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Fostering digital advocacy: Psychological and experiential drivers of tourist e-WOM in halal tourism

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Abstract

The development of halal tourism in Indonesia shows a positive trend in line with the increasing interest of tourists in destinations that combine cultural values, spirituality, and halal culinary experiences. Borobudur Temple, as one of the Super Priority Tourist Destinations (DPSP), has been transformed into a Muslim-friendly destination. In this context, traveller behaviour in sharing travel experiences digitally has become an important aspect of destination communication strategies, especially through electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM). This study aims to analyse the influence of Memorable Halal Food Experience (MHFE), Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), and Tourist Satisfaction (TS) on tourists' electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM). The research approach used was quantitative, involving 270 respondents who were tourists in the Borobudur Temple area, Magelang. The sampling technique used purposive sampling, while the data analysis used multiple regression analysis using SmartPLS 4.0 software. The results showed that MHFE ($\beta = 0.078$; $p = 0.245$) had no significant effect, whereas TS ($\beta = 0.342$; $p < 0.001$) and FoMO ($\beta = 0.313$; $p = 0.001$) had a significant positive effect on e-WOM. These findings suggest a contextual normalization of halal food attributes, positioning them as expected standards rather than experiential triggers of digital advocacy. In contrast, the FoMO and TS variables were found to have a significant effect on e-WOM. This shows that the psychological drive not to be left behind in the traveller experience, as well as the level of traveller satisfaction with the destination, is the main determinant in the formation of recommendation-based digital communication.

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Keywords

Tourism communication, e-WOM, MHFE

Introduction

The halal tourism industry has undergone a paradigm transformation from a purely religious market to a highly competitive and promising segment of the global economy [1] [2]. This phenomenon is triggered by the rapid growth of the world's Muslim

population and the increasing awareness of the halal lifestyle that is now beginning to be adopted by non-Muslim consumers because of its relation to health, hygiene, and consumption ethics [3]. In the global landscape, the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) 2024 places Indonesia in the top position on par with Malaysia, showing that Indonesia is no longer just a participant, but also a leader in the world's Muslim-friendly tourism market [4]. This success creates a demand for destinations in Indonesia to continue to innovate in providing services that go beyond basic standards, especially in the most crucial element of the travel experience, which is culinary. Food is no longer just a travel complement, but has shifted to become the main motivation that determines the satisfaction and loyalty of tourists in the modern era [5].

The context of this transformation becomes very relevant if you review the strategic steps of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy which has designated the Borobudur Temple area as one of the leading Muslim-friendly tourist destinations. As a world heritage site with a strong cultural background, the integration of Muslim-friendly services in Borobudur creates a unique dynamic where local traditions meet sharia compliance standards. However, a major challenge arises when the goals change; how the experience offered can give an emotional impression in the memory of tourists so that they are ready to become digital supporters of the destination. In the midst of the dominance of social media, the success of a destination is highly dependent on organic content generated by users through *electronic Word of Mouth* (e-WOM). Travelers today tend to trust reviews from fellow visitors on digital platforms more than official promotions, making e-WOM the most credible and effective marketing instrument in influencing other people's travel decisions [6].

Researchers have previously attempted to dissect the factors driving the emergence of e-WOM through various lenses, such as quality of service, objective imagery, and functional satisfaction [7] [8]. Most research on halal tourism tends to focus on the availability of worship facilities and halal food attributes that are technical in nature, such as certification and labelling [9]. Although these aspects are important, the existing literature is still limited in exploring the affective and cognitive dimensions of the eating experience itself. Conventional research often stops at measuring customer satisfaction in general, but rarely touches on the "memorable" aspects of an immersive experience. In fact, memorable experiences have a much stronger drive in triggering post-visit behaviours, especially in the form of digital advocacy through social media [10][11].

The current literature gap suggests that there is an unexplored space on how *Memorable Halal Food Experiences* (MHFEs) work particularly in the Muslim-friendly tourism ecosystem. Most research still separates the culinary experience from contemporary digital behaviours such as *Fear of Missing Out* (FoMO). In the digital age, travellers' behaviour is not only influenced by how they feel physically, but also by the psychological drive to stay relevant in their online social environment. FoMO has been identified as a powerful catalyst in instant information-sharing behaviour, but its relevance to impressive halal food experiences is still rarely comprehensively discussed

in a single conceptual model [12]. Additionally, while *Tourist Satisfaction* (TS) is often considered a standard mediator, its role in bridging a unique culinary experience with the intensity of e-WOM in changing destinations like Borobudur requires further testing.

