Halal Tourism Destination Branding, Is It Important?

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Abstract: *This study aims to reveal the responses of tourism destination stakeholders to the branding of halal tourist destinations. The study was conducted in the largest tourist destination in East Java, Indonesia. In this study, the key informants are the Chair of the Indonesian Ulema Council, the Chair of the Regional People's Representative Council, tourism managers, and tourism destination business actors. The last two informants are those who understand the characteristics and behavior of tourists visiting tourism destinations. Data were obtained from primary data sources through non-participant observation and in-depth interviews using the Snow-ball Sampling approach. Sources of secondary data obtained through documents from agencies relevant to the research. Data analysis used descriptive-analytical approach and interpretation. The main finding of this research is the rejection of the branding of halal tourist destinations, which is stated explicitly even though the government has made policies and promotes branding of halal tourist destinations. Research on halal destinations is still very little and not popular, many think that the inclusion of halal labels is only intended for Muslim visitors.*

Keywords: *Halal Tourism, Destination, Branding, it is important*

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap tanggapan stakeholders destinasi pariwisata terhadap branding destinasi wisata halal. Penelitian dilakukan di tujuan wisata terbesar di Jawa Timur, Indonesia. Dalam penelitian ini, informan kunci adalah Ketua Majelis Ulama Indonesia, Ketua Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah, pengelola pariwisata, dan pelaku usaha destinasi pariwisata. Dua informan terakhir adalah pihak yang memahami karakteristik dan perilaku wisatawan yang berkunjung ke destinasi pariwisata. Data diperoleh dari sumber data primer melalui observasi non partisipan dan wawancara mendalam dengan menggunakan pendekatan Snow-ball Sampling. Sumber data sekunder diperoleh melalui dokumen dari instansi yang relevan dengan penelitian. Analisis data menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis dan interpretasi. Temuan utama dari penelitian ini adalah penolakan terhadap branding destinasi wisata halal, yang dinyatakan secara eksplisit meskipun pemerintah telah membuat kebijakan dan mempromosikan Branding destinasi wisata halal. Penelitian tentang destinasi halal masih sangat sedikit dan belum populer, banyak yang beranggapan bahwa pencantuman label halal hanya ditujukan untuk pengunjung muslim.*

Kata kunci: *Wisata Halal, Destinasi, Branding, apakah Penting*

Introduction

There is a tendency for halal tourism to become a global tourism trend (Khoiriati et al., 2018), which is now the concern of many countries, both Muslim and non-Muslim ones (Samori et al., 2016). Halal tourism has become a part of the halal industry in the tourism sector (Destiana & Sunu Astuti, 2019; Jaelani et al., 2017), because it is led by the high potential market for Muslim tourists (Destiana & Sunu Astuti, 2019). Indonesia is a country that follows this trend of halal tourism (Khoiriati et al., 2018). Muslim tourists who obey Islamic law show a positive attitude toward halal *tourism* destinations (Harahsheh et al., 2019). They prefer halal tourism brand equity (Rahman et al., 2019). Indonesia is a country that has a good reputation in the halal tourism industry around the world (Wakhyono, 2019). For this reason, Indonesia is developing Branding for halal tourism destinations with the Indonesian Halal Tourism logo (Winarti, 2017). Many other countries have also carried out their countries branding as halal tourism destinations or with other terms which have similar meaning such as sharia tourism, Islamic tourism, or halal tourism. Many regions have branding halal *tourism* destinations (Khoiriati et al., 2018).

The studies on halal tourism branding have been carried out for various purposes or reasons. It serves as a marketing strategy media (Kasdi et al., 2018; Subarkah, 2018), as a promotional media (Nisa & Sujono, 2017; Shafaei & Mohamed, 2015), an analysis of halal tourism branding between expectations and reality (El-Gohary, 2016; Khoiriati et al., 2018), an analysis of halal tourism branding between customer perceptions/attitudes (hedonism) and product and service readiness (utilitarianism) (Mahsun & Jumail, 2019). The studies on halal tourism branding are limited in number, and there is a tendency that the usage of a branding always gets a positive response. Tourism branding respondents who have the opposite responses have not yet been found. Thus, it is important to carry out this study. The main objective of this study is to reveal the responses of tourism destination stakeholders regarding the Branding of halal tourism destinations. To answer the objectives of this study, a question about how stakeholders respond to the Branding of halal tourism destinations, which is set as a government policy, should be delivered. The tourism destination stakeholders of the study include tourism destination managers, entrepreneurs who support tourism destinations, community leaders, and parliamentary representatives. Tourism destination managers and entrepreneurs are individuals who are directly dealing with tourists. They are the ones who understand the subject and are directly affected by the government policies.

