence in tourists that the destination is indeed worthy of a visit.

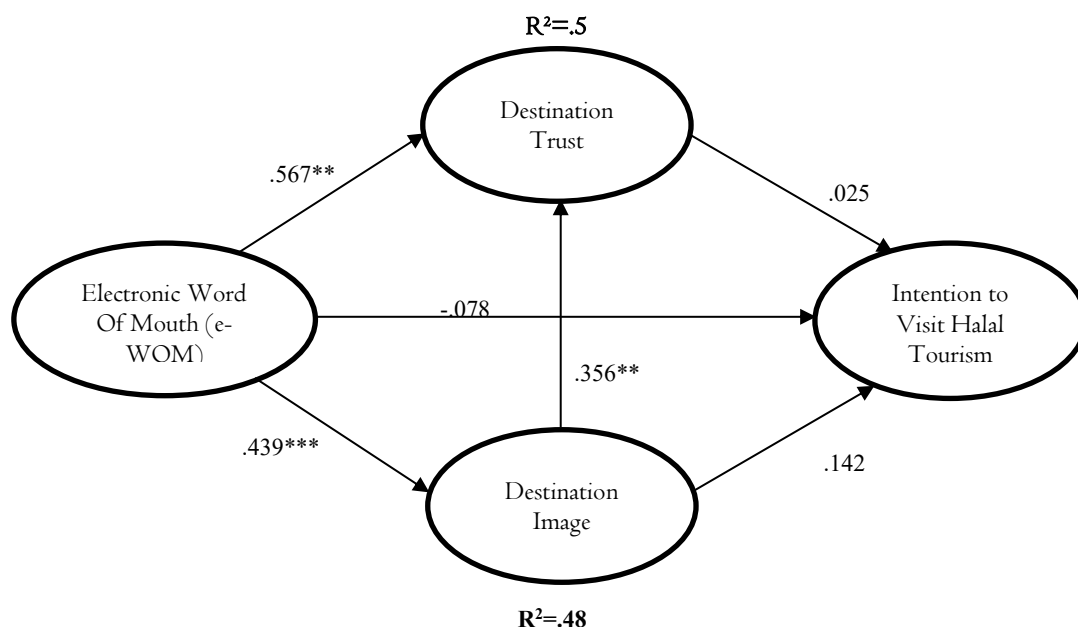


Figure 2. Path analysis
Source: Authors own work

The effect of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on intention to visit exhibits a negative correlation value ($\beta = -.078, p = .461$), thereby refuting the hypothesis that H3 is supported. This finding aligns with Jalilvand et al. (2011), who examined the impact of e-WOM on the selection of tourist destinations. The results indicate that e-WOM influences destination image and tourist attitude. However, its impact on visiting intentions is contingent upon other factors such as subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. Meanwhile, the value of destination trust on intention to visit is ($\beta = .025, p = .809$), which indicates that H5 is not supported. This is corroborated by Li et al. (2020) findings, which demonstrate that, although destination trust is a crucial factor, in certain instances, trust does not invariably exert a significant influence on the intention to visit. This can be attributed to other factors such as personal motivation and destination attractiveness, which may be more dominant. Finally, the results indicate that destination image does not exert a direct influence on intention to visit ($\beta = .142, p = .088$), thereby

negating support for H6. This finding is corroborated by the findings of [Chiu et al. \(2016\)](#), who indicate that the overall destination image does not always exert a direct influence. The decision to revisit is influenced more by previous experiences and personal beliefs than by destination image.

Table 4. Hypotheses test

Hypotheses	Causalities	Proposed Model			Results
		β	C.R.	P	
H1 (+)	e-WOM \rightarrow Destination Trust	.567	4.748	.01	Sig
H2 (+)	e-WOM \rightarrow Destination Image	.439	5.754	.01	Sig
H3 (-)	e-WOM \rightarrow Intention to Visit	-.078	-.201	.461	N/A
H4 (+)	Destination Image \rightarrow Destination Trust	.356	6.215	.01	Sig
H5 (+)	Destination Trust \rightarrow Intention to Visit	.025	.422	.809	N/A
H6 (+)	Destination Image \rightarrow Intention to Visit	.142	.504	.088	N/A

Note: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Sig = Significant, N/A = Not Significant

Source: Authors own work

Furthermore, researchers tested hypotheses H4a, H5a, and H6a using bootstrapping techniques ([Streukens & Leroi-Werelds, 2016](#)) with the SmartPLS version 3 analysis tool to analyze the mediation effect. Given that the results of the analyses of H5 and H6 are not supported, hypothesis testing to test H5a and H6a cannot be continued. The results of the analysis in [Table 5](#) indicate that destination image plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between e-WOM and destination trust ($ab = .156$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI .090–.235), thereby supporting H4a. This finding is consistent with the research findings of [Setiawan et al. \(2021\)](#), which indicate that positive reviews or e-WOM contributes to the formation of a positive image of tourist attractions in Japan and Indonesia, subsequently enhancing tourist trust in these destinations.

Table 5. Indirect effect testing

Hipotesis	Path Coefficient (ab)	p-value	95% Path Coefficient Confidence Interval (CI)		Results
			Lower	Upper	
			H4a (e-WOM \rightarrow Destination Image \rightarrow Destination Trust)	.156	
H5a (e-WOM \rightarrow Destination Trust \rightarrow Intention to Visit)	.014	.811	-.104	.129	Not Supported
H6a (e-WOM \rightarrow Destination Image \rightarrow Intention to Visit)	.062	.111	-.015	.142	Not Supported

Note: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: Authors own work

Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the relationships between e-WOM, destination trust, destination image, and intention to visit halal tourism in Bangka Belitung. These results have important implications for understanding the dynamics of tourist behavior, particularly in the context of halal tourism. Bangka Belitung, renowned for its pristine beaches and rich cultural heritage, is actively positioned as a halal-friendly destination. However, challenges such as the insufficient availability of halal-certified facilities and the limited promotion of halal tourism offerings may partially explain the nuances observed in the results of this study.