This incompleteness of understanding provides an opportunity for this research to offer novelty by integrating the MHFE dimension as a key determinant in building digital advocacy. A major focus is placed on MHFE because unforgettable dining experiences include emotional, social, and sensory elements that go beyond just food taste or ritual adherence [13]. In the context of Borobudur, MHFE is not just about the halalness of the product, but about how the narrative of food, cultural presentation, and environmental interaction creates long-term memories that compel tourists to share their stories digitally [14]. By examining the interaction between MHFE, FoMO psychological stress, and tourist satisfaction levels, this study attempts to fill in the theoretical gap regarding the mechanism for the formation of more complex and multidimensional e-WOM in the halal tourism sector [15].

Therefore, this study aims to analyse in depth the influence of *Memorable Halal Food Experience* (MHFE), *Fear of Missing Out* (FoMO), and *Tourist Satisfaction* (TS) on the *electronic Word of Mouth* (e-WOM) of tourists. This approach is carried out to prove that a well-designed halal culinary experience can be the main driver in destination marketing through digital channels. Methodologically, this study will use a quantitative approach with a survey of tourists who have visited the Borobudur area and enjoyed culinary experiences there. Through this model, it is hoped that a new understanding will emerge for destination managers and policymakers about the importance of managing the sensory and emotional aspects of halal food to create a sustainable competitive advantage on the global tourism stage.

Method

This study adopts a quantitative approach, which was chosen for its ability to enable systematic measurement of variables and inference of causal relationships between variables through statistical analysis techniques [16]. The main objective of this method is to empirically test the influence of the independent variables MHFE, FoMO, and TS on the e-WOM dependent variables of travellers. The population of this study is all tourists who visit the Borobudur Temple area, Magelang, which is currently being transformed into a *Muslim-friendly destination*.

The research sample totalled 270 respondents, which were selected using the purposive sampling technique [17]. The special criterion used in the selection of samples is that respondents must have real experience in consuming halal food during their tourist visits around the Borobudur Temple area. This criterion ensures that the data collected comes from respondents who have credible and relevant perceptions of the halal tourism experience as well as their involvement in the destination's digital communication [18].

Data collection was carried out through the distribution of questionnaires, both online and *offline.* The questionnaire instrument uses a five-point Likert scale to measure respondents' level of approval of each statement [19]. Indicators for each variable were adopted and validated from previous studies to ensure the reliability and validity of the construct: MHFE was adopted from [20] and [21] FoMO adopts from [22]; TS adopts from [23]; and e-WOM adopted from [24]and [25].

The data analysis technique employed was Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The statistical software used to operate this analysis is SmartPLS version 4.0. The selection of this technique is based on its ability to test causal relationships and identify the magnitude of the influence of independent variables on dependent variables simultaneously and partially. Prior to structural model testing, measurement model testing (Outer Model) was performed, which included reliability evaluations (*Composite Reliability* and *Alpha > Cronbach* value of 0.70) and convergent validity (*Average Variance Extracted* (AVE) > 0.50), as well as discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criteria and HTMT ratio < 0.90) [26]. The results of the measurement model test showed that all the criteria had been met, confirming the feasibility of the model for further analysis [27].

Results and discussion

Results

The sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1 The sample of this study was relatively balanced by gender, with women (55.9%) slightly more than men (44.1%). Based on country of origin, most of the tourists are domestic visitors from Indonesia (61.5%) followed by the rest from foreign tourists (38.5%). This proportion shows that Borobudur attracts both local and international tourists.

In terms of the use of social media used by respondents to disseminate information while traveling in Borobudur is dominated by Instagram (68.9%), which is the main platform for tourists to share their photos, videos, and travel stories. Facebook is used by 13.3% of respondents, followed by TikTok (7.4%), and the rest use other social media.

