



Beyond Muslim-Friendly Tourism: Mapping the Intellectual Evolution of Halal Tourism Research

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Article Info

Article history:

Received May 30, 2026

Revised June 14, 2026

Accepted June 30, 2026

Keywords:

Halal tourism;
Bibliometric analysis;
Science mapping;
Intellectual evolution;
Sustainable tourism.

ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of the global Muslim travel market has stimulated increasing scholarly attention to halal tourism, yet its intellectual development remains fragmented across multiple disciplines. This study aims to map the intellectual evolution of halal tourism research and identify its major knowledge structures, influential contributors, and emerging research directions. A bibliometric approach was employed using 486 English-language publications indexed in the Scopus database between 2004 and 2026. Data were analyzed through performance analysis and science mapping using VOSviewer to examine publication trends, leading authors, institutions, countries, and keyword co-occurrence networks. The findings reveal a substantial increase in scientific production since 2016, reflecting the growing maturity of halal tourism as a multidisciplinary field. Six major thematic clusters illustrate the evolution of research from Muslim-friendly services toward destination competitiveness, tourist behavior, governance, sustainability, digital transformation, and innovation. This study offers a comprehensive intellectual overview of halal tourism research and provides valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, and tourism practitioners to support future collaboration, strategic policy development, and sustainable growth within the global halal tourism ecosystem

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of halal tourism has been closely associated with the remarkable growth of the global Muslim population and its increasing economic influence. Muslim travelers are becoming one of the most dynamic segments of the international tourism market, driven by rising disposable income, demographic expansion, improved global connectivity, and changing travel preferences. These developments have encouraged many countries, including those without Muslim-majority populations, to recognize halal tourism as a strategic market capable of generating sustainable economic growth and destination competitiveness (Rusydiana et al., 2021) (Al-Ansi et al., 2023). Consequently, destinations such as Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and the United Kingdom have increasingly invested in Muslim-friendly tourism facilities, halal-certified food services, prayer spaces, and culturally sensitive hospitality to attract Muslim visitors (Pamukçu et al., 2026). At the same time, Muslim-majority countries continue to strengthen their tourism ecosystems by integrating halal certification, destination branding, digital services, and policy support to enhance international competitiveness (Wazin, Patimah, & Ansori, 2025). These developments indicate that halal tourism has evolved beyond a religious tourism niche into an important component of global tourism development.

The expansion of halal tourism has also stimulated significant academic interest across multiple disciplines. Early studies primarily examined tourists' travel motivation, destination choice, religiosity, and customer satisfaction, whereas more recent research has increasingly explored destination governance, service quality, digital tourism, sustainable tourism, smart tourism, halal hospitality, and tourism resilience (Susilawati, 2023). Furthermore, the emergence of technologies such as artificial intelligence, digital platforms, online travel applications, virtual reality, and social media marketing has transformed how Muslim travelers search for information, evaluate destinations, and share travel experiences (Mady et al., 2024). Researchers have therefore begun to investigate halal tourism from broader interdisciplinary perspectives that integrate tourism management, information systems, marketing, sustainability, Islamic economics, and consumer behavior (Supardin et al., 2025). This diversification demonstrates that halal tourism research has become increasingly sophisticated and multidimensional, extending well beyond traditional discussions of religious compliance.

Despite this rapid development, the existing literature remains fragmented, with studies dispersed across different disciplines, journals, and conceptual perspectives. While previous reviews have synthesized selected aspects of halal tourism, most focus on specific themes such as consumer behavior, destination attributes, marketing strategies, or hospitality management, providing only a partial understanding of the field (Muslim & Harun, 2022). Consequently, there is still limited knowledge regarding the overall intellectual structure of halal tourism research, the evolution of its major themes, collaboration patterns among scholars and institutions, and emerging research frontiers. As the volume of publications continues to

increase, identifying influential contributors, dominant research streams, and thematic shifts becomes increasingly important for advancing theoretical development and guiding future investigations (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). A comprehensive bibliometric analysis is therefore needed to provide a systematic overview of how halal tourism research has evolved and to identify opportunities for future scholarly development.

Although halal tourism has attracted considerable scholarly attention, the existing body of knowledge remains dominated by empirical studies examining tourists' behavioral intentions, destination attributes, service quality, religiosity, customer satisfaction, and marketing strategies (Battour et al., 2025). Several review articles have also attempted to synthesize the literature from thematic or systematic perspectives; however, they generally focus on specific dimensions of halal tourism and provide limited insight into the broader intellectual development of the field (Muslim & Harun, 2022). More importantly, the rapid growth of publications across diverse disciplines has created an increasingly fragmented knowledge landscape, making it difficult to identify how research themes have evolved, which scholars and institutions have shaped the field, and where future research opportunities remain. Consequently, a comprehensive bibliometric assessment that integrates performance analysis with science mapping is still needed to provide a holistic understanding of the evolution of halal tourism research and its emerging intellectual frontiers (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021).

From a theoretical perspective, understanding the intellectual evolution of halal tourism research is becoming increasingly important because the field has expanded beyond discussions of Muslim-friendly services toward broader issues involving destination governance, digital innovation, sustainability, resilience, and inclusive tourism development (Al-Ansi et al., 2023; Mady et al., 2024). This shift indicates that halal tourism is no longer viewed merely as a niche market serving Muslim travelers but as a multidisciplinary research domain that intersects with strategic management, hospitality, information technology, public policy, and sustainable development. Nevertheless, the absence of a comprehensive mapping of publication trends, collaboration networks, thematic evolution, and conceptual structure has limited the ability of researchers to identify emerging paradigms and develop more integrated theoretical frameworks. Addressing this gap is therefore essential to strengthen future knowledge development and encourage interdisciplinary collaboration within halal tourism research (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

Therefore, this study aims to systematically map the intellectual evolution of halal tourism research through a bibliometric approach. Specifically, the study seeks to identify publication trends, influential journals, productive authors, leading institutions, geographical distribution, collaboration patterns, thematic evolution, and emerging research opportunities within the global halal tourism literature. By integrating performance analysis and science mapping, this study provides a

comprehensive overview of the development of halal tourism research while revealing the conceptual dynamics that have shaped the field over time.

The significance of this study lies in its ability to provide a robust evidence base for understanding the evolution of halal tourism research in response to the rapidly changing global tourism landscape. As halal tourism continues to expand through the integration of digital technologies, sustainable destination management, and increasingly diverse Muslim travel preferences, researchers, destination managers, policymakers, and tourism practitioners require a comprehensive understanding of existing knowledge, emerging themes, and unresolved research issues. By identifying the intellectual structure, collaboration patterns, and future research frontiers of halal tourism, this study contributes to the development of more coherent theoretical perspectives while supporting evidence-based policymaking and strategic innovation for a more inclusive, competitive, and sustainable halal tourism ecosystem. Furthermore, the originality of this study lies in proposing an evolutionary perspective that explains the transformation of halal tourism research from its initial emphasis on Muslim-friendly tourism toward broader discussions of digital innovation, sustainable tourism, destination governance, and global halal tourism ecosystems, thereby providing a new conceptual lens for understanding the future trajectory of halal tourism scholarship.

2. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative bibliometric design to explore the intellectual evolution of halal tourism research. Rather than synthesizing previous studies through narrative interpretation, bibliometric analysis quantitatively examines the structure of scientific knowledge by identifying relationships among publications, authors, keywords, institutions, and countries based on bibliographic metadata. This approach is particularly appropriate for rapidly growing research fields because it enables the visualization of knowledge development and the identification of emerging research trends that are difficult to detect using conventional literature reviews (Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020).

The study began by defining the scope of halal tourism research through a comprehensive search strategy in the Scopus database. Scopus was selected because it offers extensive international journal coverage and standardized bibliographic information that facilitates reliable bibliometric analysis (Baas et al., 2020). The search was conducted in May 2026 using keywords related to halal tourism, Muslim-friendly tourism, Islamic tourism, halal hospitality, and halal travel. To maximize retrieval while maintaining relevance, the search was performed within the Title, Abstract, and Keywords fields using the following Boolean query: *TITLE-ABS-KEY ("halal tourism" OR "halal travel" OR "Islamic tourism" OR "Muslim tourism" OR "Muslim-friendly tourism" OR "Muslim friendly tourism" OR "Sharia tourism" OR "Shariah tourism" OR "halal destination" OR "Muslim-friendly destination" OR "Islamic destination*" OR "halal hospitality" OR "Muslim-friendly hospitality")*

After the initial retrieval, the dataset was refined through a structured screening process based on the PRISMA 2020 framework (Bao & Roubaud, 2022; Page, McKenzie, et al., 2021). Publications were retained only if they were final journal articles written in English and directly addressed halal tourism or closely related concepts. Publications classified as conference papers, editorials, notes, book chapters, articles in press, and records with incomplete bibliographic information were excluded to ensure consistency and reliability of the dataset. The complete screening procedure is illustrated in Figure 1.

