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Research Paper

Digital Halal Modules Effectiveness for Guesthouse Owners Based on Gender and Religious Background

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia as a Muslim-majority country still faces challenges in developing halal-friendly accommodation despite its strong position in the global Muslim-friendly tourism market. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of a Digital Halal Modules in improving halal literacy among guesthouse owners and to explore how gender and religious background influence their perceptions and responses. A qualitative approach was employed using semi-structured interviews with five guesthouse owners in the Borobudur tourism area, Magelang, Indonesia. Data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis supported by NVivo 12 Pro. The findings reveal that the Digital Halal Modules effectively enhances participants' knowledge of halal principles, increases confidence in pursuing halal certification, and supports service improvement in accordance with halal standards. Although gender and religious background influence initial perceptions, they do not significantly affect the overall effectiveness of the modules. Differences were observed in motivational responses, where some participants preferred gradual implementation while others showed immediate readiness for certification. The modules was perceived as user-friendly, systematic, visually engaging, and accessible; however, limitations were identified, including dependence on internet connectivity, lack of practical examples for small-scale guesthouses, limited local contextualization, and complexity in documentation guidance. This study concludes that digital learning tools can serve as effective capacity-building instruments for micro-scale accommodation providers, but require context-sensitive design to improve usability and broader adoption in halal tourism development.

Keywords: *Guesthouse, Halal Tourism, Digital Learning, Halal Certification, Hospitality SMEs*

Declaration of Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

1. INTRODUCTION

The global halal industry has experienced significant growth in recent years, driven by the increasing mobility and purchasing power of the Muslim middle class. Muslim travelers increasingly demand products and services that align with their religious values, lifestyle, and consumption standards. It is estimated that the halal sector generated approximately USD 180 billion in online transactions in 2022, while in 2024, around 230 million Muslim travelers contributed to the expanding economic potential of halal tourism (Mastercard-Crescentrating, 2024). Despite this growth, disparities remain in the development of halal-friendly tourism infrastructure across countries.

Indonesia and Malaysia are widely recognized as leading Muslim-friendly tourism destinations. However, Indonesia still lags behind in terms of halal tourism development, ranking fifth globally, while Malaysia and Türkiye occupy the top positions (Jumani, 2024). One of the most critical gaps lies in the accommodation sector. Despite the large number of hotels in Indonesia, only a small proportion have obtained halal certification, estimated at approximately 1.2%, compared to around 15% in Malaysia (Qolbi et al., 2024; Sup et al., 2020). Malaysia has demonstrated a more structured approach through initiatives such as the Sharia-Compliant Homestay Model, supported by integrated policies, infrastructure development, and technological innovation (Mastercard-Crescentrating, 2024; Muin et al., 2024a, Muin et al., 2024b; Weng, 2024).

Accommodation has been identified as one of the main constraints in halal tourism development. While countries such as Malaysia and Thailand have leveraged government support, digital technologies, and cultural integration strategies to strengthen their halal tourism ecosystems, Indonesia continues to face challenges in regulatory efficiency and implementation (Dabamona et al., 2025; Jaiyeoba et al., 2023). One of the key issues is the relatively low level of halal literacy among business actors, particularly in micro and small-scale accommodation sectors (Amin et al., 2024). Existing studies indicate that limited access to effective halal education and training programs contributes to this gap (Wijayanti & Fatmah, 2025).

Currently, the Indonesian government relies heavily on higher education institutions to disseminate halal-related knowledge and policies. However, this approach has limited reach, especially among micro and small enterprises operating outside formal education networks. Although efforts have been made to develop educational tools such as e-modules and digital learning platforms, their application remains limited in scope and context. For instance, previous studies on halal e-modules have been restricted to specific academic settings (Putri et al., 2024), while existing digital halal modules have primarily been tested among small and medium enterprises in specific regions, such as West Java (Pinandoyo & Jao, 2024). This indicates a gap in the application of digital learning tools tailored to micro-scale accommodation providers, particularly guesthouse operators in emerging tourism destinations.

