

INDONESIA'S DIGITAL DIPLOMACY IN DEVELOPING THE HALAL TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Abstract. Indonesia, a country with a rich Islamic heritage and a significant number of Muslim tourists, has experienced a decline in global tourist arrivals in 2020 due to the worldwide impact of the pandemic. This decline is impacting the tourism industry, which is a leading sector. The Indonesian government is exploring ways to encourage an increase in tourist visits, particularly to halal tourism destinations, through the use of digital diplomacy. This research endeavors to shed light on Indonesia's digital diplomacy efforts and their potential for fostering the growth of the halal tourism industry. The objective of this study is to gain insight into how Indonesia is employing digital diplomacy to advance the development of the halal tourism industry. To gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter, a qualitative research method was employed, utilizing a literature study. Information was gathered from a variety of secondary sources and documents about the subject matter of this research. The data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach. The findings suggest that digital diplomacy has emerged as a valuable tool for Indonesia in the development and promotion of halal tourism. Indonesia has employed digital diplomacy to enhance the government's internal capabilities in operations and communication through the Tourist Information Center online portal, disseminating information and tourism promotion via social media, fostering interaction with citizens, and strengthening collaboration with various international stakeholders in halal tourism.

Keywords: *digital media, digital diplomacy, halal tourism, Indonesia*

Introduction

Tourism plays an important role in international relations, contributing significantly to economic growth, enhancing the country's image, and creating employment opportunities. Indonesia is fortunate to have abundant natural resources and a wealth of tourist destinations. It is also worth noting that Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population, as well as the largest number of internet users globally. According to a report from the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center (RISSC) in 2023, the Muslim population in Indonesia was recorded at 240.62 million. This figure represents 86.7% of the total national population of 277.53 million (Annur, 2023). Additionally, the number of internet users in Indonesia in 2022 reached 204.7 million people, with an internet penetration rate of 73.7% of the total population (Annur, 2022). In 2020, Indonesia witnessed a notable decline in the volume of global tourist arrivals, largely attributable to the worldwide pandemic of the novel coronavirus, which had a detrimental impact on the tourism industry. In 2019, Indonesia received 16,106,954 international visitors (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2019). However, the global pandemic led to a significant decline in 2020, with only 4,052,923 international tourists visiting the country (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020). The number of foreign tourist visits decreased dramatically in 2021 due to the continued global impact of the pandemic, with 1,557,530 visits recorded (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021). In 2022, the number of tourist visits increased to 5,471,277, although it has not yet reached the level of pre-pandemic

tourism (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2022). In 2023, the number of foreign tourist arrivals began to experience a significant increase, amounting to 11,677,825 tourists (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). This notable shift reflects the impact of the global pandemic on Indonesia's tourism industry, which has demonstrated a remarkable recovery in a relatively short period.

In the annual report, it is predicted that the development of the Muslim travel market will continue to increase, reaching 230 million by 2026. This demonstrates the significant potential for halal tourism in Indonesia, which has the potential to serve as a primary catalyst for the recovery and growth of the tourism industry in the post-COVID-19 era. Following the advent of digitalization across all sectors, the Government of Indonesia must adapt to these changes to enhance the competitiveness of the halal tourism industry through digital diplomacy. Digital diplomacy can be defined as the utilization of information and communication technology, social media, and websites by state actors to conduct diplomacy and foreign policy activities (Samad and Permatasari, 2023). In the context of halal tourism, digital diplomacy can assist Indonesia in promoting halal tourist destinations, disseminating pertinent information, and developing a favorable image as a Muslim-friendly tourist destination. This research project aims to investigate Indonesia's digital diplomacy strategies in the development of the halal tourism industry to optimize the potential of the halal tourism sector in Indonesia. It is anticipated that the findings of this research will contribute to the effective exploitation of the potential of halal tourism as well as to the stimulation of interest among global Muslim tourists.