The age structure of the respondents was dominated by the productive age group, where the three largest groups were 20–29 years (40.7%), 30–39 years (20.0%), and 40–49 years (17.0%). This indicates that Borobudur is very attractive to tourists of working and active age. In addition, the diversity of respondents' religious backgrounds is reflected with the three highest proportions held by Islam (57.4%), Christianity (35.25%), and Buddhism (3.7%). This composition affirms Borobudur as an inclusive and attractive cultural and religious destination for adherents of various faiths.

In terms of monthly income, most respondents were below USD 500 (54.8%), followed by income of USD 2,001 – 3,000 (15.9%), above USD 3,000 (12.2%), USD 501–1,000 (10.0%), and USD 1,001 – 2,000 (7.0%). In terms of visit behavior, most respondents (37.8%) visited Borobudur for the first time, while the rest had visited more than once (25.9% two–three

times; 11.9% four–five; and 24.4% more than five times). This data shows that Borobudur has a strong appeal as a new tourist destination for first-time visitors while maintaining the interest of old tourists to return.

Tabel 1. Profile tourist

Profile	n	%
Number of Visited		
1 time	102	37.8%
2-3 times	70	25.9%
4-5 times	32	11.9%
More than 5 times	66	24.4%
Age		
19 years below	34	12.6%
20 – 29 years	110	40.7%
30 – 39 years	54	20.0%
40 – 49 years	46	17.0%
50 – 59 years	17	6.3%
60 years above	9	3.3%
Sex		
Woman	151	55.9%
Man	119	44.1%
Religion		
Muslim	155	57.4%
Christian	95	35.25
Jewis	3	1.1%
Hindu	5	1.9%
Buddhist	10	3.7%
Roman Catholic	2	0.7%
Tourist Type		
Domestic	166	61.5%
Foreign	104	38.5%
Monthly Income		
$ 500 and below	148	54.8%
$ 501 -$ 1.000	27	10.0%
$ 1.001 – $ 2.000	19	7.0%
$ 2.001 – $ 3.000	43	15.9%
$ 3.001 - above	33	12.2%
Media Sosial		
Facebook	36	13.3%
Instagram	186	68.9%
Snapchat	1	0,4%
Tik Tok	20	7.4%
Trip Advisor	2	0.7%
Twitter	1	0.4%
WhatApps Story	16	5.9%
Youtube	7	2.6%
Other Media	1	0.4%
Average no of trips		
1 – 2 trips	109	40.4%
3 -5 trips	110	40.7%
6 – 10 trips	34	12.6%
More than 10 trips	17	6.3%
TOTAL	270	100.00%

Overall, the characteristics of the respondents showed that Borobudur tourists were dominated by domestic visitors of productive age with diverse socioeconomic and religious backgrounds. Instagram is the main medium for sharing information while

traveling. In addition, the high proportion of new visitors and the return of old tourists shows Borobudur's strong and sustainable appeal as a cultural and religious destination.

The results of SmartPLS analysis in Table 2 showed that all the research constructs had an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value of > 0.50, Composite Reliability (CR) > 0.70, and Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70. These values indicate that each construct is already reliable and has good convergent validity. This approach involves examining the inter-construct correlation matrix, in particular by comparing the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of a latent construct, found on the main diagonal, with its correlation with all the other constructs in the model [28] [29]. Our analysis confirms the validity of the discriminant, as the square root of AVE for each construct consistently exceeds its correlation with all other constructs, indicating that each construct is unique and measures unique aspects of the phenomenon.