Based on this gap, this study focuses on the development and evaluation of a Digital Halal Modules designed to improve halal literacy among guesthouse owners. Specifically, the research aims to examine the effectiveness of the modules and to explore how gender and religious background influence participants' perceptions and responses. Addressing these aspects is important, as sociocultural factors may shape the adoption of digital learning tools in hospitality contexts.

This study employs a qualitative research approach using semi-structured interviews with guesthouse owners in the Borobudur tourism area, Magelang, Indonesia. The data are analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis to capture participants' experiences and perceptions in depth.

This research contributes to the literature on halal tourism and digital learning by providing empirical evidence on how digital tools can support halal literacy among micro-scale accommodation providers. Furthermore, the study offers practical implications for the development of context-sensitive

digital training programs that can enhance the readiness of small hospitality businesses to participate in halal tourism development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical foundations

Halal tourism is defined as a segment of the tourism industry that provides products and services in accordance with Islamic principles, including dietary requirements, religious practices, and ethical standards (Weng, 2024). The rapid growth of halal tourism is driven by increasing global Muslim mobility, rising income levels, and greater awareness of halal consumption. Importantly, halal tourism is no longer limited to Muslim-majority countries but has expanded as a global market opportunity, including in non-Muslim destinations (Supardin et al., 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, halal tourism can be understood within the broader framework of service quality and value co-creation in hospitality (Ruiz-Muñoz et al., 2025). Muslim tourists' satisfaction is influenced by both tangible and intangible attributes, including physical facilities, emotional experiences, and service interactions (Azmin, 2021; Akhtar et al., 2020). In this context, halal compliance is increasingly interpreted not only as religious adherence but also as a quality assurance mechanism that enhances trust and service standardization (Wahyudin et al., 2022).

In addition, the development of halal tourism is closely linked to sustainable tourism principles and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in terms of economic inclusion, community empowerment, and social well-being (Ilmi & Ambariyanto, 2024; Rahmawati et al., 2019). Therefore, strengthening halal tourism requires not only regulatory frameworks but also effective knowledge dissemination and capacity-building mechanisms among tourism stakeholders.

2.2. Previous empirical research

Previous studies have highlighted the uneven development of halal tourism across countries. Malaysia has been widely recognized as a leading example due to its structured policies, technological integration, and initiatives such as the Muslim-Friendly Accommodation Recognition (MFAR) program, which has been shown to improve service quality and tourist satisfaction (Samuni et al., 2022; Abdullah et al., 2024). Similarly, other countries such as Thailand have successfully integrated halal tourism with local cultural identity to attract a broader market (Anggara, 2022; Dabamona et al., 2025).

Empirical research also indicates that accommodation plays a critical role in halal tourism development. Guesthouses and homestays, due to their flexibility and adaptability, have been found to better accommodate halal requirements compared to standardized hotel chains (Muin et al., 2024a; Muin et al., 2024b; Wang & Qiu, 2020). In contexts such as the Maldives, community-based guesthouse models have successfully supported halal tourism development while empowering local communities (Latheef, 2024).

In Indonesia, however, studies have identified persistent challenges, particularly related to limited halal literacy, weak regulatory implementation, and insufficient technological support for business actors (Wijayanti & Fatmah, 2025). Although digital learning tools such as halal e-modules have been developed, their application remains limited to specific academic contexts or regional studies (Putri et al., 2024; Pinandoyo & Jao, 2024). This indicates that the integration of digital learning in halal tourism remains underdeveloped, especially among micro-scale accommodation providers.

2.3. Research gaps

Previous studies have demonstrated that halal tourism development is influenced by regulatory support, service quality, and accommodation readiness. While Malaysia and other countries have

successfully implemented integrated halal tourism systems, Indonesia continues to face challenges related to halal literacy and practical implementation among business actors.

However, existing research has several limitations. First, prior studies on halal education and digital learning tools have primarily focused on formal educational settings or small and medium enterprises, with limited attention to micro-scale accommodation providers such as guesthouse operators (Putri et al., 2024; Pinandoyo & Jao, 2024). Second, there is a lack of research examining how sociocultural factors, particularly gender and religious background, influence the adoption and perception of digital halal learning tools in hospitality contexts (Hati et al., 2025).