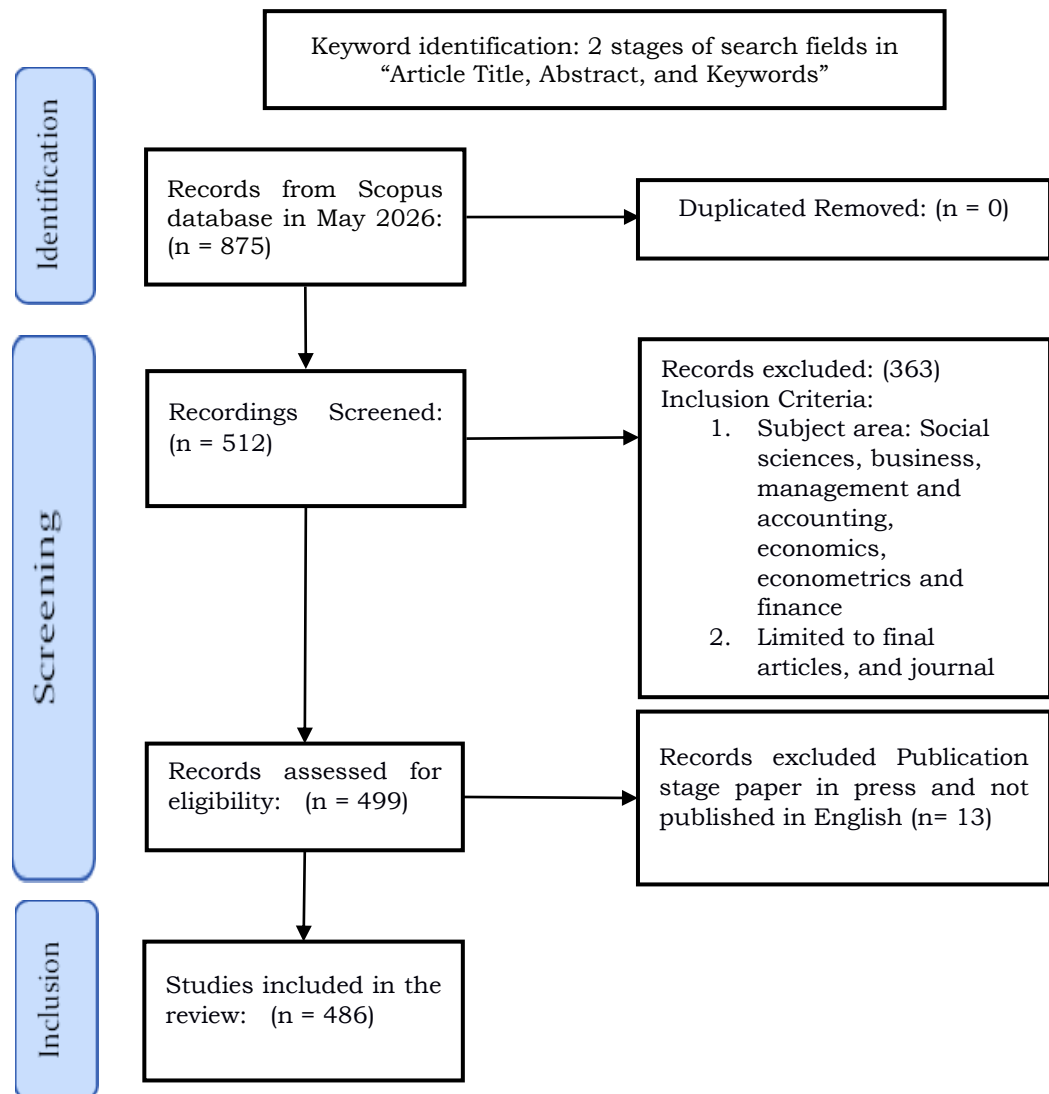


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 adapted from Page, et al., (2021)

Prior to visualization, the bibliographic records were standardized to improve network accuracy. Variations in author names, institutional affiliations, and keywords were harmonized by applying a thesaurus file

within VOSviewer, thereby minimizing duplication and ensuring that semantically identical terms were treated as single entities. This preprocessing stage is essential in bibliometric studies because inconsistencies in metadata may distort collaboration networks and keyword relationships (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). The cleaned dataset was subsequently imported into VOSviewer (version 1.6.x) to construct bibliometric networks. Unlike software primarily designed for descriptive statistical summaries, VOSviewer emphasizes graphical representation of scientific relationships through the Visualization of Similarities (VOS) algorithm, which groups strongly connected items into clusters according to their association strength (van Eck & Waltman, 2014). The software enables simultaneous exploration of structural patterns within scientific literature through network, overlay, and density visualizations, making it particularly suitable for identifying the evolution of research themes and collaboration patterns.

The analysis was performed in several stages. Initially, descriptive indicators were generated to examine publication growth, source productivity, author productivity, institutional contributions, and country participation. The study then focused on relational analyses by constructing co-authorship, co-occurrence, citation, bibliographic coupling, and co-citation networks. Finally, cluster interpretation was undertaken to identify dominant research domains, emerging topics, and the conceptual evolution of halal tourism research. The interpretation of each network was based on node size, link strength, and cluster composition, allowing a comprehensive understanding of how scientific knowledge in halal tourism has developed over time. This methodological framework combines systematic document selection, bibliographic data standardization, and network visualization to provide a transparent and reproducible analysis of halal tourism research. By emphasizing both descriptive patterns and intellectual relationships, the approach offers a comprehensive perspective on the evolution of the field while identifying potential directions for future scholarly development

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

3.1.1 Descriptive Analysis of Annual Scientific Production

Figure 1 presents the annual scientific production of halal tourism research indexed in the Scopus database from 2004 to 2026, illustrating the longitudinal development of this research field over more than two decades. The publication trend demonstrates a gradual transition from an emerging area of scholarly inquiry to an increasingly mature and internationally recognized research domain. During the early stage (2004–2015), scientific output remained relatively limited, with annual publications generally below 15 documents. This modest level of productivity indicates that halal tourism was still in its formative stage, where scholarly attention primarily focused on conceptual discussions regarding Islamic tourism, Muslim-friendly hospitality, halal food services, and the religious needs of Muslim travelers. At this stage, research activity was concentrated among a relatively small

number of scholars and institutions, reflecting the limited academic visibility of halal tourism within the broader tourism literature.

Beyond reflecting increasing publication volume, this trend indicates that halal tourism has gradually evolved into a strategic research domain closely associated with the development of the global halal economy. The acceleration of publications after 2016 suggests that scholarly attention has shifted from examining halal tourism merely as a religious tourism niche toward understanding its broader contribution to destination competitiveness, sustainable tourism development, Islamic business ecosystems, and digital innovation. This intellectual transition demonstrates the increasing maturity of halal tourism as an interdisciplinary research field that bridges tourism management, Islamic economics, marketing, hospitality, and public policy

