

ATTRactions, E-WOM, AND GENDERED INSIGHTS INTO RELIGIOUS TOURISM INTEREST

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse the influence of attraction quality and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on tourist interest in the context of mosque-based religious tourism in Indonesia, with gender as a moderating variable. This study took place in the tourist destination of Al-Imam Mosque, Majalengka, West Java, which is renowned for its distinctive historical value, architectural aesthetics, and rich religious activities. The results showed that all indicators on the attraction variable and e-WOM obtained scores in the "High" to "Very High" category, which reflects the consistent positive perception of the respondents. Female respondents tended to rate higher on aesthetic aspects, cultural values, and spiritual experiences, while male respondents showed more equal variation in assessments across all dimensions. The integration of attraction quality and e-WOM has been proven to significantly contribute to forming interest in visiting, both on initial and subsequent visits. Gender-based analysis reveals differences in preferences that can be the basis for a more targeted marketing strategy. Theoretically, this study expands the literature on religious tourism by combining the variables of attraction, e-WOM, and gender moderation in a single analytical framework. In practical terms, these findings offer recommendations for mosque destination managers to optimise promotional strategies by leveraging visuals, emotional narratives, and credible online information.

Keywords: Mosque tours, Attractions, e-WOM, Interest in visits, Gender differences

Introduction

Religious tourism is one of the important segments in the global tourism industry, contributing significantly to the mobility of tourists on both a domestic and international scale. The development of religious tourism is also influenced by global trends that emphasise the search for meaning, authentic experiences, and emotional connection to destinations (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). This type of tourism not only provides spiritual benefits, but also encourages local economic growth through tourist spending on accommodation, transportation, food, and souvenirs (Shinde & Olsen, 2022).

In Indonesia, mosque-based tourism has experienced significant growth, as public interest in travel experiences that combine spiritual, cultural, and historical elements is on the rise (Battour & Ismail, 2016). The mosque is no longer seen solely as a means of worship, but also as an architectural icon that reflects the richness of Islamic art and tradition, a centre of social activities that strengthens community cohesion, and a tourist destination that attracts domestic and foreign tourists. Many historical mosques, such as the Great Mosque of Demak, the Great Mosque of Baiturrahman, and the Great Mosque of Bandung, have become symbols of regional identity and witnesses of the development of Islamic civilisation in the archipelago. The existence of these mosques not only provides spiritual benefits for worshippers but also acts as a catalyst for local economic growth through tourist visits, large-scale religious activities, and economic turnaround in supporting sectors such as culinary, transportation, and creative industries. With the support of government policies that include religious tourism as part of their sustainable tourism development strategy, the potential for mosque-based tourism in Indonesia is being increasingly developed professionally and integrated with cultural promotion, thereby strengthening the image of destinations at the global level.

However, despite its great potential, empirical studies on the factors that affect tourist interest in visiting mosque destinations are still relatively limited, especially those that integrate physical and digital aspects. Previous studies have generally examined the influence of attraction quality (Albayrak & Caber, 2018a) or electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) (Jalilvand et al., 2013) separately, without considering the simultaneous interaction between the two, and rarely taking into account differences in perception based on gender. Understanding this variation in perception is important to designing a more effective and targeted destination marketing strategy, considering that gender can moderate responses to destination elements and online communication (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of three key variables attraction quality, e-WOM, and interest in visits with gender as a moderation variable in the context of mosque-based religious tourism. This integrative model is expected to contribute to the tourism literature by offering a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between travel experiences, the influence of online information, and visitor intentions, as well as

providing empirical evidence that can be used as a basis for decision-making by mosque tourism destination managers.

Based on this phenomenon, this study is directed to answer the question: "How does the influence of attraction quality and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on the interest of tourist visits to mosque tourist destinations, and the extent to which gender moderates the relationship. This study fills this gap by examining the relationship between attraction quality and e-WOM in relation to the interest of tourists in visiting mosque tourist destinations in Indonesia, with gender as a moderating variable. The novelty of this research lies in an integrative model that combines physical and digital dimensions, providing an analysis of gender-based perceptions.