Literature review

Public diplomacy

In the contemporary era of globalization, diplomatic activities have increased significantly following the growing complexity of global issues. The scope of international relations has expanded beyond the domain of state-to-state interactions, encompassing a broader array of relations between global communities. Consequently, the conventional diplomatic approach, designated as "first track diplomacy", is not invariably the most efficacious method for conveying diplomatic messages to a nation-state. However, this does not indicate that traditional diplomacy is not important. Rather, it suggests that the implementation of traditional diplomacy needs to be supported by a public diplomacy approach (Cho, 2012) or developed into multitrack diplomacy. The multitrack diplomacy approach aims to advance national interests not only through engagement with state actors but also with non-state actors. The implementation of public diplomacy by a country can facilitate public understanding of government policies, including efforts to develop halal tourism in an area that is the focus of research in the context of halal tourism in Indonesia.

Digital diplomacy

Digital diplomacy serves as a conduit for fostering persuasion and shaping perceptions on a global scale, with a particular focus on how a country strategizes and produces content within the digital diplomacy domain. In this context, digital diplomacy plays a pivotal role in determining the messages that a country will disseminate to foreign entities and other interested parties. In its evolution, digital diplomacy has undergone several stages, as outlined by Almuftah and Sivarajah (2016): (1) Initial

stage (intra-organizational capabilities). This stage can be identified by the availability of digital services within the organization that are used by the government in diplomatic activities to facilitate coordination with each other. (2) Second stage (mobile access). This stage can be identified by the use of resources in the form of social networks by the government to create dialogue or interaction with the people in a country. (3) Third stage (citizen interaction). This stage is characterized by interaction between the government and the public with the help of social media networks and websites. The government can communicate all its policies to everyone through digital media. The government can also use the Internet and social networks as a means of cultural exchange and promotion for the country. (4) The final stage (collaborative diplomacy). This stage involves cooperation and collaboration with other countries, international organizations, and global stakeholders through digital platforms. The focus is on open and transparent diplomacy and the sharing of knowledge and resources.

Halal tourism

Halal tourism can be defined as a subset of tourism that is by Islamic teachings and can be participated in by Muslims (Battour and Ismail, 2016). This concept reflects the actualization of Islam, wherein the halal and haram criteria serve as the primary standards, thereby establishing halal certification as an integral element in all aspects of tourism activities (Chookaew et al., 2015). As outlined in the Dinar Standard's State of the Global Islamic Economy Report, halal tourism, also referred to as Muslim-friendly tourism, represents a response to the needs of Muslim travelers based on religious considerations. This encompasses a diverse range of facilities, including beach resorts and family-oriented hotels (DinarStandard Web Portal, 2022). In developing halal tourism, several factors must be taken into account to ensure its success. For instance, Indonesia employs indicators established by the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) to advance halal tourism, particularly the development of regional halal tourism, which is conducted through the Indonesia Muslim Travel Index (IMTI) assessment. This indicator encompasses accessibility, communication, environment, and services, of which there are numerous sub-indicators. These indicators play a pivotal role in enabling regions or tourist destinations to assess their level of preparedness and progress in establishing or developing tourism that is welcoming to Muslim tourists.

Materials and Methods

This research employs a qualitative research method. Qualitative research is defined as a research method that aims to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon by describing it in detail through the use of language and contextualization within a specific setting. This approach utilizes a range of scientific methods to facilitate a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the subject matter (Moloe, 2004). This research employs a qualitative methodology to provide an in-depth description and comprehensive understanding of Indonesia's digital diplomacy in supporting the advancement of halal tourism in Indonesia. The data and information in this research were collected through a literature study utilizing secondary data sources. To ensure data validity, source triangulation was employed. The research data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis, which followed the procedures set forth by Miles and Huberman, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