Documents by year

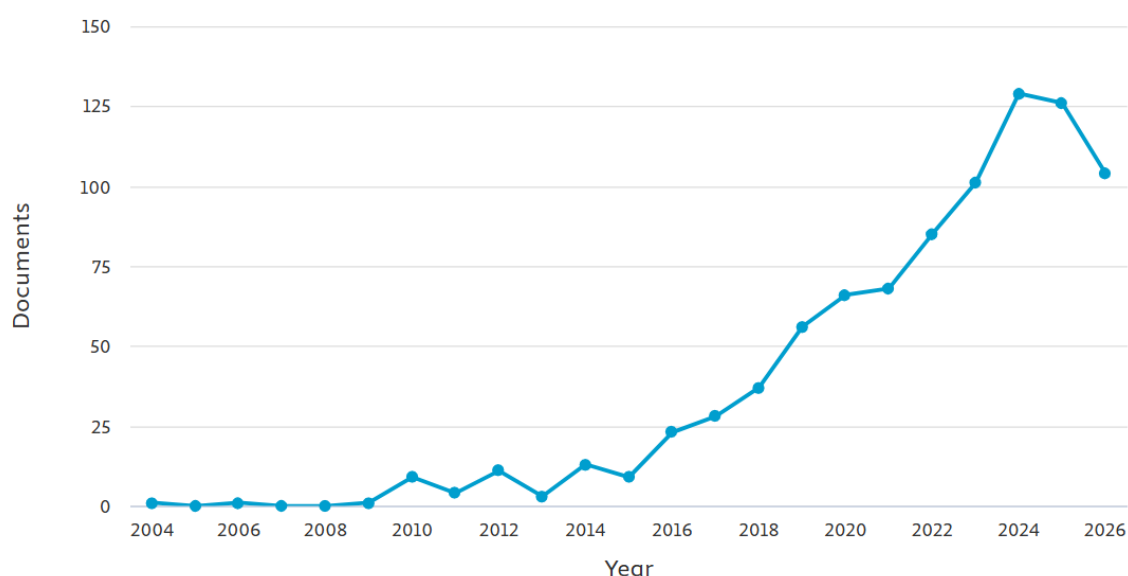


Figure 2. Annual Scientific Production in Halal Tourism Research (2004–2026)

Source: Authors' analysis based on the Scopus database (2026).

A significant increase in publication activity became evident beginning in 2016, marking an important turning point in the evolution of halal tourism research. Between 2016 and 2024, annual scientific production increased consistently from approximately 24 publications to more than 120 publications per year, indicating a sustained acceleration in scholarly interest. This period coincides with the rapid expansion of the global Muslim travel market, increasing governmental commitment to developing halal tourism destinations, wider adoption of halal certification systems, and stronger international recognition of halal tourism as a strategic component of the global halal economy. The continuous upward trajectory also reflects the growing participation of researchers from multiple disciplines, including

tourism management, hospitality, marketing, Islamic economics, consumer behavior, public policy, and sustainable development.

The publication trend further demonstrates that halal tourism research has experienced not only quantitative growth but also considerable thematic diversification. While earlier studies predominantly emphasized destination attributes and religious compliance, more recent publications increasingly examine issues related to destination competitiveness, tourist experience, service quality, digital transformation, halal governance, sustainability, smart tourism, and stakeholder collaboration. This diversification indicates that halal tourism has evolved beyond its initial conceptualization as a niche tourism segment and has become a multidisciplinary research field addressing broader economic, managerial, technological, and social challenges facing the global tourism industry.

The highest annual publication output was recorded in 2024, with approximately 129 documents, followed by a slight decline in 2025 and 2026. However, this apparent decrease should not be interpreted as a reduction in scholarly interest. Because the bibliographic data were collected during July 2026, publications indexed for the most recent years were still undergoing editorial processing and database indexing. Consequently, the lower publication counts for 2025 and particularly 2026 are more appropriately attributed to indexing and publication lag rather than an actual decline in research productivity. Similar patterns are commonly observed in bibliometric studies that include the current publication year, where incomplete database coverage temporarily underestimates annual scientific output.

Overall, the annual publication pattern demonstrates a robust and sustained expansion of halal tourism scholarship over the past decade. The consistent increase in scientific production confirms that halal tourism has become an established research domain attracting growing international academic attention. More importantly, the observed trajectory suggests that future research is likely to continue expanding in response to emerging issues such as digital innovation, artificial intelligence, sustainable destination management, ESG-oriented tourism governance, and the evolving expectations of Muslim travelers. These findings provide strong evidence that halal tourism has progressed beyond a specialized research niche and has developed into a dynamic multidisciplinary field with substantial theoretical, practical, and policy relevance for the future of the global tourism industry.

3.1.2 Most Productive and Impactful Authors

Table 1 presents the ten most productive and influential authors in halal tourism research based on three bibliometric indicators: number of documents, citation impact, and Total Link Strength (TLS). In terms of productivity, Abror ranks first with 14 publications, followed by Han Heesup (13 publications) and Battour Mohamed (12 publications), indicating their consistent contribution to the advancement of halal tourism scholarship. However, productivity does not necessarily correspond to scientific influence. Han Heesup records the highest citation count (1,148 citations), followed closely by Al-Ansi Amr (1,089 citations) and Battour Mohamed (914 citations),

suggesting that their publications have exerted substantial academic impact and are widely recognized within the field. From the perspective of research collaboration, Abror demonstrates the strongest collaborative network with a Total Link Strength of 32, followed by Patrisia Dina (29), Engriani Yunita (23), and Wardy Yunia (22). These findings indicate that the intellectual development of halal tourism research is shaped not only by publication productivity but also by the scientific influence of highly cited scholars and the strength of collaborative research networks. Authors with high citation counts contribute significantly to theoretical development, while those with strong collaboration networks play an important role in expanding interdisciplinary and international research partnerships, thereby strengthening the global knowledge structure of halal tourism research.

Table 1. Top 10 Most Productive and Influential Authors in Halal Tourism Research

No.	Author	Documents	Citations
1	Abror, Abror	14	547
2	Han, Heesup	13	1,148
3	Battour, Mohamed	12	914
4	Al-Ansi, Amr	11	1,089
5	Rafnasari, Ririn Tri	11	324
6	Patrisia, Dina	9	279
7	Gaffar, Vanessa	9	41
8	Engriani, Yunita	7	72
9	Wardy, Yunia	7	422
10	Suhartanto, Dwi	7	215

Source: Authors' analysis using VOSviewer version 1.6.20 based on the Scopus database (2026)

The concentration of scientific productivity among a relatively small number of highly influential scholars also indicates that the intellectual development of halal tourism continues to be driven by several established research groups. Their collaborative networks have facilitated theoretical refinement and international knowledge exchange, accelerating the evolution of halal tourism into a globally recognized field of Islamic business and tourism research.

3.1.3 Most Productive and Influential Universities

Table 2 shows that halal tourism research is concentrated in several universities that demonstrate strong scientific productivity and academic influence. Tanta University (Egypt) emerges as the most productive institution with 7 publications, while simultaneously recording the highest citation impact (823 citations) and the strongest collaborative network (Total Link Strength = 9). This finding indicates that the university has played a pivotal role in advancing halal tourism scholarship through both influential publications and extensive research collaboration. The University of Malaya

(Malaysia) ranks second with 6 publications and 711 citations, highlighting Malaysia's sustained leadership in halal tourism research. Indonesian universities also make a significant contribution, particularly Universitas Airlangga, Universitas Negeri Padang, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, and University of Jember, reflecting Indonesia's increasing research capacity in the field. Although several institutions have relatively fewer publications, their citation performance demonstrates that research quality and scholarly impact are not solely determined by publication volume. Overall, these findings suggest that the intellectual development of halal tourism research is led by a relatively small group of highly productive universities that serve as important knowledge hubs and collaborative centers, particularly in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, reinforcing their strategic role in shaping the global research agenda on halal tourism.

Table 2. Top 10 Most Productive and Influential Universities in Halal Tourism Research

No.	University / Institution	Documents	Citations
1	Tanta University, Egypt	7	823
2	University of Malaya, Malaysia	6	711
3	Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia	4	198
4	Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia	4	203
5	Universitas Islam Malaysia, Malaysia	5	177
6	Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia (Department of Management)	4	110
7	University of Isfahan, Iran	4	118
8	University of Jember, Indonesia	3	192
9	Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia	3	88
10	Abu Dhabi University, United Arab Emirates	3	72

Source: Authors' analysis using VOSviewer version 1.6.20 based on the Scopus database (2026)

The dominance of universities from Southeast Asia and the Middle East further reflects the geographical concentration of halal tourism development. These institutions operate within countries that have actively integrated halal tourism into national economic strategies, enabling stronger collaboration between academia, government, and industry. Consequently, institutional scientific productivity appears closely associated with the maturity of national halal tourism ecosystems.

3.2. Discussions

3.2.1 Science Mapping of Halal Tourism Research

Cluster 1. Foundations of Halal Tourism, Islamic Hospitality, and Destination Competitiveness

Cluster 1 represents the foundational intellectual domain of halal tourism research and constitutes the largest and most interconnected cluster within the co-occurrence network. The cluster is organized around the keyword "halal tourism", which records the highest frequency (236 occurrences) and occupies the central position in the network, indicating its role as the primary conceptual hub linking all major research themes. Closely associated keywords—including tourism, Muslim-friendly tourism, Muslim travelers, Islamic hospitality, halal food, hospitality, religiosity, and perceived risk—demonstrate that the earliest stage of halal tourism scholarship was primarily concerned with understanding how tourism products and services could accommodate the religious requirements of Muslim travelers while simultaneously enhancing destination competitiveness.