Furthermore, limited studies have explored the effectiveness of digital halal modules in real tourism settings, particularly in emerging market (Abor & Bokpin, 2010). This indicates a gap in understanding how digital learning interventions can support halal literacy and certification readiness among micro-scale hospitality businesses.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the effectiveness of a Digital Halal Modules among guesthouse owners and analyzing how gender and religious background influence their perceptions and responses using a qualitative approach.

2.4. Research propositions

Based on the literature, this study proposes that digital learning tools can play a significant role in improving halal literacy among micro-scale accommodation providers. The effectiveness of such tools is expected to be influenced not only by their usability but also by sociocultural factors, including gender and religious background. Accordingly, this study develops the following research propositions:

1. The Digital Halal Modules improves halal knowledge and certification readiness among guesthouse owners.
2. Gender influences the perception and motivational response toward halal certification adoption.
3. Religious background influences the perception of halal-related digital learning tools but does not necessarily affect their effectiveness.
4. Digital learning tools require contextual adaptation to meet the operational needs of micro-scale accommodation providers.

These propositions guide the analysis and provide a conceptual foundation for understanding the role of digital learning in supporting halal tourism development at the micro-enterprise level.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a multiple-participant exploratory design to examine the effectiveness of the Digital Halal Modules and to explore how gender and religious background shape guesthouse owners' perceptions and responses toward the modules. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the research aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, interpretations, and attitudes after engaging with the digital learning material. Rather than measuring relationships statistically, this study focused on capturing meaning, variation in perception, and contextual responses among micro-scale accommodation actors.

The study adopted a general inductive orientation, which allows findings to emerge from the raw data without imposing rigid prior categories. This design fits the research objective because the study seeks to explore how participants make sense of halal literacy content in relation to their operational realities, sociocultural background, and readiness for halal certification.

3.2. Population and sample

The target population of this study was micro-scale accommodation actors operating guesthouses in the Borobudur tourism area, Magelang, Indonesia, particularly those directly involved in business operations and service decision-making. This population was selected because guesthouses represent an important yet underexplored segment in halal tourism development, especially in emerging tourism destinations.

The study used purposive sampling to recruit participants who were considered capable of providing rich and relevant information regarding the use of the Digital Halal Modules. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

1. currently involved in guesthouse operations as an owner, manager, operations lead, or front-line staff with decision-making influence;
2. having at least one year of continuous experience in the same guesthouse;
3. aged 21 years or older and able to provide informed consent;
4. available to participate in a 60–90-minute interview; and
5. having direct experience with guesthouse operations.

Based on these criteria, five guesthouse owners or operators with different gender and religious backgrounds were selected as participants. Although the sample size was small, it was considered appropriate for an exploratory qualitative study aimed at generating in-depth insights rather than statistical generalization.

3.3. Data collection procedure

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This instrument was selected because it enabled the researchers to explore participants' views in depth while still maintaining consistency across interviews. The interview guide was developed based on the study objectives and focused on several key dimensions: participants' understanding of halal certification, perceived usefulness of the Digital Halal Modules, motivational responses after using the modules, perceived advantages and disadvantages of the modules, and the influence of gender and religious background on their perceptions.

Data collection was conducted online from December 2024 to April 2025 with participants located in the Borobudur tourism area, Magelang, Indonesia. Participants were approached purposively based on their relevance to the study criteria and their involvement in guesthouse operations. Before the interview, each participant was informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of the data. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interview process.

Each participant was first given access to the Digital Halal Modules and sufficient time to review its content. After this exposure, semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture their perceptions of the modules's effectiveness, usability, relevance, and limitations. Interviews lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and were designed to encourage detailed reflection on both individual and operational experiences. The interview format allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences freely while ensuring that all major themes relevant to the study were covered. To support systematic data handling, interview data were transcribed and prepared for coding using NVivo 12 Pro.

To ensure data quality, the researchers used a consistent interview guide, maintained reflective notes during and after interviews, and reviewed transcripts repeatedly to confirm completeness and coherence. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. The ethical basis of the research referred to the standards of the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at Ghent University, particularly regarding informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of participants' responses.

