

Strengthening Governance and Branding of Sharia Tourism Based on Local Wisdom among Tourism Stakeholders in Central Aceh Regency

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ABSTRACT

This community service initiative aims to strengthen governance and branding of Sharia tourism rooted in local wisdom among tourism stakeholders in Central Aceh Regency, Aceh Province, Indonesia. Central Aceh possesses significant tourism potential, including natural attractions, cultural heritage, and strong Islamic values embedded in Gayo local wisdom. However, limited managerial capacity, weak branding practices, and insufficient understanding of Sharia tourism concepts among tourism actors have hindered sustainable tourism development.

This program employed a participatory and capacity-building approach involving tourism stakeholders, community leaders, youth organizations, and local government representatives. The methods included needs assessment, workshops, focus group discussions, mentoring sessions, and program evaluation. The materials focused on Sharia tourism governance, Islamic-based service standards, integration of local wisdom, destination branding, and ethical digital marketing strategies.

The results show an improvement in participants' understanding and skills in implementing Sharia-compliant tourism governance, developing authentic destination branding based on Gayo culture, and utilizing digital media for promotion. Participants also demonstrated positive changes in service orientation, destination identity formulation, and collaborative management practices among tourism actors.

In conclusion, this community service program contributes to the development of sustainable and ethical Sharia tourism while preserving local culture and Islamic values. The findings indicate that integrating Sharia principles with local wisdom enhances destination competitiveness and empowers local communities in regional tourism development.

Keywords: Sharia tourism, local wisdom, tourism governance, destination branding, community empowerment

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism development has emerged as a pivotal sector in regional economic advancement and community empowerment, especially in locales with substantial cultural and social capital (Tosun, 2000; UNWTO., 2018). In Aceh Province, the advancement of tourism is intricately linked to the enforcement of Islamic principles as prescribed by local regulations and entrenched socio-cultural traditions (Qanun Aceh Nomor 18, 2013; Henderson, 2010). Central Aceh Regency, recognized for its natural attractions including Lake Lut Tawar, vast coffee plantations, and vibrant Gayo cultural legacy, possesses significant potential for the advancement of Sharia-based tourism (Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Aceh, 2021). Sharia tourism prioritizes ethical services, halal products, modest hospitality, and value-driven management in accordance with Islamic principles, framing tourism as both a commercial endeavor and a moral and social practice (Battour, M., & Ismail, 2016; Henderson, 2010).

The notion of Sharia tourism has emerged as a strategic response to the growing demand for ethical, responsible, and faith-oriented travel experiences among both Muslim and non-Muslim visitors (El-Gohari, 2016)). Sharia tourism transcends halal certification to include broader ideals

such as equity, environmental sustainability, cultural reverence, and social accountability. These ideals align well with sustainable tourism frameworks that emphasize long-term advantages for host communities and environmental conservation.

Local expertise is a crucial component in enhancing the authenticity and sustainability of Sharia tourism locations. In Central Aceh, Gayo cultural values namely community responsibility, reverence for the environment, hospitality, and moral integrity are profoundly ingrained in everyday social. Incorporating these values into tourist governance and branding not only distinguishes places in a competitive tourism industry but also strengthens community identity, social cohesion, and cultural continuity (Richards, 2018).

Notwithstanding this significant potential, tourist players in Central Aceh persistently encounter structural obstacles, including inadequate governance frameworks, limited branding capabilities, and a deficient understanding of Sharia tourism principles (Hall, 2011). Tourism services often operate in a conventional manner, lacking distinctiveness, and Islamic values and local wisdom have not been effectively integrated into destination narratives and branding strategies (Pike, 2016; Richards, 2018). Consequently, tourist competitiveness, value generation, and long-term sustainability are persistently limited.

The successful incorporation of Sharia principles and indigenous knowledge into tourism development necessitates sufficient institutional capacity, stakeholder cooperation, and ongoing knowledge dissemination. Many tourism stakeholders in rural and semi-rural areas lack access to organized training, governance frameworks, and branding techniques relevant to local cultural and religious contexts (Hall, 2011). In the absence of suitable facilitation, tourist development is likely to become disjointed, commercially driven, and disconnected from the host community's social and ethical principles.