Table 2. Measurement model items and factors

Construct	Loadings	VIF
Memorable Halal Food Experience (MHFE) (AVE = 0.84, CR = 0.89, α = 0.75)		
(MHFE1) I have wonderful memories of my recent halal food experience.	0.83	1.912
(MHFE2) I will not forget my recent halal food experience.	0.87	2.368
(MHFE3) I will remember my recent halal food experience.	0.89	1.911
Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) (AVE = 0.90, CR = 0.90, α = 0.73)		
(FoMO1) I feel anxious when I don't get to experience events/opportunities.	0.83	2.421
(FoMO2) I believe I'm missing out compared to others when I miss events/opportunities.	0.85	2.631
(FoMO3) I feel anxious knowing that something important or fun must be happening in tourism destination when I'm not there.	0.87	2.942
(FoMO4) I feel sad if I can't participate in destination events due to other commitments.	0.86	2.736
(FoMO5) I feel regretful about missing out on events/opportunities	0.84	2.436
Tourist Satification (TS) (AVE = 0.87, CR = 0.87, α = 0.91)		
(TS1) The trip met my expectations.	0.87	2.255
(TS2) I am satisfied with the overall impression of the trip to Borobudur.	0.89	2.309
(TS3) Compared to other similar tourist activities, I am satisfied with this experience.	0.87	1.895
Electronic Word of Mouth (EWoM) (AVE = 0.876, CR = 0.87, α= 0.67)		
(EWoM1) I plan to share my experiences of my trip with friends and on social media more often in the future	0.85	2.742
(EWoM2) I will share my friends' experiences and photos from their trips with my other friends on social media.	0.84	2.714
(EWoM3) I will post my honest reviews (positive or negative) of my trip on social media for others to see.	0.83	2.204
(EWoM4) Before my trip, I frequently check online reviews from other travellers to help choose the right destination	0.85	2.318
(EWoM5) I would have been unsure about choosing Borobudur as my destination if I hadn't read online reviews.	0.70	1.499

The loading factor value of all indicators is in the range of 0.70–0.89 (above the threshold of 0.70), so each indicator is valid in measuring its construct [30]. For example,

the MHEF3 indicator in the Memorable Halal Food Experience construct has the highest loading (0.89), while other indicators in FoMO, TS, MHFE, and EWoM are also consistent with high loading values. Meanwhile, the VIF value of all indicators is in the range of 1,449–2,942, well below the critical limit of 5.0, so there is no multicollinearity problem. The results showed no significant problems with the questionnaire items, as shown in Table 2 Thus, the measurement model of this study was declared to meet the eligibility criteria for further analysis.

To establish the validity of the discriminator, we first applied the criteria of Fornell & Larcker 1981 [31]. Second, a Heterotrait-Monotrait 2 (HTMT2) correlation ratio was used, with all HTMT2 values recorded below the conservative threshold of 0.90, with the highest value being 0.71. This provides strong evidence that discriminant validity has been well established in the model [33] [34].

Based on Table 4 all constructs in this study show a greater value of the square root of AVE than the correlation between other constructs. For example, the diagonal value for the Destination Image (EWoM) is 0.82, higher than the correlation (EWoM) with other constructs such as FoMO (0.47), MHFE (0.33), TS (0.50). A similar pattern also occurs in other constructs, such as FoMO (0.85), MHFE (0.86), TS (0.87), all of which are greater than their cross-correlation values.

The results of the test with HTMT also showed that the entire value of the heterotrait-monotrait ratio was below the limit of 0.90. These relatively low HTMT values indicate that each construct is quite different from each other (discriminatory), so that there is no overlap between constructs. Thus, the discriminant validity test through both the Fornell–Larcker and HTMT criteria proves that the constructs in this model have clarity and specificity in measuring the variables in question. This ensures that the measurement model is feasible for further analysis on the structural model.

The results of the structural model testing showed that most of the hypothetical relationships were supported by the data based on Table 4 Tourist Satisfaction (TS) was shown to have a positive and significant effect on Electronic Word of Mouth (EWoM) ($\beta = 0.342$; $p < 0.001$). These findings show that the higher the level of satisfaction of travellers, the greater their tendency to share their travel experiences through social media.

In addition, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) also had a positive and significant effect on EWoM ($\beta = 0.313$; $p = 0.001$). This indicates that the psychological drive not to be left behind from social experiences encourages tourists to be more active in sharing travel experiences online.

In contrast, Memorable Halal Food Experience (MHFE) had no significant effect on EWoM ($\beta = 0.078$; $p = 0.245$). These findings show that the halal culinary experience in Borobudur is not strong enough to encourage tourists to share their experiences on social media, and is more perceived as a basic need than an experience that is unique or worth sharing.