3.5 Data analysis techniques

The data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis to identify, interpret, and organize patterns across participants' responses. This analytical approach was appropriate because the study aimed to explore subjective meanings and socially situated experiences related to halal literacy, digital learning, gender, and religious background.

The analysis process followed iterative stages. First, the interview transcripts were read repeatedly to ensure familiarity with the data. Second, initial codes were generated from meaningful segments related to participants' perceptions of the Digital Halal Modules. Third, the codes were grouped into broader categories and potential themes. Fourth, the themes were reviewed and refined in relation to the full dataset to ensure internal coherence and conceptual relevance. Finally, the themes were interpreted analytically to explain the effectiveness of the modules and the sociocultural factors influencing participants' responses.

NVivo 12 Pro was used to support data organization, coding, and thematic mapping. The analysis remained interpretive in nature, meaning that themes were not treated as merely descriptive categories but as analytical constructions developed through researcher engagement with the data. This approach enabled the study to capture both shared patterns and nuanced differences across participants, especially in relation to gender and religious background.

4. RESULT

4.1. Overview of findings

The findings indicate that the Digital Halal Modules effectively improves guesthouse owners' understanding of halal certification. The modules enhances participants' knowledge of halal requirements, increases their confidence in pursuing halal certification, and supports improvements in service quality aligned with halal standards. The analysis shows that both gender and religious background do not significantly influence the effectiveness of the modules. Participants from different backgrounds demonstrated similar levels of understanding and acceptance after using the Digital Halal Modules. The mind map analysis illustrating these findings is presented in Figure 1.

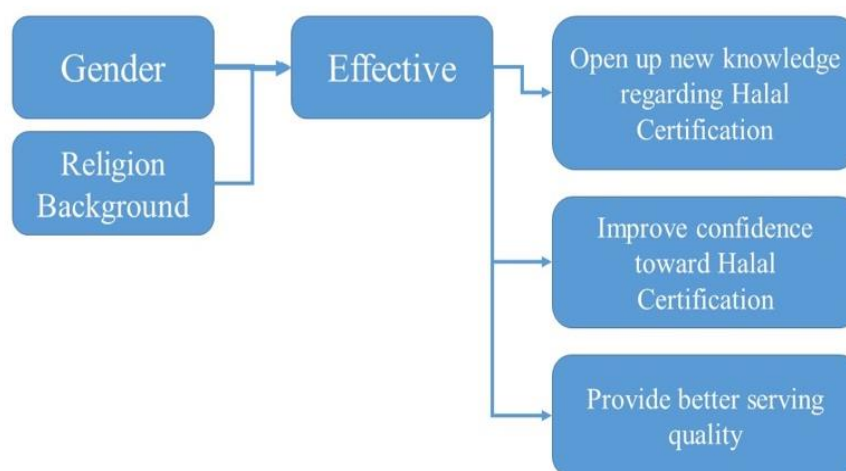
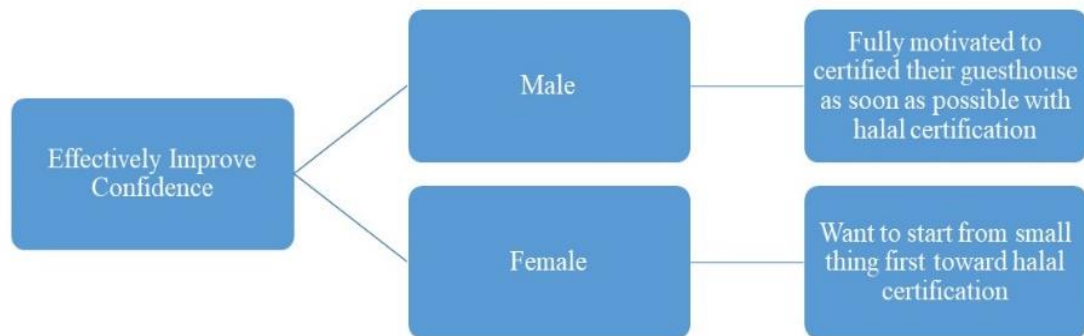


Figure 1. Mind Map Analysis of Effectiveness of the Digital Halal Modules
Source: Primary Data, 2025

4.2. Motivational impact of the Digital Halal Modules

Although the modules was found to be effective in improving participants' confidence toward halal certification, variations were observed in motivational responses. These differences were influenced by



gender rather than religious background (Figure 2). Male participants tended to show strong motivation to immediately pursue halal certification for their guesthouses. In contrast, female participants preferred a gradual approach, starting with incremental improvements before committing to full certification.