Results and Discussion

The development of Islamic tourism in Indonesia

The Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf) has been responsible for the development of the country's halal tourism sector since 2015. The 2015 World Halal Tourism Summit in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, served to heighten awareness of the significance of the halal tourism market. As indicated by data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf), the mean annual growth rate in the number of international Muslim tourists visiting Indonesia between 2015 and 2017 was 18%. This figure demonstrates an increase from 2 million tourists in 2015 to 2.4 million in 2016 and 2.7 million in 2017 (Fadhlan and Subakti, 2022). The expansion of the halal tourism sector in 2015 represents the most significant growth among various forms of tourism, contributing to the advancement of Indonesia's sharia-based economy (Sayekti, 2020). Indonesia is committed to fostering the growth of the halal tourism sector. To this end, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has established the Halal Tourism Development Acceleration Team, which is working to develop 10 provinces as key hubs for halal tourism in Indonesia. These areas include Aceh, Riau and Riau Islands, West Sumatra, Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, Yogyakarta, East Java, South Sulawesi, and West Nusa Tenggara.

Halal tourism, as an Indonesian tourism campaign, has become an integral part of Indonesia's public diplomacy. Tourism can be one of the means of carrying out public diplomacy to strengthen relations with other countries. As a large industry, tourism has a significant impact on the country's economic growth through the movement of billions of individuals around the world, which in turn has a direct and indirect influence on diplomatic activities. The government engages in a range of public diplomacy initiatives through the tourism sector, with a particular emphasis on the Halal Tourism campaign. The Halal Tourism Indonesia campaign was introduced as part of the *Pesona Indonesia* and *Wonderful Indonesia* brands to promote Indonesian tourism, with a particular focus on global Muslim travelers. The *Wonderful Indonesia* and *Halal Tourism Indonesia* campaigns are designed to promote Indonesia's tourism identity on a global scale, with the objective of enhancing the country's international recognition. Halal Tourism Indonesia has a distinctive logo that is integrated with the *Wonderful Indonesia* or *Pesona Indonesia* logo. One noteworthy aspect of halal tourism is the concept of "Extended Facilities and Services," which encompasses the expansion of market segmentation for Muslim tourists concerning the services and facilities available to both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists.

The digital diplomacy process in the development of Indonesia halal tourism

The utilization of online tourist information portals in intra-organizational capability stages

The first stage can be identified through the availability of digital services in organizations that are used by the government in diplomatic activities. This stage focuses on developing digital capabilities within government organizations and related institutions. This includes improving information technology infrastructure, training human resources, and adopting efficient digital management systems. One of the characteristics of this stage is the availability of the internet and an integrated online portal or website between the central government and local governments that facilitates

coordination with each other. In its application, the Government of Indonesia, in collaboration with the Regional Tourism Office, coordinates the development of the halal tourism industry. The advancement of halal tourism necessitates the establishment of a robust digital infrastructure. In order to facilitate the promotion of tourism destinations, the Internet serves as a valuable platform for disseminating a plethora of information about tourism. Local governments have also established online portals that are linked to tourist information centers (TICs). The assessment of services is a crucial aspect of the Indonesia Muslim Travel Index, and tourist information centers are included in this assessment. The tourist information center is part of a system that aims to provide information about tourism to tourists. We endeavor to provide information about tourist locations, accommodations, culinary offerings, and other services. This system is designed to develop tourist destinations in a digital capacity and also to make it easier for tourists to obtain information. As an example, the West Sumatra Regional Tourism Office is pleased to be able to respond to the needs of Muslim tourists who are looking for destinations by sharia principles. This facility is designed to provide convenience for Muslim travelers, and it also has the potential to become a special attraction that could increase tourist visits from countries with a majority Muslim population. Moreover, it demonstrates the local government's commitment to promoting inclusive and welcoming tourism for all groups of travelers (*Figure 1*).