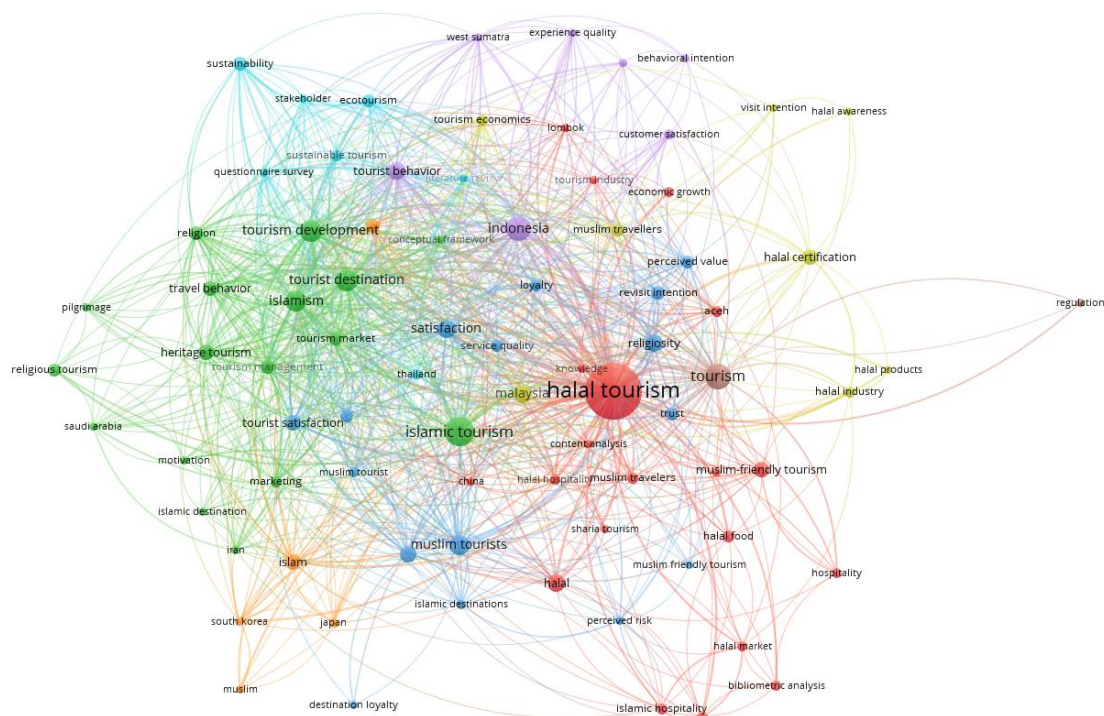


Figure 3. Keyword Co-occurrence Network of Halal Tourism Research
Source: Authors' analysis using VOSviewer version 1.6.20 based on the Scopus database (2026).

The prominence of Islamic hospitality and halal food reflects the historical evolution of halal tourism from a service-oriented concept rooted in Islamic principles toward a comprehensive destination management framework. Early conceptual studies defined halal tourism mainly through the provision of halal-certified food, prayer facilities, gender-sensitive services, alcohol-free environments, and Shariah-compliant accommodation, arguing that these attributes represented the minimum requirements for Muslim-friendly destinations (Battour et al., 2017). This service-based perspective was

subsequently expanded by incorporating broader hospitality dimensions, including destination image, service quality, cultural authenticity, and visitor experience, suggesting that successful halal tourism depends not only on religious compliance but also on delivering high-quality tourism experiences comparable to international tourism standards (Han et al., 2019).

The coexistence of the keywords Muslim-friendly tourism and halal tourism within the same cluster also illustrates an important conceptual transition in the literature. Earlier research frequently used these terms interchangeably, reflecting a limited distinction between destinations that fully comply with Islamic principles and those that merely provide facilities accommodating Muslim travelers. However, recent studies increasingly differentiate these concepts by arguing that Muslim-friendly tourism emphasizes accessibility and convenience for Muslim visitors, whereas halal tourism encompasses a broader governance framework integrating halal certification, destination management, service quality, ethical business practices, and Islamic values throughout the tourism supply chain (Al-Ansi et al., 2023; Islam et al., 2023). This conceptual refinement indicates the gradual maturation of halal tourism as an independent research domain with clearer theoretical boundaries.

Another notable characteristic of this cluster is the strong presence of religiosity, highlighting its enduring role as one of the most influential explanatory variables in halal tourism studies. Numerous empirical investigations have demonstrated that religiosity shapes destination preferences, travel motivation, service evaluation, and behavioral intention among Muslim tourists (Abror, 2020). Nevertheless, recent publications suggest that religiosity alone is insufficient to explain contemporary travel behavior, particularly among younger Muslim travelers, whose destination choices are increasingly influenced by destination attractiveness, digital accessibility, authenticity, sustainability, and experiential value (Mady et al., 2024). This shift reflects a broader movement within halal tourism research from a compliance-oriented paradigm toward a value-creation perspective that recognizes Muslim tourists as sophisticated consumers seeking memorable and meaningful travel experiences.

The inclusion of perceived risk further indicates the diversification of research themes within this foundational cluster. Earlier studies generally associated perceived risk with religious uncertainty regarding halal compliance, whereas more recent research extends this concept to encompass health security, destination safety, digital privacy, environmental sustainability, and geopolitical stability, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic (Pamukçu et al., 2026). Consequently, halal tourism is no longer interpreted merely through the lens of religious observance but increasingly as a multidimensional tourism ecosystem requiring integrated risk management, governance, and service innovation.

From a strategic perspective, the cluster also demonstrates the growing importance of destination competitiveness. Contemporary halal tourism research increasingly argues that competitive advantage is achieved through the integration of Islamic hospitality, destination branding, service

innovation, halal certification, and stakeholder collaboration rather than through isolated religious attributes (Wazin, Patimah, & Ansori, 2025). This argument aligns with destination competitiveness theory, which emphasizes that tourism success depends on the interaction between destination resources, institutional support, service quality, and visitor experiences. Consequently, halal tourism has evolved into a strategic development framework capable of enhancing both economic performance and international destination positioning.

Overall, Cluster 1 illustrates the intellectual foundation upon which subsequent halal tourism research has developed. The cluster reveals a clear progression from early discussions emphasizing religious compliance and Muslim-friendly services toward a broader conceptualization incorporating hospitality excellence, destination competitiveness, governance, and experiential value. This evolution supports the central argument of the present study that halal tourism has moved beyond Muslim-friendly tourism, transforming into a multidisciplinary research field that integrates Islamic values with tourism management, marketing, hospitality, and strategic destination development. Rather than functioning solely as a niche segment of religious tourism, halal tourism has become a comprehensive paradigm for designing inclusive, competitive, and sustainable tourism destinations capable of responding to the increasingly diverse expectations of the global Muslim travel market.

Cluster 2. Muslim Tourist Behaviour, Destination Experience, and Customer Loyalty

Cluster 2 reflects one of the most dynamic streams of halal tourism research by emphasizing Muslim tourist behaviour and destination experience. The cluster is characterized by highly interconnected keywords such as Muslim tourists, destination image, tourist satisfaction, customer satisfaction, service quality, perceived value, trust, destination loyalty, revisit intention, and behavioral intention. Unlike Cluster 1, which primarily establishes the conceptual and institutional foundations of halal tourism, this cluster demonstrates a significant shift toward understanding how Muslim tourists perceive, evaluate, and respond to tourism experiences. The prominence of these behavioral constructs indicates that halal tourism research has progressively adopted theoretical perspectives from consumer behavior, relationship marketing, hospitality management, and destination marketing to explain travel decision-making and post-visit behavioral outcomes.