Figure 2. Mind Map Analysis of Gender-Based Differences in Motivation Toward Halal Certification
Source: Primary Data, 2025

4.3. Perceived advantages of the Digital Halal Modules

The Digital Halal Modules was generally perceived positively by all participants (see Figure 3). Six advantages were identified wich are easy to understand, systematic and well-structured, visually attractive, accessible and user-friendly, culturally appropriate, and relevant to practical hospitality operations. Participants, particularly those with limited technological familiarity, emphasized the user-friendly nature of the modules. They reported that the modules was easy to navigate and accessible even for individuals with limited digital literacy.

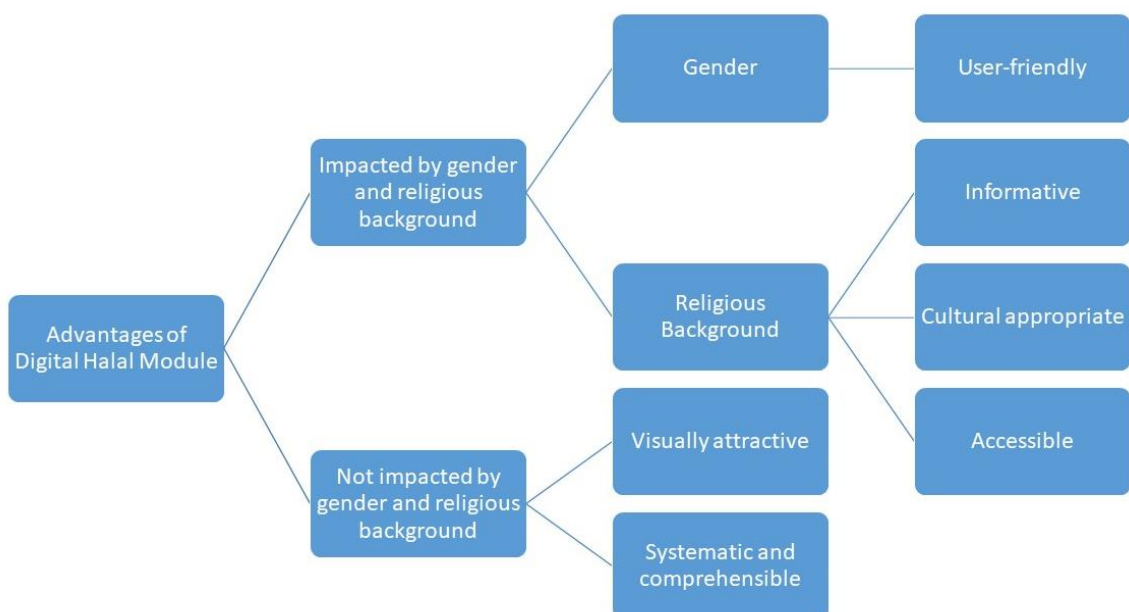


Figure 3. Mind Map Analysis of Perceived Advantages of the Digital Halal Modules
Source: Primary Data, 2025

Example of respondent responses include:

“This digital modules is easy to navigate, even for those who are not very familiar with technology.”

“Even with limited technological knowledge, we can still understand the content clearly.”

Participants also suggested the need for offline or printable versions of the modules to improve accessibility in areas with limited internet connectivity.

4.4. Perceived disadvantages of the Digital Halal Modules

Despite its advantages, several limitations of the Digital Halal Modules (see Figure 4) were identified which are high dependence on internet connectivity, lack of practical examples for small-scale guesthouses, limited integration of local cultural context, complexity in explaining documentation and certification procedures.