In this context, community service initiatives implemented by higher education institutions serve a strategic function in closing knowledge gaps and enhancing local capability. Universities serve as knowledge intermediaries by integrating academic proficiency, participatory methodologies, and community involvement to facilitate sustainable development projects (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Through organized support, education, and guidance, tourism stakeholders can be enabled to implement Sharia-compliant governance processes and cultivate genuine destination branding grounded in indigenous knowledge. This community service program aims to enhance governance and branding of Sharia tourism rooted in local wisdom among tourism stakeholders in Central Aceh Regency.

METHOD

This research uses a quantitative approach. The type of research used in this study is a causal relationship or cause-and-effect relationship. Data is obtained from the results of a *survey* where by distributing questionnaires to respondents who are the object of research. Causal research is research that aims to determine the cause-and-effect relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable (Sugiyono, 2018). The population in this study were all employees at the Agam Regency Land Office as many as 70 people. In this study using sampling techniques, namely saturated samples. Saturated sample is a sampling technique where the entire population is used as a sample (Sugiyono, 2018). Based on the description above, the researcher made the entire population of 70 people the sample in this study. In this study using the *Structural Equation Modeling* (SEM) analysis tool using the *partial least square* (PLS) program. PLS is a component-based approach to testing structural equation models or commonly called SEM. PLS is based on the idea that has two iterative procedures that use least squares estimation for single and *multi-component* models. By applying the procedures, the algorithm aims to minimize the *variance of* all dependent variables, therefore the cause and direction between all variables need to be clearly defined. PLS is divided into measurement models and structural models.

This community service initiative employed a participatory action research methodology, emphasizing community engagement and practical capacity-building. The intended participants comprised tourism business proprietors, homestay administrators, tour guides, culinary entrepreneurs, youth tourism collectives, and local government representatives.

The implementation stages included: (1) initial needs assessment via observation and interviews; (2) development and preparation of training materials; (3) execution of workshops and focus group discussions; (4) mentorship and practical support; and (5) evaluation and reflection. The training materials encompassed principles of Sharia tourism, governance, and service standards, the incorporation of Gayo indigenous wisdom, destination branding concepts, and digital marketing tactics.

Data collection was executed via observation, participant feedback questionnaires, and group discussions. The evaluation focused on participants' comprehension, skill development, and the implementation of Sharia tourism governance and branding methodologies.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The community service initiative aimed at enhancing governance and branding of Sharia tourism, grounded in local wisdom within Central Aceh Regency, yielded many tangible and discernible results among tourism stakeholders. This section examines the findings by emphasizing changes in participants' comprehension, attitudes, and practices following the program's implementation. Enhancement of Comprehension Regarding Sharia Tourism Governance.

A primary finding of this community service program was the enhancement of participants' comprehension of Sharia tourism governance. Prior to the initiative, the majority of tourist stakeholders perceived governance solely as administrative concerns, including permits, rules, and business operations. Participants gained a deeper understanding that Sharia tourist governance encompasses ethical service, integrity, cleanliness, halal assurance, hospitality, and accountability in aligned with Islamic principles, through training sessions and mentoring activities.

Participants recognized that Sharia tourist governance must be regularly implemented in everyday tourism operations, serving not merely as a concept but as a framework for conduct and service provision. This comprehension prompted tourism stakeholders to prioritize service ethics, guest comfort, and adherence to Sharia standards. The program advocated the view that governance is a collective obligation among tourist stakeholders, requiring collaboration and mutual commitment. Application of Indigenous Knowledge in Tourism Practices.

Another significant discovery pertains to the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into tourism endeavors. The workshop demonstrated that numerous participants were previously oblivious to the potential of Gayo cultural values as assets in the advancement of Sharia tourism. Participants, through conversations and contemplative exercises, recognized local characteristics, including mutual collaboration, respect for nature, modest behavior, courtesy, and hospitality, as congruent with Islamic teachings.

Post-program, participants effectively implemented local values through practices such as greeting visitors with culturally appropriate etiquette, narrating Gayo cultural stories, upholding environmental cleanliness, and engaging respectfully with tourists. The use of local knowledge enhanced the confidence of tourist stakeholders in showcasing their cultural identity while adhering to Sharia principles. It enhanced community pride and promoted more ethical tourism practices. Enhancing the Branding Competence of Sharia Tourism.