The bibliometric findings reinforce this evolution. Keywords such as satisfaction (26 occurrences), destination image (20 occurrences), tourist satisfaction (18 occurrences), revisit intention (14 occurrences), perceived value (12 occurrences), and trust (12 occurrences) appear among the most frequently occurring concepts in the dataset, illustrating the increasing dominance of customer-oriented research within the halal tourism literature. This trend reflects the broader transformation of tourism studies from a supply-driven paradigm toward a demand-driven perspective in which

tourists are viewed as active value creators rather than passive recipients of tourism services. Consequently, researchers have increasingly focused on identifying the psychological and experiential factors that shape Muslim tourists' perceptions of destinations and influence their travel behavior (Han et al., 2019).

One of the defining characteristics of this cluster is the central role of destination image in explaining Muslim tourists' behavioral responses. Previous studies consistently demonstrate that destination image influences tourists' expectations, perceived quality, destination satisfaction, and loyalty (Al-Ansi et al., 2023). Within halal tourism, destination image extends beyond traditional tourism attributes by incorporating perceptions of halal authenticity, Islamic values, safety, cultural inclusiveness, and the availability of Muslim-friendly facilities. This multidimensional interpretation suggests that Muslim travelers increasingly evaluate destinations through a combination of functional, emotional, and religious considerations. Consequently, destinations capable of communicating a strong halal identity while maintaining high standards of hospitality and service quality are more likely to achieve long-term competitiveness in the global Muslim travel market (Battour et al., 2017).

Another dominant theme within this cluster is tourist satisfaction, which has become one of the most widely examined outcome variables in halal tourism research. Earlier studies primarily associated tourist satisfaction with the availability of halal food, prayer facilities, and Shariah-compliant accommodation. However, more recent investigations reveal that satisfaction is increasingly influenced by broader experiential dimensions, including destination authenticity, hospitality performance, digital accessibility, cultural interaction, environmental quality, and service personalization (Mady et al., 2024). This conceptual shift indicates that Muslim tourists no longer evaluate destinations solely based on religious compliance but also on the overall quality of their travel experiences. Such findings support the emerging argument that halal tourism should be understood as an experience-oriented tourism model capable of delivering both spiritual fulfillment and memorable leisure experiences (Pamukçu et al., 2026).

The close association between service quality, perceived value, and trust further demonstrates the increasing integration of marketing theories within halal tourism research. Service quality has consistently been identified as a key determinant of customer satisfaction and loyalty because it reflects tourists' perceptions of destination performance relative to their expectations (Islam et al., 2023). Likewise, perceived value has evolved from a simple evaluation of economic benefits into a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional, social, functional, and religious values. Recent studies suggest that Muslim tourists are more likely to revisit destinations when they perceive that tourism services provide authentic Islamic experiences while simultaneously delivering high-quality hospitality and cultural enrichment (Abror et al., 2021). In addition, trust has emerged as a strategic factor in reducing uncertainty associated with halal compliance, destination credibility, and service reliability. As halal tourism increasingly

attracts international travelers from diverse cultural backgrounds, trust has become essential for strengthening destination reputation and encouraging long-term visitor relationships (Wazin, Patimah, Ansori, et al., 2025).

The emergence of destination loyalty and revisit intention within this cluster further illustrates the maturation of halal tourism research. Rather than merely explaining initial destination choice, contemporary studies increasingly examine long-term behavioral outcomes, including repeat visitation, positive word-of-mouth communication, and destination advocacy. This shift aligns with relationship marketing theory, which emphasizes that sustainable tourism competitiveness depends not only on attracting first-time visitors but also on retaining loyal tourists who actively promote destinations through social networks and digital platforms (Han et al., 2020). Consequently, halal tourism research has expanded from understanding travel motivation to investigating the mechanisms through which memorable tourism experiences generate long-term destination competitiveness.

An equally important development reflected in this cluster is the growing influence of digital transformation on Muslim tourist behavior. Although digital-related keywords do not dominate the current network, recent publications increasingly emphasize the role of online travel platforms, electronic word-of-mouth, mobile applications, artificial intelligence, and social media in shaping destination image and travel decisions (Supardin et al., 2025). Muslim tourists now rely extensively on digital information when evaluating halal-friendly destinations, comparing accommodation, verifying halal certification, and sharing travel experiences. This evolution suggests that future halal tourism research will increasingly integrate tourism marketing with digital consumer behavior, smart tourism, and technology-enabled destination management.

From a theoretical perspective, Cluster 2 demonstrates a clear progression from traditional models emphasizing religiosity and destination attributes toward more comprehensive frameworks integrating service quality, customer experience, perceived value, trust, and behavioral intention. This development reflects the broader evolution of tourism research in which visitor experience has become the principal determinant of destination success. Within the context of halal tourism, this transformation signifies that Muslim travelers should no longer be viewed solely as consumers seeking religious compliance but as sophisticated global tourists whose travel decisions are shaped by a complex interaction between religious values, emotional experiences, destination quality, technological convenience, and cultural authenticity.

Overall, Cluster 2 highlights the transition of halal tourism research from a destination-centered perspective toward a tourist-centered paradigm. The findings indicate that the future competitiveness of halal tourism destinations will increasingly depend on their ability to create integrated customer experiences that combine Islamic values with service excellence, digital innovation, destination branding, and experiential tourism. This intellectual shift provides strong evidence that halal tourism research has moved beyond evaluating physical destination attributes and now focuses on

understanding how Muslim tourists perceive, experience, and co-create value throughout the entire tourism journey. Such developments reinforce the broader conclusion of this study that halal tourism has evolved into a multidimensional field integrating tourism marketing, consumer psychology, hospitality management, and strategic destination development.

Cluster 3. Destination Development, Islamic Heritage, and Sustainable Tourism

Cluster 3 represents the expanding body of research that links halal tourism with destination development, Islamic heritage, and sustainable tourism. The cluster is characterized by keywords such as tourism development, tourist destination, religious tourism, heritage tourism, ecotourism, Islamism, travel behavior, tourist satisfaction, and destination management. The close relationships among these concepts indicate that halal tourism is increasingly viewed not merely as a tourism product designed for Muslim travelers but as a strategic framework for destination planning, regional development, and sustainable tourism governance. This intellectual shift reflects the growing recognition that the long-term success of halal tourism depends on integrating religious values with destination competitiveness, cultural preservation, environmental responsibility, and community participation.

The presence of tourism development as one of the dominant keywords demonstrates that scholars have gradually expanded the scope of halal tourism research beyond consumer behavior toward macro-level discussions concerning destination planning and tourism policy. Earlier studies primarily focused on identifying the characteristics of halal-friendly destinations, including the availability of halal-certified food, prayer facilities, and Islamic hospitality services (Battour et al., 2017) (& Ismail, 2016). However, contemporary research increasingly examines how governments, destination management organizations, and local stakeholders collaborate to develop halal tourism as a catalyst for regional economic growth and sustainable development (Al-Ansi et al., 2023). This evolution suggests that halal tourism is no longer regarded solely as a niche tourism segment but as an integral component of national tourism strategies aimed at enhancing destination competitiveness and attracting international Muslim travelers.

A notable feature of this cluster is the strong association between religious tourism and heritage tourism, indicating that researchers increasingly acknowledge the cultural dimension of halal tourism. While religious tourism traditionally focuses on pilgrimage and visits to sacred sites, heritage tourism emphasizes the preservation and interpretation of Islamic history, architecture, local traditions, and cultural landscapes (Pamukçu et al., 2026). The coexistence of these keywords suggests that halal tourism has evolved into a broader cultural tourism concept in which Islamic heritage serves not only as a religious attraction but also as a valuable tourism asset capable of enhancing destination identity and authenticity. Recent studies argue that destinations integrating Islamic cultural heritage with high-quality tourism services are more likely to generate memorable visitor experiences

while strengthening local cultural preservation and economic resilience (Purnomo et al., 2026).

Another significant aspect of this cluster is the emergence of ecotourism and sustainability-related concepts, which illustrate the convergence between halal tourism and sustainable tourism research. Traditionally, halal tourism emphasized compliance with Islamic principles regarding food, accommodation, and religious facilities. Nevertheless, recent publications increasingly argue that Islamic values such as environmental stewardship (*khalifah*), moderation (*wasatiyyah*), and social responsibility provide a strong ethical foundation for sustainable tourism development (Supardin et al., 2025). Consequently, scholars have begun to position halal tourism within broader sustainability frameworks that emphasize environmental conservation, responsible resource management, community empowerment, and long-term destination resilience. This development reflects a significant paradigm shift in which halal tourism is understood as contributing not only to religious fulfillment but also to ecological sustainability and inclusive socio-economic development.