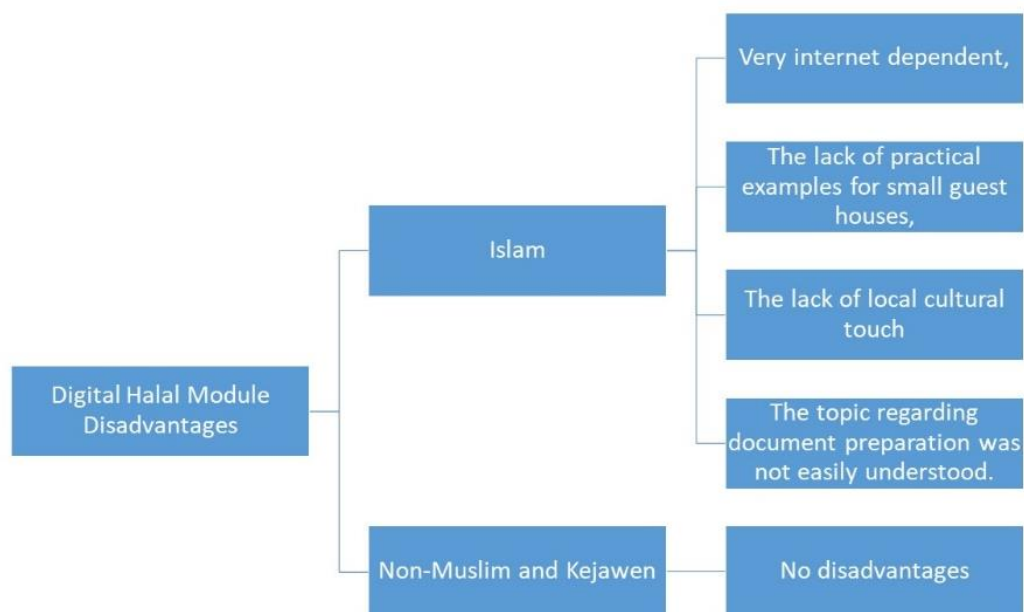


Figure 4. Mind Map Analysis of Disadvantages of the Digital Halal Modules
Source: Primary Data, 2025

Interestingly, perceptions of these disadvantages were influenced by religious background. Non-Muslim and Kejawen participants reported fewer perceived limitations compared to Muslim participants, who were more critical of the modules’s shortcomings. Example responses include:

“The modules depends too much on internet access, which is not always stable in rural areas.”

“It would be helpful to have practical examples specifically designed for small guesthouses.”

“The explanation of halal audit procedures is still difficult to understand.”

5. DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that the Digital Halal Modules serves as an effective tool for improving halal literacy among micro-scale accommodation providers. Although gender and religious background influence initial perceptions, these sociocultural factors do not significantly affect the modules’s overall

effectiveness. This indicates that digital learning tools can function as inclusive capacity-building mechanisms in halal tourism development.

From a theoretical perspective, these results support the argument that technology adoption in hospitality contexts is socially embedded rather than purely technical. Cultural identity, prior knowledge, and experiential familiarity with halal practices shape how individuals interpret and engage with digital learning tools. Previous studies have emphasized that halal compliance is strongly associated with literacy and perceived business relevance rather than solely religious identity (Maulana, 2024; Yuanitasari, 2023). The Digital Halal Modules in this study reduces knowledge barriers by translating complex halal certification concepts into accessible and practical guidance.

The relatively consistent effectiveness of the modules across different religious backgrounds suggests that halal standards are increasingly perceived as universal service-quality indicators rather than exclusively religious requirements (Wu et al., 2014). This finding aligns with previous research indicating that halal tourism practices are becoming integrated into broader hospitality service standards that appeal to both Muslim and non-Muslim stakeholders (Ruiz-Muñoz et al., 2025; Xiong & Chia, 2024). In this context, the modules functions not only as a compliance tool but also as a professional development resource that enhances competitiveness among small accommodation providers.

However, several socio-technological challenges were identified. The strong dependence on internet connectivity represents a major barrier for guesthouse operators in rural tourism areas. This finding is consistent with previous studies highlighting infrastructure limitations as a key obstacle to digital learning adoption in small tourism enterprises (Ubaydullaeva et al., 2024). The suggestion to develop hybrid or offline versions of the modules reflects the need for adaptive digital learning systems that accommodate varying levels of technological readiness.