The results indicate enhancements in brand awareness among tourist stakeholders. Before the program, tourism advertising was typically executed in a rudimentary, traditional manner, primarily emphasizing physical attractions without a distinct identity or message. Participants in branding seminars were introduced to the concept of destination identity and the importance of consistent branding grounded in Sharia principles and local culture.

Consequently, participants successfully created fundamental branding components, including location descriptions, service slogans, and promotional narratives that embody Islamic values and Gayo cultural identity. Participants acquired skills to utilize social media more efficiently and responsibly as a promotional instrument. This discovery suggests that branding rooted in Sharia principles and local expertise might enhance the distinctiveness of tourism destinations while preserving moral and cultural purity. Capacity Development and Community Empowerment

The mentoring-based methodology employed in this community service initiative substantially enhanced capacity building and community empowerment. Participants engaged in conversations, collaborative tasks, and practical exercises, enhancing the significance of the learning experience. Instead of remaining passive recipients, tourism stakeholders were urged to exchange experiences and solutions pertinent to their local context.

Consequently, participants exhibited heightened confidence and enthusiasm to enhance tourism services and engage with other stakeholders. Several participants indicated their willingness to apply the knowledge they acquired and to disseminate it among other community members. This signifies that the initiative effectively enabled tourist stakeholders to actively participate in the development of Sharia tourism in their local regions. Summary of Program Outcomes

To elucidate the outcomes more succinctly and minimize verbose exposition, the principal results of the community service program are encapsulated in Table 1. Consequences for the Advancement of Community-Oriented Sharia Tourism.

Tabel. 1. Consequences for the Advancement of Community-Oriented Sharia Tourism.

Aspect	Before Program	After Program
Understanding of Sharia tourism governance	Limited to administrative aspects	Broader understanding including ethics, halal assurance, and service responsibility
Use of local wisdom	Cultural values not explicitly applied	Gayo values integrated into tourism services and interactions
Branding practices	Generic and unclear destination identity	Branding reflects Sharia values and local culture
Digital promotion	Limited and inconsistent use	More active and ethical use of social media
Stakeholder collaboration	Individual and fragmented	Increased cooperation among tourism actors

The findings suggest that this community service initiative positively enhanced governance and branding of Sharia tourism in Central Aceh Regency. The integration of Sharia principles and indigenous knowledge enabled tourism stakeholders to elevate service quality, fortify destination identity, and augment community involvement.

Despite the absence of quantitative measuring instruments, observable alterations in participant behavior, attitudes, and coordination indicate significant capacity enhancement. These findings underscore the need for ongoing support and cooperation among higher education institutions, local governments, and tourism communities to sustain Sharia tourism development rooted in local expertise.

CONCLUSIONS

The community service initiative, grounded in local wisdom in Central Aceh Regency, aimed at enhancing governance and branding of Sharia tourism, has yielded significant and beneficial results for local tourism stakeholders. The workshop effectively improved participants' comprehension of Sharia tourist governance, transforming their perspective from a limited administrative viewpoint to a more holistic approach that encompasses ethical service, halal assurance, accountability, and hospitality in alignment with Islamic principles.

The use of local expertise, including Gayo cultural values, demonstrated a significant advantage in advancing Sharia tourism. Tourism stakeholders successfully identified and implemented local cultural elements that correspond with Islamic beliefs in their daily operations. This integration enhanced location authenticity and elevated community pride and ownership in tourism development.

The workshop enhanced participants' awareness and competencies in establishing Sharia-compliant destination branding. Tourism stakeholders gained practical insights into conveying destination identity through fundamental branding components and the ethical use of digital media. Branding grounded in Sharia principles and local wisdom highlighted the distinct identity of tourism attractions in Central Aceh Regency.

Moreover, the mentoring-oriented and participatory methodology employed in this program effectively facilitated capacity building and community empowerment. Participants exhibited increased confidence, motivation, and a greater propensity to collaborate with other stakeholders in the tourism sector. This suggests that community service initiatives that focus on engagement and contextual learning can promote enduring improvements in tourism governance and service quality.

This community service program underscores the importance of ongoing partnerships among higher education institutions, local government, and the tourism sector in fostering sustainable Sharia tourism growth. It is advisable for future programs to incorporate follow-up mentoring and wider stakeholder engagement to guarantee sustained impact and consistency in the execution of Sharia tourist governance and branding rooted in local wisdom.

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