Table 3. Discriminant validity

	Fornell-Lacker			
	EWoM	**FoMO**	**MHFE**	**TS**
EWoM	0.82			
FoMO	0.47	0.85		
MHFE	0.33	0.34	0.86	
TS	0.50	0.40	0.42	0.87

	Heterotrait-Monotrait 2			
	EWoM	**FoMO**	**MHFE**	**TS**
EWoM				
FoMO	0.53			
MHFE	0.36	0.38		
TS	0.57	0.44	0.50	

Table 4. Structural model evaluation results

Hypothesis path	***β***	**Std. Deviation**	***t*- value**	***p*- value**	**Interpretation**
Direct Effect					
H1 FoMO → EWoM	0.313	0.052	6.048	0.000	Supported
H2 MHFE → EWoM	0.078	0.067	1.162	0.245	Not supported
H3 TS → EWoM	0.342	0.055	6.211	0.000	Supported

Discussion

This study contributes to tourism communication scholarship by explaining how electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) in halal tourism is primarily driven by evaluative satisfaction and psychological motivation, rather than by experiential memorability alone. The findings indicate that digital advocacy among tourists emerges not merely from what is experienced, but from how that experience is cognitively evaluated and socially positioned within digital networks.

The significant influence of tourist satisfaction on e-WOM can be interpreted through Expectation–Confirmation Theory (ECT), which emphasizes satisfaction as a post-consumption judgment resulting from the comparison between expectations and actual performance [34] . In the context of Borobudur as a Muslim-friendly destination, satisfaction reflects an integrated assessment of service quality, emotional comfort, and perceived inclusivity. When tourists perceive that their expectations are fulfilled or exceeded, they are more inclined to communicate their experiences voluntarily through digital platforms. This finding reinforces previous studies demonstrating that satisfaction functions as a key antecedent of online recommendation behavior in tourism contexts [35] [36], while extending them by confirming its relevance in halal tourism settings where symbolic assurance and cultural sensitivity are central.

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) also demonstrates a strong explanatory role in shaping e-WOM behaviour. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory and Social Comparison Theory, FoMO represents a psychological tension arising from the desire to remain socially connected and visible within online communities. Tourists experiencing higher levels of

FoMO tend to engage more actively in digital sharing as a strategy to maintain social relevance and avoid perceived exclusion. This finding aligns with recent tourism and media studies that identify FoMO as a catalyst for real-time experience sharing and continuous online engagement [37] [38]. Unlike satisfaction, which is largely reflective and retrospective, FoMO operates during the consumption phase, thereby accelerating the production of e-WOM.

In contrast, the absence of a significant relationship between Memorable Halal Food Experience (MHFE) and e-WOM should not be interpreted as the irrelevance of halal culinary experiences. Instead, this result reflects a contextual shift in mature Muslim-friendly destinations where halal food has become a standardized expectation rather than a distinctive experiential trigger. From the perspective of Means–End Chain Theory, attributes that are perceived as basic requirements tend to lose their symbolic and communicative power unless they are embedded in broader narratives or offer emotional differentiation. While earlier studies have found memorable food experiences to stimulate storytelling and recommendation behavior [39] [40], those findings were often situated in contexts where halal food was novel or scarce. In Borobudur, where halal food availability is normalized, memorability alone may be insufficient to stimulate digital advocacy.

Theoretically, this study refines the understanding of e-WOM formation by demonstrating that psychological urgency (FoMO) and cognitive evaluation (satisfaction) outweigh experiential memorability in contexts where service attributes are institutionalized. Practically, destination managers should move beyond compliance-based halal offerings and design emotionally engaging, time-sensitive, and socially shareable culinary narratives that can restore the communicative value of halal food experiences.

Conclusion

This study elucidates the communication mechanisms underlying electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) in halal tourism by examining the roles of Memorable Halal Food Experience (MHFE), Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), and Tourist Satisfaction (TS). The findings demonstrate that digital advocacy is primarily driven by evaluative satisfaction and psychological urgency rather than experiential memorability alone.

Tourist satisfaction emerges as the strongest determinant of e-WOM, indicating that experiences are translated into digital communication through cognitive evaluation processes. FoMO further accelerates online sharing behaviour by reinforcing social visibility and comparison within digital networks. In contrast, the non-significant effect of MHFE suggests that in mature Muslim-friendly destinations, halal food attributes have become normalized expectations, rendering experiential memorability insufficient to independently trigger digital advocacy.

Overall, this study advances communication scholarship by positioning e-WOM as a form of mediated interpersonal communication shaped by psychological motivation and evaluative judgment. Practically, destination managers should move beyond compliance-based halal offerings and design emotionally resonant and socially shareable experiences to stimulate organic digital advocacy.

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