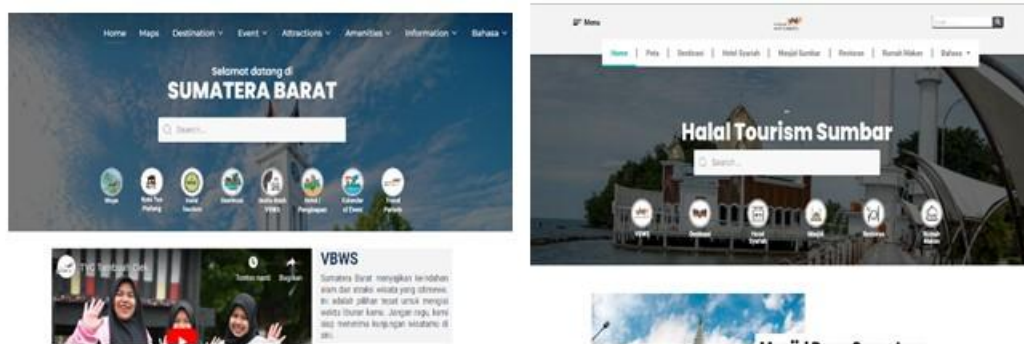


Figure 1. Online portal display of the West Sumatra Tourist Information Center.

Utilization of apps and social media in mobile access stages

The second stage is designed to guarantee the accessibility of digital information and services at any given moment and in any location through the use of a multitude of channels. This encompasses the creation of mobile applications, websites that are optimized for viewing on various devices, and the use of social media platforms. Diplomats are not required to undertake physical travel to other countries; instead, they can employ social media networks to disseminate specific messages to the public. The advent of digital technology gave rise to the phenomenon of digital diplomacy. The advent of digital technology and the Internet has had a profound impact on various aspects of international relations, including the role of diplomacy as a foreign policy tool. This has had a significant impact on the conduct and study of diplomacy (Bjola and Holmes, 2015). The advent of communication technology has precipitated a new revolution in diplomacy. Whereas previously diplomacy was confined to interactions between governments, it now encompasses social media and other technologies, such as mobile phones, that facilitate relationships between individuals and governments (Ross, 2012). The "HalalTrip Indonesia" mobile application is designed to assist Muslim

travelers in locating comprehensive information regarding halal tourist destinations. This application offers an interactive map of tourist destinations, a guide to the nearest places of worship, a list of halal-certified restaurants and prayer times, and a travel inspiration blog. Additionally, halal tourism information is disseminated through social media platforms (*Figure 2*).



Figure 2. HalalTrip application.

Furthermore, technological advancements have prompted the government to adapt its services to align with the evolving needs of tourists. The use of digital platforms, such as social media, is the optimal choice because tourists currently utilize mobile devices or smartphones to obtain information related to tourist attractions. The ease of access to information via the internet also encourages the government to adapt services to the needs of Muslim tourists and launch platforms that align with the purpose and target of the user segment. In this context, it can be argued that people today are quite tech-savvy, with almost all individuals possessing smartphones as a consequence of technological advancement and the openness of information systems. The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, has employed a variety of digital platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok, to disseminate information about Indonesian tourism. The YouTube channel for Wonderful Indonesia has amassed 155 thousand subscribers, while the Instagram account, also named Wonderful Indonesia, has attracted over 1.3 million followers. The Facebook page for Wonderful Indonesia has 450 thousand followers; the Twitter account, which uses the handle wonderfulid web portal, has over 1.3 million followers; and the TikTok account, which uses the handle wonderfulid web portal, has 466.6 thousand followers. The Indonesian government employs social media as a platform for disseminating informative and engaging content about halal tourism destinations within

the country. The content includes images, videos, articles, and infographics that showcase various aspects of halal-compliant tourism, such as worship facilities, halal restaurants, and travel experiences. Additionally, social media is utilized to disseminate information and educate the public on the significance of halal tourism and the diverse range of facilities in Indonesia that cater to Muslim travelers. This educational outreach encompasses an explanation of the halal concept, places of worship, and the special services provided.