Methods

This research model adopts a framework for analysing tourist behaviour that integrates the dimension of destination experience with online communication through user-generated content (UGC) and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Destination experiences that include physical, emotional, and cognitive aspects play a role in shaping destination images and emotional attachments that drive return intentions (Amali et al., 2024), while online communication through e-WOM and UGC influences destination image, tourist trust, and travel decisions through information adoption mechanisms (Zain et al., 2025). The integration of these two dimensions is particularly relevant in the context of mosque-based religious tourism, where visitor perceptions are shaped by both direct experiences and digital narratives circulating on social media. The research population consists of tourists who have visited the Al-Imam Grand Mosque of Majalengka, Indonesia, using purposive sampling techniques based on the criteria that they have visited at least once in the last two years and have experience accessing online information related to the destination. The sample of 40 respondents, consisting of 15 women and 25 men, has met the minimum limit for descriptive analysis and relationship testing with the comparative descriptive statistics approach (Hair, 2014).

Results and Discussions

The data from this study provide an overview of tourists' perceptions of attractions, e-WOM, and interest in visiting the Great Mosque of al-Imam Majalengka by comparing responses between female and male respondents. The analysis was conducted based on the average assessment of respondents for each indicator, which encompassed aspects of culture, history, religious rituals, aesthetics, the credibility of online information, the influence of reviews, and the intention to make repeat visits. These results not only reveal the level of appreciation shown by tourists but also confirm the differences in assessment tendencies between genders. These findings provide a crucial basis for understanding the factors that shape the image of mosques as destinations for religious tourism, as well as strategies for managing their attractions.

Table 1: Summary of Research Results

Variable	Question	Indicator	Average Female	Interpretation (F)	Average Male	Interpretation (M)	Difference
Attractions	Al-Imam Mosque Majalengka has a special attraction in the field of history and Islamic da'wah traditions	Cultural and historical values	4.07	High	3.96	High	F > M
	Al-Imam Mosque Majalengka has a distinctive attraction in the field of religious activities/rituals	Religious activities	4.40	Very High	4.16	High	F > M
	Al-Imam Mosque Majalengka has a distinctive attraction in the field of architecture	Aesthetics & architecture	4.27	Very High	4.08	High	F > M
	Al-Imam Mosque Majalengka has a beautiful scenic attraction	comfort of the environment	4.60	Very High	4.04	High	F > M
e-WOM	I use the internet and social media to find information about visiting mosques	Credibility of information	4.07	High	3.88	High	F > M
	Through the internet and social media, I get mosque recommendations	Credibility of information	4.00	High	3.88	High	F > M
	Through the internet and social media, I get information about the mosque	Credibility of information	4.07	High	4.00	High	F > M
	Through the internet and social media, I get information about the attraction of the mosque	Content relevance	4.00	High	4.00	High	F = M
	Through the internet and social media, I get information about positive experiences	The Impact of Online Reviews	4.13	High	4.04	High	F > M
	Through the internet and social media, I also feel the pleasure of others	The Impact of Online Reviews	4.13	High	4.04	High	F > M
	I found out all the information about the Mosque	Credibility of information	4.07	High	4.00	High	F > M
Interested in Visiting	I will tell you about my experience of visiting a mosque	Intention to revisit	4.07	High	4.00	High	F > M
	I would recommend visiting the mosque	Intention to visit	4.07	High	4.00	High	F > M
	I want to invite friends or others to visit the mosque	Intention to visit	4.07	High	4.00	High	F > M

Source: Data Processing Result, 2025

The results showed that the attraction variable obtained the highest average compared to e-WOM and interest in visiting, with all indicators falling within the High to Very High category. The highest score appeared on the indicator "Mosques have beautiful scenery" among female respondents (4.60; Very High) compared to males (4.04; High), which emphasises the importance of the visual and aesthetic aspects of the mosque environment in shaping tourists' positive perception. These findings align with those of Albayrak & Caber (2018), who emphasised the role of aesthetic elements and the uniqueness of destinations in enhancing the tourist experience.

Other dimensions, such as cultural and historical values, religious rituals, and architecture, were also highly valued, especially by female respondents. This aligns with (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Those who affirm that mosques, in addition to serving as a centre of worship, are also a symbol of cultural identity and historical heritage that attracts tourists. Therefore, strengthening historical narratives and architectural identities can be an effective promotional strategy.