This study is based on the argument that tourism destination branding has received various responses. Some parties responded positively, and some others responded in an opposite way. Parties who responded positively were followed up by conducting studies on the importance of tourism destination branding, and for the practitioners, it was followed up using tourism destination branding policies. On the other hand, some parties question the effectiveness and the reality of tourism destination branding. Some parties consider it as a threat for tourist visits. Thus, this study provides an overview of the importance of explicit tourist destination branding statements.

Literature Review

Branding is a main activity in marketing (Kasapi & Cela, 2017). Branding aims to make an impression of a product, service, or business on individuals/groups of consumers (Vaid, 2003) for labelled goods, services, and organizations (Kasapi & Cela, 2017). It is the most appropriate strategy for campaigning in the modern government (Scammell, 2015). So far, branding is synonymous with corporate names, products, or images with a set of values (Vaid, 2003). However, nowadays, branding is widely recognized as a powerful tool for companies to achieve a competitive strength (Keller, 2003). Branding has been used for various interests such as product, services, personal, place (destination), ideas, and concepts to make them different from others (Pullig, 2008). Therefore, it is possible to brand a place/destination.

Referring to Sevin (2011), place/destination branding is an activity to present an image of a place. He argued that the emergence of place branding is due to various perceptions of a place. If internal and external stakeholders have the same perception, there is no need for place branding. Destination branding is a name, symbol, logo, word sign, or another graphic that identifies a destination. Furthermore, it aims to convey a unique promise related to a destination. It also serves as a consolidation and strengthens the memories of a pleasant trip to a destination (Kasapi & Cela, 2017). Therefore, a destination needs to be distinguished using a brand identity if it needs to exist and to be considered to have a better quality than other destinations. In Indonesia, the concept of destination branding is used to promote Indonesia as a halal tourism destination.

The terminology of halal tourism means all tourist activities that are in line with the principles of sharia (Fatwa of the National Sharia Council - Indonesian Ulema Council, 2016). It provides products, tour packages, and tourism services following Islamic teachings (Satriana & Faridah, 2018). Furthermore, it includes pilgrimage trips as a religious activity to increase one's understanding and deepen his/her spiritual level by coming to sacred places, tourism products and services that meet the needs of Muslim tourists after Islamic teachings (Mohsin et al., 2016). For Muslim, the pilgrimage is an activity from one place to another, during which they still obey the existing Islamic teachings and principles. Hence, it requires the availability of places of worship and halal food (Zamani-farahani & Henderson, 2010). Thus, the Branding of halal tourism destinations is a description of tourism destinations that provide the products, services, facilities, and infrastructure needed and demanded by Muslim tourists.

Reseach Methodology

This research was conducted in Batu City, East Java, Indonesia. It is one of the cities designated as a halal tourism destination by the Ministry of Tourism. It is known as a tourist city. For the promotion strategy, Batu City uses the branding "Shining Batu." However, this Branding does not represent the identity of Batu City. At about the same time, the Ministry of Tourism awarded Batu City as a halal tourism destination. Thus, Batu City deserves to be a halal tourism destination. To promote this interest, it is necessary to change the branding and state it explicitly. To meet its objectives, the study was designed to use a qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources were

obtained from informants and social phenomena. Secondary sources were obtained through external documents, including population data, several tourist visits, hotel, and non-hotel data, restaurants, and houses, data taken from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) documents and data on religious facilities.

In this study, the informants were the Batu City Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), the Chairperson of the Batu City Local Representative Council (DPRD), tourism destination managers, and entrepreneurs whose works are related to tourism destination. The entrepreneurs supporting tourism destinations include hotel/villa/guest house managers, restaurant/ restaurant/cafe managers, and tour guides. These informants are parties who have an essential role in realizing halal tourism. They understand the characteristics and behavior of tourists visiting Batu City. They also have an interest in and have a direct impact on government policy.

Descriptive analysis was done through several stages, namely data reduction, data presentation and conclusions. Data reduction is the activity of sorting, making patterns, and categorizing data to get data that truly answer the research objectives. Data that were insufficient/irrelevant to the objectives of the study were excluded from the analysis. The second, it is presenting the research data using narrative and graphic form. Before the data is presented, it is necessary to interpret the data based on its patterns and categories. Third, it is drawing conclusions and conducting verification to determine important findings from the research results.

Result

These are the main and supporting tourism destinations in Batu City. Based on observations, it was found that:

"Most of these tourist destinations provide representative worship facilities and infrastructure for Muslim tourists."

Based on the observations, it was found that:

"Most of the places of lodging and restaurants/restaurants provide religious facilities and infrastructure."

An interview with one of the villa manager stated that:

"Most of big restaurants, tourist attractions always provide prayer rooms, villa also provides at least prayer mat " (Khalil, +32 years) ".