The positive and significant influence of e-WOM on destination trust (H1) underscores the critical role of online reviews and recommendations in building trust among tourists. This aligns with prior studies, such as [Taecharungroj and Mathayomchan \(2019\)](#), who emphasized the role of positive reviews as social proof in reinforcing trust in a destination's reliability. For Bangka Belitung, discussions about halal amenities and cultural sensitivity on online platforms are likely to

enhance perceptions of trustworthiness. This finding highlights the need for local stakeholders to actively curate and amplify positive e-WOM to foster a robust trust framework for prospective visitors.

Similarly, the positive relationship between e-WOM and destination image (H2) corroborates prior research by [Madi et al. \(2024\)](#), who emphasized the role of e-WOM in shaping tourists' perceptions. In the case of Bangka Belitung, the portrayal of its natural beauty, local culture, and halal-friendly initiatives on digital platforms contributes significantly to a favorable destination image. However, the impact of e-WOM may be constrained by the limited verified halal content and the lack of comprehensive awareness campaigns targeting global Muslim travelers. To address this, enhancing the digital presence of Bangka Belitung's halal tourism offerings is essential to solidifying its image as a desirable destination.

Interestingly, this study found that e-WOM does not significantly influence the intention to visit (H3). This result aligns with that of [Jalilvand et al. \(2011\)](#), who argued that personal motivation and perceived behavioral control are critical mediators of this relationship. For Bangka Belitung, external factors such as affordability, accessibility, and perceived inadequacy of halal infrastructure may act as barriers, preventing positive e-WOM from translating into actual visitation intentions. Addressing these barriers by improving infrastructure, offering competitive travel packages, and emphasizing the ease of accessing halal facilities could help bridge the gap between favorable perceptions and actionable intentions.

The absence of the direct effects of destination trust and destination image on the intention to visit (H4 and H5) warrants further consideration. [Li et al. \(2020\)](#) suggested that motivational factors such as individual preferences or situational constraints often mediate the relationship between trust or image and behavioral intentions. For Bangka Belitung, while trust and image may enhance perceptions of the destination, they may not suffice to drive visitation intentions unless complemented by compelling motivators such as unique experiences, promotional offers, or stronger emotional connections. This indicates that merely enhancing trust and image without addressing practical and emotional motivators may yield limited success in increasing tourist arrival.

Furthermore, the mediation effects of destination trust and destination image on the relationship between e-WOM and intention to visit are not supported. This suggests that while e-WOM enhances trust and image, these constructs alone are insufficient to significantly impact tourists' decision-making process. This finding highlights the need for an integrated approach that combines e-WOM strategies with other promotional efforts, such as direct engagement with target audiences, partnerships with travel agencies, and innovative marketing campaigns that showcase unique halal tourism experiences.

In summary, this study underscores the complexity of tourist decision-making processes, particularly in the context of halal tourism in Bangka Belitung. While e-WOM plays a crucial role in shaping trust and image, its translation into actual visitation requires addressing practical constraints and enhancing the motivational factors. Future strategies should focus on improving the halal-certified infrastructure, increasing accessibility, and leveraging both digital and offline marketing channels to create a compelling proposition for halal tourism. By addressing these challenges, Bangka Belitung can strengthen its position as a premier halal-friendly destination and align its offerings more effectively with the expectations of global Muslim travelers.

Conclusion

This study explored the mediating role of destination image and trust in the relationship between electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and the intention to visit halal tourism in Bangka Belitung. The findings reveal that while e-WOM significantly influences destination trust and image, these variables do not directly translate into visit intentions. Contrary to expectations, neither e-WOM, destination trust, nor destination image had a significant direct impact on tourists' intention to visit. These results suggest that, while e-WOM contributes to building positive perceptions and trust, other factors may play a more critical role in shaping tourists' actual decisions to visit a destination. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of e-WOM by highlighting its role in shaping trust and image, particularly in halal tourism. However, the findings challenge conventional

assumptions that positive perceptions directly lead to behavioral intentions, suggesting that visit intentions may depend on external factors such as personal motivations, perceived behavioral control, or subjective norms, as posited by frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). This nuanced perspective provides valuable insights for future research on the complex pathways linking perceptions, trust, and behavioral intentions.

From a practical standpoint, the findings imply that tourism stakeholders need to look beyond fostering trust and enhancing image through e-WOM. While these elements are important, they are insufficient on their own to drive visit intention. Destination managers should consider strategies that connect these positive perceptions with tourists' deeper motivations and personal values, such as personalized marketing, immersive experiences, and authentic cultural sensitivity. For halal tourism providers, prioritizing authenticity and aligning offerings with the specific needs of Muslim travelers can enhance the overall appeal and decision-making processes for potential visitors. Despite its contributions, this study has limitations, including reliance on self-reported data, a narrow geographical focus on Bangka Belitung, and the exclusion of potential moderating variables, such as personal motivations or digital platform influences. Future research could address these limitations by exploring broader contexts, examining additional mediating and moderating variables, and investigating long-term effects, such as tourist loyalty and revisit intentions. Expanding the study to include other halal tourism destinations would also enhance the generalizability and applicability of the findings.

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