The inclusion of destination management and tourism policy further demonstrates the increasing institutionalization of halal tourism research. Rather than concentrating exclusively on market demand, recent studies emphasize the importance of governance structures, policy coordination, certification systems, and stakeholder collaboration in ensuring successful destination development (Wazin, Patimah, Ansori, et al., 2025). Governments in countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Türkiye, Japan, and South Korea have implemented various policy initiatives to strengthen halal tourism ecosystems through infrastructure investment, destination branding, certification programs, and international promotion. These developments have encouraged researchers to examine halal tourism from governance and public policy perspectives, thereby expanding the theoretical boundaries of the field beyond hospitality and marketing.

The growing attention to community participation also represents an important intellectual development within this cluster. Contemporary studies increasingly recognize that sustainable halal tourism cannot be achieved solely through infrastructure development or marketing campaigns but requires active involvement from local communities, tourism entrepreneurs, religious authorities, and public institutions (Mady et al., 2024). Community-based halal tourism is therefore emerging as a promising research direction because it combines economic empowerment with cultural preservation and environmental sustainability. This perspective aligns with sustainable destination management theories, which emphasize that long-term tourism competitiveness depends on balancing economic performance with social inclusion and environmental protection.

Furthermore, this cluster reflects the geographical diversification of halal tourism research. Earlier investigations were largely concentrated in Muslim-majority countries, particularly Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Middle East. However, recent studies increasingly explore destination development in non-Muslim-majority countries seeking to attract the rapidly expanding

Muslim travel market. Countries such as Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and the United Kingdom have invested substantially in Muslim-friendly infrastructure, halal-certified services, and culturally inclusive destination strategies to enhance their international competitiveness (Al-Ansi et al., 2023). This geographical expansion demonstrates that halal tourism has evolved into a global tourism phenomenon rather than a regional or religiously bounded market.

From a theoretical perspective, Cluster 3 illustrates the transition of halal tourism research from destination attributes toward destination systems. Earlier studies examined individual tourism components such as halal food or accommodation, whereas contemporary research increasingly conceptualizes halal tourism as a comprehensive destination ecosystem integrating governance, infrastructure, cultural heritage, sustainability, stakeholder collaboration, and strategic planning. This systems-oriented perspective is consistent with destination competitiveness theory, which argues that tourism success depends on the interaction of multiple institutional, economic, environmental, and socio-cultural factors rather than isolated tourism products.

Overall, Cluster 3 demonstrates that halal tourism research has undergone a significant conceptual transformation from focusing primarily on religious travel toward a broader vision of sustainable destination development. The integration of tourism development, Islamic heritage, destination governance, ecotourism, and community participation indicates that halal tourism is increasingly recognized as a strategic instrument for promoting sustainable regional development and preserving cultural identity. These findings reinforce the central argument of the present study that halal tourism has progressed beyond Muslim-friendly tourism, evolving into a multidisciplinary field where sustainability, governance, cultural heritage, and destination competitiveness collectively shape the future direction of global halal tourism research.

Cluster 4. Islamic Tourism, Religious Identity, and Cultural Transformation

Cluster 4 represents the conceptual roots of halal tourism by emphasizing Islamic tourism, religious identity, and cultural transformation. Unlike Cluster 2, which focuses primarily on tourists' behavioural responses, this cluster examines the philosophical and socio-cultural foundations that distinguish halal tourism from conventional tourism. The close relationships among keywords such as Islamic tourism, religion, religious tourism, culture, heritage, and Islam indicate that halal tourism research has evolved from earlier discussions concerning faith-based travel toward broader debates regarding the integration of Islamic values within destination development, cultural preservation, and tourism policy.

The prominence of Islamic tourism within this cluster reflects its historical significance as one of the earliest concepts underpinning halal tourism scholarship. Initial studies generally described Islamic tourism as travel motivated by religious obligations, including pilgrimage, visits to

Islamic heritage sites, and participation in religious events (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Over time, however, scholars argued that limiting halal tourism to pilgrimage activities overlooks its broader social, cultural, and economic dimensions. Contemporary research therefore conceptualizes Islamic tourism as an integrated tourism system that combines religious values with leisure, education, culture, and recreation, enabling Muslim travellers to fulfil spiritual needs while participating in modern tourism experiences (Al-Ansi et al., 2023).

Another important characteristic of this cluster is the growing emphasis on religious identity as a determinant of tourism development. Rather than considering religion solely as an individual belief system, recent studies increasingly view Islamic identity as a cultural resource capable of shaping destination branding, tourism experiences, and community engagement (Purnomo et al., 2026). Islamic heritage, architecture, local traditions, and religious festivals have become strategic tourism assets that strengthen destination uniqueness while preserving cultural authenticity. This perspective broadens the understanding of halal tourism beyond compliance with halal standards by recognizing the role of Islamic civilization in enriching cultural tourism and destination attractiveness.

The coexistence of heritage tourism and religious tourism also illustrates an important conceptual transition. Earlier studies frequently separated pilgrimage tourism from cultural tourism, whereas contemporary research increasingly integrates both perspectives within a unified halal tourism framework. Islamic heritage destinations are no longer viewed merely as places of worship but also as educational, historical, and cultural attractions that contribute to intercultural dialogue and sustainable tourism development (Pamukçu et al., 2026). This transformation reflects the growing recognition that preserving Islamic heritage not only strengthens religious identity but also supports destination competitiveness through authentic cultural experiences.

Furthermore, this cluster highlights the role of halal tourism in promoting cultural transformation within the global tourism industry. As Muslim travel markets continue to expand, many non-Muslim-majority destinations have adapted their tourism products to accommodate Islamic values while maintaining cultural diversity. Countries such as Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and the United Kingdom increasingly incorporate Muslim-friendly facilities, halal-certified services, and culturally sensitive hospitality into their tourism strategies without fundamentally altering their local cultural identities (Supardin et al., 2025). Such developments demonstrate that halal tourism functions not as an exclusive tourism model but as an inclusive framework capable of encouraging cross-cultural understanding and international tourism competitiveness.

From a theoretical perspective, this cluster signifies the transition from viewing halal tourism as a religion-centred tourism activity toward understanding it as a broader socio-cultural phenomenon. Islamic values are increasingly interpreted as ethical principles that influence destination governance, hospitality practices, cultural preservation, and sustainable

tourism development rather than merely defining permissible tourism activities. Consequently, halal tourism has become an interdisciplinary research domain integrating religious studies, cultural geography, tourism sociology, and destination management.

Overall, Cluster 4 illustrates that the evolution of halal tourism cannot be understood solely through the perspectives of consumer behaviour or destination marketing. Instead, the field has progressively embraced broader discussions concerning religious identity, Islamic cultural heritage, and cultural transformation, positioning halal tourism as an important mechanism for preserving Islamic civilization while simultaneously supporting inclusive and sustainable tourism development. This conceptual evolution further reinforces the central proposition of this study that halal tourism has moved beyond the traditional notion of Muslim-friendly tourism and has become a multidimensional framework linking religion, culture, governance, and destination development within the contemporary global tourism landscape.

Cluster 5. Halal Governance, Certification, and Institutional Development

Cluster 5 represents the institutional dimension of halal tourism research by emphasizing the interconnected roles of halal governance, certification systems, regulatory frameworks, and the broader halal industry ecosystem. The cluster is characterized by keywords such as halal certification, halal products, halal awareness, regulation, halal industry, and governance, indicating that recent scholarship has increasingly shifted beyond destination attributes and tourist behaviour toward institutional mechanisms that ensure the credibility, standardization, and sustainability of halal tourism destinations. The emergence of these themes demonstrates that halal tourism is no longer viewed solely as a market-oriented tourism product but as a governance system requiring coordinated policies, internationally recognized standards, and effective institutional collaboration across the tourism value chain.

The increasing prominence of halal certification reflects its growing role as a strategic instrument for strengthening destination credibility and enhancing consumer confidence. Earlier halal tourism studies primarily regarded certification as an operational requirement for halal food and accommodation services. However, contemporary research argues that halal certification has evolved into a comprehensive governance mechanism that influences destination branding, service quality assurance, market access, and international competitiveness (Purnomo et al., 2026). Certification now extends beyond restaurants and hotels to include travel agencies, transportation services, wellness facilities, and tourism attractions, creating a more integrated halal tourism ecosystem. As Muslim travellers become increasingly aware of halal standards, certification serves as an important quality signal that reduces information asymmetry and reinforces tourists' trust in destination reliability (Han et al., 2023).