Thus, this supporting factor has considered the interests of Muslim tourists. From the social aspect, the condition of the area and the ease of getting halal food in the Batu City area support the realization of halal tourism. Based on the observations, it was found that:

"The people of Batu City are religious, friendly, tolerant, and they accept all tourists. They seem accustomed to be socializing in a friendly atmosphere with tourists. They seem to work together with the city government in developing tourist areas. "

Meanwhile, the condition of the area shows:

"The condition of the area is neat, clean, cool, safe, comfortable, and there are no wild animals (dogs) roaming around, both in urban and rural areas."

Thus, Batu City already has a social system and a city area as a tourist destination that is associated with Muslim tourists' interests. Meanwhile, the owners of restaurant and small restaurant businesses have high awareness in providing halal food. It can be proven by the results of the interview in which the informant, "Sidik Batu" restaurant's owner, stated that:

"I have never managed to get a halal certificate. As a Muslim who runs a small restaurant, I definitely must provide halal food by also considering the ingredients and cooking methods, mas. The only certificate I have was given by the Batu government in 1995. Until now, the Batu city government has never demanded a small restaurant to provide halal food and to have a certificate. Although there was no special command about it, as a Muslim, I must certainly sell halal food."(Sidik, + 60 years).

Referring to these data, it is proven that Batu City is indeed a tourism city and has been awarded as a halal tourism destination, which has the opportunity for a city branding transformation for tourism destinations. The purpose of this transformation is to convince tourists while promoting Batu City as a halal tourism destination. However, the tourism destination stakeholders, as the informants, explicitly asserted that they did not want Batu's city branding that emphasizees Batu as a halal tourism destination. They want the already existing City Branding. This finding is found based on the statement of the Chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in Batu City, which affirms that:

"MUI of the Batu City does not demand Batu City to brand itself as a halal tourism destination. For MUI, if the term "halal tourism" exists in Batu City, the term does not signify the halal/haram in fiqh terminology. The halal term used here means providing halal services for Muslim tourists like lodging or hotels, providing a proper place for ablution, and providing a place for praying including its equipment. These should make Muslim tourists feel comfortable "(Abdullah Thohir, +60 years).

The aforementioned statement is in contrast to the statement of one of the Heads of the urban village in Batu City. He stated:

"He supports the branding of halal tourism in Batu City. I am sure that all families, particularly Muslim families, want the tourism attractions that are halal as regulated by the religion. These places include Songgoriti, his territory, if it is branded as a halal tourism. However, as the head of the urban village structurally, he fully follows the Batu City Government's policies. The urban village government follows all policies set by the city government "(Ramadhan, +55 years).

Meanwhile, the manager of a villa explicitly rejects the transformation of city branding for halal tourism. He stated that:

"Halal branding for Batu City area, in my opinion, is not necessary, sir, depending on the market target for tourists. It seems that Branding is not necessary for now. For the time being, regarding halal food and the ease to do worship, Batu is a safe area, sir "(Khalil, +32 years).

Similar to Khalil, several tour guides in Songgoriti area argue that:

"We do not agree if Songgoriti must be branded as a halal tourism because its tourism does not violate the rules. The residents want their business to run smoothly and to be able to support the family's economic condition. Just let Songgoriti stay like this. We do not agree on the term 'halal tourism' "(Suwandono, tourism+35 years). "If it is branded with halal tourism, it will affect the interest of tourists who come here because the term 'halal' refers to certain religion. On the contrary, those visiting Songgoriti have various backgrounds "(Arianto, +39 years).

Hence, it is clear that the external stakeholders refuse the city branding for halal tourism. However, they support and are committed to realize halal tourism. This is proven by the statement of the Chairman of the DPRD.

"The DPRD intensively reminds the related parties starting from tourism managers and the tourism office to always pay attention to the complete facilities of halal tourism. For example, all tourism objects must prepare a place for worship, especially for Muslim tourists. These have to be done because it cannot be denied that the tourists coming to

Batu City so far are mostly Muslim tourists. The places for worship must be provided and the condition must be clean and tidy so that tourists are comfortable while praying" *(Asmadi, ±50 years old).*

Therefore, the transformation of City Branding for halal tourism has been rejected by the community leaders, heads of legislative institutions, and entrepreneurs who maintain the tourist destinations. However, they affirmed that it is far more essential to create a safe and comfortable atmosphere for all tourists while concerning about Muslim tourists' interests.

Discussion

It turns out that many tourist destinations in Indonesia have considered the interests of Muslim tourists although the local government of tourism destinations does not intend to identify or promote their area as a halal tourism destination. This condition has long been developed, understood, and realized by all tourism destination stakeholders. These awareness and cooperation are driven by the same goal that is to increase their regional economic potential.