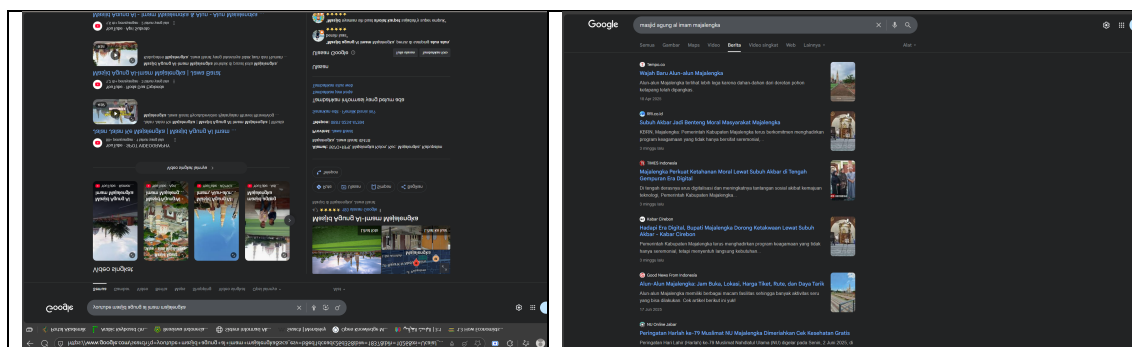
In the e-WOM variable, all indicators received a high score, indicating the significant role of social media and the internet in shaping tourists' perceptions and decisions. The highest score was found in the influence dimension of online reviews, indicating that previous positive visitor experiences can help build a destination's image and increase intent to visit, in line with the findings of (Jalilvand et al., 2013) Jalilvand & Samiei (2012) and (De-Juan-Vigaray et al., 2021) Interestingly, the content relevance indicator in the statement "Internet and social media get information about the attractiveness of mosques" shows a balanced score between women and men (4.00; Height). This suggests that the influence of e-WOM is more widespread.

Meanwhile, the visiting interest variable also showed a high average score on all indicators, with women consistently scoring higher than men. These findings suggest that women are more enthusiastic about sharing experiences, offering recommendations, and inviting relatives to visit, which supports research by (Sun et al., 2020) Who stated that female tourists are more likely to share their travel experiences socially and online? Overall, the results of this study indicate a gender moderation in the relationship between attraction quality, e-WOM, and interest in visiting. Female respondents are more responsive to visual and emotional aspects, while men tend to be more neutral on several dimensions. Thus, mosque tourism management and marketing strategies can consider gender-sensitive approaches, for example, by highlighting visual promotion and emotional narratives for female tourists and presenting more structured informative content for male tourists.

Clear evidence of the effectiveness of e-WOM in influencing tourists can be seen from the results of digital searches, where the Al-Imam Grand Mosque of Majalengka is widely reviewed and featured on various online platforms, including YouTube and Google. Various videos uploaded by content creators showcase the beauty of the mosque's architecture, the worship atmosphere, and the surrounding panorama. Google Reviews have recorded hundreds of reviews with an average rating of 4.7 stars, showing high appreciation from visitors. The review was dominated by positive impressions about the cleanliness, comfort, and attractiveness of the mosque, both as a centre of worship and a religious tourist destination. This high volume of digital content and reviews significantly contributes to increased interest in visits, as potential travellers get a convincing picture of the experience before visiting the location directly.

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Figure 1 is obtained from Google Screenshot.



Source: Data Collecting, 2025

This finding has novelty in the context of mosque-based religious tourism research because it integrates the dimensions of attraction, e-WOM, and gender moderation simultaneously. Previous studies have examined the influence of e-WOM or attractions separately. In contrast, this study contributes to the existing literature by comparing gender perceptions at the indicator level, thereby providing a more detailed picture of destination development strategies.

Conclusion

This study reveals that the quality of attractions and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) significantly influence tourist interest in visiting the Great Mosque of al-Imam Majalengka, with women exhibiting a higher appreciation for the visual, emotional, and spiritual aspects than men. Theoretically, these findings expand the literature on religious tourism by integrating attraction quality, e-WOM, and gender moderation in a single analytical framework. This makes a new contribution to the development of a theory of tourist behaviour, especially in the context of mosque-based tourism, by showing that gender perceptions can moderate the relationship between destination experience and online communication in shaping the intention to visit.

From a practical perspective, the results of this study confirm the importance of gender-sensitive management strategies for mosque tourism. Destination promotion can be more effective by highlighting visual, aesthetic, and emotional narrative aspects that resonate with female travellers, while presenting structured, credible, and factual information is more appropriate for male travellers. In addition, strengthening historical narratives, architectural identities, and leveraging positive online reviews can be used as promotional strategies to build a broader image of the destination. Thus, mosque tourism managers are expected to be able to optimise the combination of direct experience and digital communication to increase the attractiveness and sustainability of religious tourism.

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