The presence of halal awareness within this cluster further illustrates the institutional transformation of halal tourism. Earlier studies generally examined halal awareness at the individual consumer level, focusing on knowledge, religiosity, and purchase behaviour. More recent investigations, however, conceptualize halal awareness as a broader societal and institutional phenomenon involving governments, tourism businesses, certification agencies, and destination management organizations (Purnomo et al., 2026). This expanded perspective recognizes that increasing public awareness of halal standards contributes not only to consumer confidence but also to encouraging tourism operators to adopt internationally recognized halal practices. Consequently, halal awareness has become an important driver of policy implementation and industry standardization within the global halal tourism market.

Another defining characteristic of this cluster is the close relationship between halal tourism and the broader halal industry. Rather than functioning as an isolated tourism sector, halal tourism increasingly operates within an integrated halal economic ecosystem encompassing halal food, Islamic finance, halal cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, Muslim-friendly hospitality, and digital halal services (Pamukçu et al., 2026). This convergence reflects the emergence of the halal economy as a comprehensive development framework in which tourism contributes to value creation across multiple industrial sectors. Recent studies therefore argue that strengthening institutional linkages between tourism and other halal industries can generate greater economic resilience, encourage innovation, and improve destination competitiveness in the rapidly expanding global Muslim travel market (Supardin et al., 2025).

The keyword regulation highlights the growing importance of public policy and institutional governance in supporting halal tourism development. Governments in leading halal tourism destinations, including Malaysia, Indonesia, Türkiye, and several Gulf countries, have introduced legal frameworks, certification systems, and national tourism strategies to promote halal tourism while ensuring compliance with Islamic principles and international service standards (Battour et al., 2026). At the same time, non-Muslim-majority destinations such as Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and the United Kingdom have adopted adaptive regulatory approaches by introducing Muslim-friendly guidelines and voluntary certification schemes to improve destination accessibility without fundamentally altering their existing tourism models (Al-Ansi et al., 2023). These developments illustrate that effective governance has become a critical determinant of destination competitiveness in the increasingly globalized halal tourism market.

An equally important aspect of this cluster is the growing discussion surrounding institutional harmonization and international standardization. Although the global halal tourism market continues to expand, certification procedures, regulatory requirements, and halal standards remain fragmented across countries, resulting in inconsistencies that may reduce consumer confidence and complicate international tourism development (Wazin et al., 2024). Recent literature increasingly advocates greater collaboration among

governments, certification bodies, tourism organizations, and international standard-setting institutions to establish mutually recognized halal standards capable of facilitating cross-border tourism and strengthening global market integration (Pamukçu et al., 2026). Such harmonization is expected to improve transparency, reduce certification costs, and enhance the overall credibility of halal tourism destinations.

From a theoretical perspective, Cluster 5 illustrates a significant transition from service-based halal tourism toward governance-based halal tourism. Earlier research primarily emphasized destination facilities and consumer preferences, whereas contemporary studies increasingly recognize the importance of institutional capacity, regulatory quality, stakeholder coordination, and governance effectiveness in determining destination performance. This evolution aligns with governance theory, which argues that successful tourism development depends on coordinated interactions among governments, businesses, certification authorities, local communities, and international organizations rather than relying solely on market mechanisms.

Overall, Cluster 5 demonstrates that the future development of halal tourism will be increasingly influenced by the quality of governance and institutional arrangements rather than by destination attributes alone. The integration of halal certification, regulatory frameworks, public policy, and industrial collaboration indicates that halal tourism has entered a new phase characterized by stronger institutionalization and global standardization. These findings reinforce the central argument of this study that halal tourism has evolved beyond Muslim-friendly tourism, becoming a comprehensive governance ecosystem in which certification, institutional collaboration, and regulatory innovation play essential roles in ensuring destination credibility, sustainable competitiveness, and the long-term development of the global halal tourism industry.

Cluster 6. Digital Transformation, Smart Tourism, and Emerging Research Frontiers

Cluster 6 represents the emerging frontier of halal tourism research, highlighting the transition of the field toward digital transformation, smart tourism, innovation, and sustainable destination resilience. Although this cluster contains fewer keywords than the preceding clusters, its conceptual significance is particularly important because it reflects the newest directions within the halal tourism literature. The interconnections among keywords related to sustainability, stakeholders, innovation, digitalization, tourism economics, and tourist behaviour indicate that halal tourism research is progressively moving beyond conventional discussions of destination attributes and consumer satisfaction toward broader debates concerning technological innovation, collaborative governance, and long-term destination resilience. This evolution suggests that halal tourism is entering a new stage in which digital technologies and sustainability principles jointly shape the competitiveness of future tourism destinations.

One of the defining characteristics of this cluster is the growing influence of digital transformation on halal tourism development. Advances

in digital technologies have fundamentally changed how Muslim travellers search for information, evaluate destinations, make travel decisions, and share tourism experiences. Online booking platforms, mobile travel applications, artificial intelligence, social media, and digital payment systems have become integral components of the contemporary Muslim travel ecosystem (Osijo et al., 2024). More importantly, digital technologies increasingly facilitate access to reliable halal information, enabling travellers to identify halal-certified restaurants, Muslim-friendly accommodation, prayer facilities, and destination services before and during their journeys. Consequently, recent studies argue that digital transformation is no longer merely a technological innovation but a strategic capability that enhances destination accessibility, service efficiency, and visitor confidence (Mady et al., 2024).

The cluster also highlights the emergence of smart tourism as an important research direction. Smart tourism refers to the integration of information and communication technologies, big data, artificial intelligence, and Internet of Things (IoT) applications to improve tourism management and visitor experiences. Within the context of halal tourism, smart technologies support destination managers in providing personalized travel information, optimizing visitor flows, improving service quality, and enhancing operational efficiency while maintaining compliance with Islamic principles (Supardin et al., 2025). Recent publications increasingly suggest that the future competitiveness of halal tourism destinations will depend on their ability to integrate digital innovation with halal services, creating intelligent tourism ecosystems that simultaneously satisfy religious, functional, and experiential needs.

Another significant theme emerging from this cluster is destination resilience. The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally reshaped global tourism and highlighted the importance of resilience in responding to unexpected disruptions. As a result, recent halal tourism studies increasingly investigate how destinations can strengthen adaptive capacity through digital innovation, institutional collaboration, diversified tourism products, and sustainable resource management (Pamukçu et al., 2026). Rather than focusing solely on post-pandemic recovery, resilience is now conceptualized as a long-term strategic capability enabling destinations to respond to economic uncertainty, climate change, geopolitical instability, and changing tourist preferences. This shift reflects the growing recognition that sustainable competitiveness depends on the ability of tourism destinations to adapt continuously to complex global challenges.

The inclusion of stakeholders within this cluster further demonstrates the movement toward collaborative governance models. Contemporary halal tourism development increasingly requires cooperation among governments, tourism businesses, certification agencies, local communities, technology providers, and academic institutions (Wazin, Patimah, Ansori, et al., 2025). Such collaboration is essential for developing integrated tourism ecosystems in which innovation, digital infrastructure, sustainability initiatives, and halal governance reinforce one another. Recent studies therefore emphasize

stakeholder engagement as a critical determinant of destination resilience and sustainable tourism development, moving beyond earlier approaches that primarily focused on individual firms or government agencies.

A particularly noteworthy development within this cluster is the convergence between digital transformation and sustainability. Earlier halal tourism research generally treated environmental sustainability and technological innovation as separate topics. However, recent publications increasingly argue that digital technologies can accelerate sustainable tourism by improving resource efficiency, reducing operational waste, supporting smart mobility, facilitating environmental monitoring, and promoting responsible tourist behaviour (Al-Ansi et al., 2023). At the same time, Islamic ethical principles such as stewardship (*khalifah*), justice (*adl*), and moderation (*wasatiyyah*) provide a normative foundation for integrating sustainability into destination governance. This convergence demonstrates that halal tourism is gradually evolving into a holistic development model where digital innovation and sustainability are mutually reinforcing rather than competing priorities.