Another critical issue is the lack of practical and context-specific content tailored to micro-scale accommodation providers. Participants emphasized the need for case-based examples, simplified certification procedures, and operational checklists that align with the realities of small guesthouse businesses. This indicates that future digital training tools should incorporate experiential learning elements to improve usability and implementation.

Gender differences in motivational responses further highlight the role of decision-making dynamics in small hospitality enterprises. Male participants demonstrated stronger immediate motivation, while female participants adopted a more cautious and incremental approach. This finding is consistent with research suggesting that female leaders tend to adopt more risk-aware and gradual decision-making strategies (Hughes et al., 2022). Such differences should not be interpreted as resistance but rather as adaptive strategies to operational constraints.

Overall, the findings suggest that the success of digital halal literacy initiatives depends on the integration of technological usability, sociocultural relevance, and operational practicality. Therefore, digital learning programs for halal tourism development should move beyond standardized models and adopt context-sensitive approaches that reflect the realities of micro-scale hospitality businesses.

5.1. Research implications

This study provides several important implications for theory, practice, and policy. From a theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to the literature on halal tourism and digital learning by demonstrating that sociocultural factors shape perception but do not necessarily limit learning effectiveness. This reinforces the importance of integrating social and cultural dimensions into digital adoption frameworks in hospitality research.

From a practical perspective, the Digital Halal Modules can serve as a capacity-building tool for guesthouse operators, helping them improve halal literacy and prepare for certification. However,

improvements are needed to enhance its usability, particularly by incorporating practical examples and offline accessibility.

From a policy perspective, the findings highlight the need for government and industry stakeholders to support the development of context-sensitive digital learning tools that can reach micro-scale accommodation providers. Strengthening halal literacy at this level is essential to ensure inclusive and sustainable halal tourism development.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that the Digital Halal Modules functions as an effective digital learning tool for improving halal literacy among guesthouse owners operating within small-scale accommodation settings. Although gender and religious background influence how participants initially perceive the modules, these sociocultural factors do not significantly hinder its ability to enhance knowledge and confidence regarding halal certification processes. From a theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to the growing body of research on digital adoption in halal tourism by illustrating that sociocultural identity shapes perception but does not necessarily limit knowledge acquisition when learning materials are presented in accessible and context-sensitive formats. This insight reinforces the importance of designing inclusive digital capacity-building tools that can be adopted across diverse cultural and religious backgrounds within the hospitality sector.

From a practical standpoint, the study highlights the importance of developing digital training resources that address the operational realities of micro and small-scale accommodation providers. The Digital Halal Modules developed in this research demonstrates potential as a capacity-building instrument that can help guesthouse operators better understand halal certification requirements while simultaneously improving service quality for Muslim travelers. However, to maximize its effectiveness, future development should focus on incorporating more practical implementation guidance, including operational case studies, simplified certification procedures, and business-oriented checklists tailored specifically to guesthouse operations. Additionally, improving accessibility through hybrid online-offline learning formats would allow the modules to be more effectively utilized in rural tourism destinations with limited technological infrastructure. By addressing these aspects, digital halal literacy initiatives can play a strategic role in strengthening halal tourism development at the micro-enterprise level, ensuring that small accommodation providers are not excluded from the ongoing digital transformation of the tourism industry.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS (CRediT)

Dimas Bayu Pinandoyo: Conceptualization; Methodology; Project administration; Supervision; Formal analysis; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

Lu'luwatin Rosdiana Aprilia: Conceptualization (halal digital module); Methodology (content development); Resources (learning materials); Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

Elviana: Methodology (alignment with hospitality principles); Formal analysis (independent and reliability-enhancing analyses); Validation; Writing – review & editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. Although the research received financial support from the LP3M (Research and Community Services Body) of Politeknik Negeri Media Kreatif through the 2024 internal research grant, the funders had no role in the study design, data collection, analysis, interpretation of data, or the decision to submit the work for publication.

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