Social media utilization in citizens interaction stages

The third stage is distinguished by the interaction between the government and the public through digital platforms. Social media networks and websites provide the government with a means of communicating its policies to the general public. The Internet and social networks can be utilized by the government as vehicles for cultural exchange and the promotion of the country. The deployment of information and communication technology is anticipated to enhance the efficiency of government performance. Furthermore, app users can access services and information at minimal cost through the use of a smartphone and an internet connection. The Indonesian government disseminates content about the country's tourism industry, including halal tourism, on social media platforms. To facilitate direct and real-time interaction through social media, posts related to cultural diversity and tourism potential are expected to generate engagement between the government and the public. To examine the Indonesian government's role on social media, the researcher selected one of the posts from the Wonderful Indonesia Instagram account. The official government account is called wonderfulid web portal and currently has 1.3 million followers. Active communication is evident in the positive responses and community involvement observed in the tourism promotional material. The promotional content above has a total of 4,603 likes and 39 comments, indicating a positive reputation among the public, particularly the foreign public, for the "Wonderful Indonesia" social media account, which includes Instagram. The creation of positive responses through promotional media demonstrates the digital diplomacy carried out by the Government of Indonesia in developing its halal tourism (*Figure 3*).



Figure 3. *Indonesia Halal Tourism Promotion Content in Instagram.*

Utilization of digital platforms in collaborative diplomacy stages

This final stage entails the formation of cooperative and collaborative relationships with other nations, international organizations, and global stakeholders through the use of digital platforms. The emphasis is on open and transparent diplomacy, as well as knowledge and resource sharing. The global spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has led to an increased demand for digital diplomacy in every country. This is evident in various diplomatic activities, including virtual meetings, campaigns, and the dissemination of information about diplomacy through social media. Additionally, technology is being leveraged to enhance international cooperation. Consequently, state leaders no longer require physical attendance at international meetings, as they can be conducted virtually. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic coincides with the fourth industrial revolution, a period of rapid technological advancement and communication media development. This has led to a notable acceleration in the utilization of digital platforms, including those employed in diplomatic activities. Virtual meetings, facilitated by applications such as Zoom, have become a prominent feature of diplomatic practice, offering enhanced opportunities for cooperation with partner countries in the development of halal tourism.

The *Figure 4* illustrates a transformation in the manner by which diplomatic practices employ digital technologies. This approach reflects an adaptation to the digital age, wherein communication and promotion are no longer constrained by geographical boundaries. The advent of digital platforms has enabled countries to disseminate information to the public in a more effectively and efficiently. One illustrative example is a virtual meeting conducted by the Government of Indonesia and the Indonesian Consulate General in Davao City's partners, including the Director of Tourism Region 11, Tanya Virginia Rabat-Tan, and Assistant Secretary Renato Pedro Villa of the Department of Foreign Affairs Mind. The participants included Anao Branch, representatives of the Mindanao Development Authority (MINDA), as well as the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos Region XI, and a number of online participants from the Philippines and Indonesia. The objective of this activity is to facilitate the sharing of experiences and encourage mutual learning between the halal tourism industries in Indonesia, as well as to explore tourism in Indonesia, with a particular focus on Bali. This will include an examination of potential avenues for collaboration between the Indonesian tourism industry and the tourism industry in Mindanao, Southern Philippines. This transformation not only increases accessibility and transparency, but also allows for faster and wider interaction with various parties.



Figure 4. *Indonesia-South Philippines Webinar on Halal Tourism.*

The potential for collaborative diplomacy lies in its capacity to foster collaboration between state actors and other non-state actors. It is of great consequence that state actors and non-state actors cooperate in the development and advancement of the halal tourism industry. This collaboration generates synergies that can optimize the potential of tourism in terms of promotion, services, and the management of tourist destinations. Cooperation between the government and non-state actors, such as private companies, travel agents, and the media, allows for broader and more effective tourism promotion. The government can provide regulatory support, while non-state actors can leverage their expertise and networks to market tourist destinations on a global scale. Collaboration with international media companies can help disseminate information about destinations through platforms that can reach a wider audience. For example, as shown in the image above, Indonesia has successfully collaborated with Agoda.com to virtually develop tourism and the creative economy. Agoda is one of the world's largest digital platform companies, based in Singapore, offering online accommodation services. This cooperation focuses on efforts to promote Indonesian tourism both domestically and in the global market, as well as strengthening sustainable tourism campaigns that also contribute positively to halal tourism (*Figure 5*).



Figure 5. Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy cooperation with Agoda.