Many tourism destinations in Indonesia have realized the concept of halal tourism. The idea of halal tourism has long been an inseparable part of those who manage tourism destination and entrepreneurs who maintain tourism destinations. They have more understanding about the needs and interests of tourists, especially Muslim tourism since they are the ones who interact with and serve the tourists every day. Thus, although a tourism destination is not branded as a halal tourism destination, they have provided services according to Muslim tourists' needs and demands. They understand very well that most tourists coming to their area are Muslim tourists.

This condition leads to a follow up given by the government in form of a strategic program. Thus, the Indonesian government has made halal tourism a strategic plan. This strategic program was marked by Halal Tourism's launching in Indonesia in December, 2012 (Kemenparekraf, 2013). It aims to carry on with the tourism destinations brand in Indonesia as a halal tourism destination.

Implicitly, the goal is promoting Indonesia worldwide and at the same time bring in foreign exchange (Khoiriati et al., 2018). The launching was followed by the establishment of 10 provinces as tourism destinations that have halal tourism standards (Surabaya Post, 2019; Wakhyono, 2019). The ten provinces are branded as halal tourism destinations by the government. Because of this tourism destination branding, Indonesia is confirmed as the most notable halal tourism destination in the world, according to the GMTII (Kemenparekraf, 2019; Mastercard, 2019). Thus, the government's efforts regarding the tourism destinations branding for several regions in Indonesia are not in vain. The government expects the branding of this halal tourism destination can promote the destination and improve its economy.

The main finding of this study is the rejection of tourism destination branding proposed by the those who manage tourism destinations, entrepreneurs, and some heads of non-governmental organizations who work in tourism destination areas. The results of the study strengthen the evidence that tourism branding does not always make a positive contribution for the managers, entrepreneurs, and tourists. The previous studies are the follow-ups to government policies. For example, in a study conducted by Kasdi et al. (2018), a tourism city branding promotes religious tourism destinations. This tourism destination does not have to be branded as halal

tourism because the religious tourism destinations have provided services and infrastructures according to Muslim tourists' needs and demands. The study carried out by (Genoveva & Kamal, 2019) shows that the promotion of tourism destinations through a city branding for halal tourism only contributes 58.30% to the increasing tourist visits. The study conducted by Khoiriati et al. (2018) indicates that halal tourism is only about a branding rather than value. Similarly, El-Gohary (2016) argues that halal tourism does not completely comply with Islamic sharia or the concept of halal tourism. This proves that tourism destination branding is only used to create the region's image as a tourism destination. Thus, the rejection of tourism destination branding by those who manage and entrepreneurs that maintain tourism destinations is logical.

CONCLUSION

The government is promoting tourism destination Branding. However, most tourism destinations in Indonesia have provided halal tourism-based services although the tourism destinations are not branded as halal tourism. The realization of this condition is the awareness and understanding of those managing the tourism destination, the entrepreneurs who maintain tourism destinations tourism, and the people who live around the tourism destinations in Indonesia. Their understanding and awareness are firstly compared to the government policies concerning halal tourism because they understand the characteristics of the tourists who visit their area very well. In addition, they understand the needs and demands of all tourists better. The effects of their awareness are comfort and increasing number of tourists that will automatically affect their economic condition. With the existence of tourism destination branding, they assume that tourism destinations located in their area are open only for certain segments. This can have an impact on the decreasing numbers of tourists and their economy. This assumption is in line with the findings of a study conducted by Winarti (2017), which states that the halal tourism market tends to lose non-Muslim tourists. Thus, the tourism destinations branding should not be stated explicitly but conveyed through a slogan strategy that depicts that tourism destinations highlight the concept of halal tourism.

The contribution to the findings of this study scientifically enriches the knowledge that the tourism destinations branding has a positive impact, and the other side triggers the opposite perception. The positive effects of tourism destination branding include the assurance given to Muslim tourists that a tourism destination has provided their needs and interests. However, tourism destinations branding can lead to the opposite perception since not all of the tourists coming to the tourism destinations are Muslim tourists. An explicit announcement of tourism destinations branding can lead to the perception that tourism destinations are open only for certain tourists, and it can disrupt tourist visits. Therefore, the government must be wise and strategic in promoting tourism destinations in Indonesia. This wise and strategic way can be carried out using a slogan strategy. This strategy is intended to show that tourism destinations are accessible for all segments of tourists; however, these destinations provide services, facilities, and infrastructure that are needed and required by Muslim tourists. Thus, the promotion of tourism destinations is intended for all tourists.

Although the findings of this study have contributed to the understanding and

thinking about tourism destination branding, this study has some limitations. The limitation of this study is the fact that it was only conducted in one of the largest tourism destinations in East Java, Indonesia. Meanwhile, there are ten provinces in Indonesia that have been branded as tourism destinations. To strengthen the findings of this study, it is hoped that further studies will expand the object of research to the areas that have been branded as halal tourism destinations. Thus, further studies can confirm the findings of this study or vice versa.

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