From a theoretical perspective, Cluster 6 signals the emergence of a next-generation halal tourism paradigm. Earlier stages of research emphasized religious compliance, hospitality services, and tourist behaviour, whereas contemporary scholarship increasingly incorporates concepts from digital innovation, smart destination management, sustainability science, and resilience theory. This interdisciplinary expansion illustrates that halal tourism has become closely connected with broader discussions concerning digital ecosystems, technological disruption, environmental responsibility, and inclusive tourism governance. Consequently, the future development of halal tourism research is likely to draw upon theories from information systems, innovation management, sustainable development, and institutional governance alongside traditional tourism and hospitality frameworks.

Overall, Cluster 6 represents the future trajectory of halal tourism scholarship. The integration of digital transformation, smart tourism, stakeholder collaboration, resilience, and sustainability indicates that halal tourism is evolving beyond conventional destination management toward a technology-enabled and sustainability-oriented tourism ecosystem. These findings strongly reinforce the central proposition of this study that halal tourism has progressed beyond Muslim-friendly tourism, becoming an interdisciplinary field that combines Islamic values with digital innovation, collaborative governance, and sustainable destination development. Future research should therefore explore the role of artificial intelligence, blockchain-based halal verification, smart destination platforms, digital customer engagement, and ESG-oriented tourism governance in shaping the next generation of halal tourism destinations.

3.2.2 Future Research Directions

The bibliometric findings reveal that halal tourism research has undergone substantial intellectual expansion, evolving from a narrow emphasis on Muslim-friendly services toward a multidisciplinary field encompassing hospitality, consumer behaviour, destination management, governance, sustainability, and digital

transformation. Despite this significant progress, several important research gaps remain that offer promising opportunities for future investigation.

First, future studies should move beyond traditional consumer behaviour models by developing more comprehensive theoretical frameworks capable of explaining the complexity of Muslim travellers' decision-making processes. Existing studies predominantly rely on established behavioural theories, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, to explain destination choice, satisfaction, and revisit intention (Han et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2023). While these theories have provided valuable insights, they often overlook the dynamic interaction between religiosity, digital engagement, cultural identity, sustainability values, and destination governance. Future research should therefore integrate interdisciplinary perspectives from tourism studies, institutional theory, service-dominant logic, and sustainability science to develop more holistic conceptual models capable of capturing the evolving behaviour of contemporary Muslim travellers.

Second, the science mapping analysis demonstrates that digital transformation has emerged as one of the fastest-growing themes within halal tourism research, yet empirical evidence remains relatively fragmented. Although recent studies have begun examining the influence of digital platforms, online travel applications, social media, and artificial intelligence on Muslim travel behaviour, limited attention has been devoted to understanding how emerging technologies reshape the overall halal tourism ecosystem (Mady et al., 2024; Supardin et al., 2025). Future studies should therefore investigate the application of artificial intelligence, blockchain-enabled halal verification, smart destination technologies, big data analytics, virtual reality, and the Internet of Things in enhancing destination competitiveness, visitor experiences, and operational efficiency. Such investigations would contribute to the development of technology-enabled halal tourism models capable of supporting more inclusive and intelligent tourism destinations.

Third, greater scholarly attention should be directed toward governance and institutional dimensions of halal tourism. The keyword co-occurrence analysis indicates that halal certification and governance have become increasingly important components of the research landscape; however, comparative studies examining regulatory harmonization, certification governance, and cross-country policy implementation remain limited (Wazin, Patimah, Ansori, et al., 2025). Future research could therefore explore institutional collaboration among governments, certification authorities, destination management organizations, and international tourism bodies to identify governance models that facilitate internationally recognized halal tourism standards. Comparative analyses involving Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority destinations would also provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of different governance approaches in supporting sustainable tourism development.

Fourth, sustainability should become a central research agenda in future halal tourism studies. While sustainability has recently emerged as an important research theme, most existing investigations focus primarily on environmental dimensions or destination development. Future studies should adopt a broader sustainability perspective by examining the integration of environmental stewardship, social inclusion, economic resilience, and Islamic ethical principles within halal tourism governance (Pamukçu et al., 2026). In particular, the relationship between halal tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices, circular tourism, climate resilience, and responsible destination management remains underexplored. Addressing these issues would strengthen the theoretical contribution of halal

tourism research while increasing its practical relevance for sustainable destination planning.

Fifth, future bibliometric studies may expand the analytical scope by incorporating multiple scientific databases, including Web of Science, Dimensions, Crossref, or Lens, to provide broader coverage of global scholarly production and reduce potential database bias. In addition, combining bibliometric analysis with systematic literature reviews, meta-analysis, or qualitative content analysis would enable deeper interpretation of emerging research themes and theoretical developments. Such methodological integration would generate a more comprehensive understanding of the intellectual evolution of halal tourism research while improving the robustness and generalizability of future evidence.

Finally, the intellectual evolution identified in this study indicates that halal tourism is progressively transforming into a holistic tourism ecosystem integrating Islamic values, digital innovation, governance, sustainability, and destination competitiveness. Consequently, future research should move beyond viewing halal tourism merely as a tourism niche for Muslim travellers and instead conceptualize it as an interdisciplinary field contributing to global tourism transformation. Greater collaboration among researchers from tourism, hospitality, information systems, Islamic economics, public policy, environmental studies, and digital innovation is expected to generate more comprehensive theoretical frameworks and practical solutions capable of addressing the challenges and opportunities facing the global halal tourism industry.

4 CONCLUSION

This study aimed to systematically map the intellectual evolution of halal tourism research and provide a comprehensive understanding of its scientific development through bibliometric analysis. The findings demonstrate that halal tourism has evolved from a relatively narrow concept centered on Muslim-friendly services into a multidisciplinary research domain integrating hospitality, consumer behavior, destination management, governance, sustainability, and digital transformation. This intellectual evolution reflects the increasing maturity of halal tourism as an independent field of study that extends beyond religious compliance to encompass broader strategic issues related to destination competitiveness, institutional development, and sustainable tourism ecosystems.

The study makes several important contributions. Theoretically, it advances the understanding of halal tourism by illustrating its conceptual transformation from faith-based tourism toward a more comprehensive framework that integrates Islamic values with contemporary tourism management, sustainability, and technological innovation. Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of bibliometric network analysis using VOSviewer in revealing the intellectual structure, thematic relationships, and knowledge evolution of a rapidly growing research field. Empirically, the findings provide a systematic overview of the major research themes, influential contributors, and emerging knowledge domains that collectively shape the current landscape of halal tourism research. These contributions establish a stronger foundation for future theoretical development and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the analysis was limited to publications indexed in the Scopus database, which may not fully represent relevant studies published in other international databases or regional indexing systems. Second, the study relied exclusively on bibliographic metadata and keyword relationships without examining the full textual content of individual publications, thereby limiting deeper interpretation of theoretical and methodological developments. Third, the findings reflect the characteristics of the available literature rather than the practical implementation of halal tourism across different destination contexts. Consequently, the results should be interpreted within the scope of the selected dataset and analytical approach.

Building upon these limitations, future studies are encouraged to broaden database coverage by incorporating additional sources such as Web of Science, Dimensions, or Lens to enhance the comprehensiveness of bibliometric evidence. Future research may also integrate bibliometric techniques with systematic literature reviews, content analysis, or meta-analysis to provide richer theoretical interpretation and stronger empirical synthesis. Furthermore, greater attention should be devoted to emerging research areas, including artificial intelligence, blockchain-enabled halal verification, smart tourism, ESG-oriented destination governance, climate resilience, and digital tourism ecosystems, as these topics are expected to shape the next stage of halal tourism scholarship.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of adopting a more integrated approach to halal tourism development. Policymakers should strengthen regulatory coordination, harmonize halal certification systems, and encourage international collaboration to improve destination competitiveness and global recognition. Destination management organizations and tourism businesses should invest in digital innovation, service quality, sustainable destination management, and stakeholder collaboration to create more inclusive and resilient halal tourism ecosystems. At the same time, academic institutions and researchers are encouraged to expand interdisciplinary collaboration by integrating perspectives from tourism, hospitality, Islamic economics, information systems, sustainability, and public policy. Such collaborative efforts will contribute to developing more adaptive, innovative, and globally competitive halal tourism destinations capable of responding to the evolving needs of Muslim travelers and the future challenges of the international tourism industry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support provided by their respective institutions throughout the completion of this research. The authors also thank Elsevier for providing access to the Scopus database, which served as the primary source of bibliographic data for the bibliometric analysis. Special appreciation is extended to the anonymous reviewers and the editorial team for their insightful comments and constructive recommendations, which have substantially improved the quality of this manuscript.

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