Furthermore, Indonesia has developed a digital platform, designated INA-ACCESS, which serves as a conduit for facilitating digital interactions and collaboration. INA-ACCESS is a digital platform established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia to enable overseas partners to explore potential opportunities and interact directly with Indonesian entrepreneurs through virtual means. The platform's objective is to reinforce collaboration and partnership and to promote digitalization to enhance business partnerships. In the context of halal tourism, the platform provides a forum for halal tourism industry stakeholders to showcase their products and services to the international market. Through virtual exhibitions and networking sessions, INA-ACCESS facilitates the promotion of halal tourism destinations, hotels, restaurants, and other facilities that adhere to halal standards. *Figure 6* presents a view of the INA-ACCESS platform concerning features pertinent to the tourism industry. Furthermore, the utilization of INA-ACCESS serves to reinforce the collaborative and cooperative endeavors between Indonesia and its international partners in the development of halal tourism. The platform facilitates more straightforward communication between governments, entrepreneurs, and tourism industry stakeholders from disparate countries. This collaboration is crucial for the exchange of knowledge regarding halal standards, best practices, and innovations in the halal tourism industry. By engaging directly through INA-ACCESS, Indonesia can establish a more robust network and identify potential investment opportunities that could expedite the growth of the halal tourism sector. The digitalization of the halal tourism sector, driven by the INA-ACCESS platform, has the potential to enhance the visibility and attractiveness of Indonesian halal tourism on the global stage. The platform enables industry players to upload promotional content that can be accessed by international partners at any time and from any location. This increases the efficiency of information dissemination and allows potential tourists and business partners to gain a comprehensive understanding of the potential of halal tourism in Indonesia.



Figure 6. INA-Access Digital Platform.

Indonesia can participate in virtual tourism exhibitions, webinars, and international conferences through digital platforms, which enable the exchange of knowledge and

experience and expand cooperation networks. This cooperation not only helps in promotion but also the development of internationally recognized halal standards and certifications. This collaboration demonstrates innovative and strategic diplomacy in promoting halal tourism. By bringing together various stakeholders from the public and private sectors, this cooperation aims to create strong synergies in developing tourist destinations that meet the needs of Muslim travelers. By employing a digital diplomacy approach, Indonesia can reinforce its international relations and construct a global network that facilitates the expansion of the halal tourism sector. This initiative not only enhances Indonesia's visibility in the global market but also exemplifies the country's dedication to offering quality services for Muslim travelers. By leveraging digital technology and international platforms, this collaboration enables Indonesia to attain its diplomatic objective of expanding influence and enhancing cross-border collaboration in the domain of halal tourism.

Conclusion

The advent of communication tools and technological advances has precipitated the emergence of digital diplomacy. Digital diplomacy represents the latest strategy in the conduct of diplomacy through the utilization of digital platforms. The deployment of technology and digital tools offers an opportunity for the government of Indonesia to advance its halal tourism sector. The significance of digital diplomacy in the development of halal tourism is evidenced by the Indonesian government's deployment of digital technology and social media in the advancement of halal tourism. Indonesia employs digital diplomacy to facilitate the growth of its halal tourism sector. This study demonstrates that Indonesia leverages digital diplomacy to enhance its internal governmental capabilities in operations and communication. This is evident in the establishment of an online portal, the Tourist Information Center, which disseminates information and promotes tourism through mobile applications and social media. Additionally, digital diplomacy has facilitated increased interaction with citizens and strengthened collaboration with international stakeholders in the development of halal tourism. The Indonesian government's utilization of digital technology has facilitated the creation of novel avenues for the optimization of halal tourism. In an era of accelerating globalization, digital diplomacy has emerged as a pivotal instrument for the expansion of reach and engagement with a more heterogeneous audience. The author proposes that the Government of Indonesia must persist in its investment of resources in the advancement of a robust digital infrastructure, one that is capable of supporting the full range of halal tourism services. This encompasses the enhancement of internet access in tourist destinations, the development of user-friendly applications, and the provision of relevant and up-to-date content.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that no conflict of interest is involved with any parties in this research.

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