
GLOBAL TRENDS AND KNOWLEDGE STRUCTURES IN HALAL TOURISM RESEARCH: INSIGHTS FROM BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Halal tourism has grown into one of the fastest-growing sectors of the travel industry worldwide, driven by rising demand for Sharia-compliant services. However, practical challenges persist in the industry, such as inconsistent service implementation, uncertainties in operational costs, and ambiguous international standardization. Our research aims to examine halal tourism using published studies from 2020 to 2025 to provide a comprehensive basis for forming a coherent picture of its evolution. Our research examines halal tourism using published studies from 2020 to 2025 to provide a comprehensive overview of its development. In this quantitative study, we utilized a bibliometric analysis approach. We retrieved data from the Scopus database and analyzed them using the Biblioshiny R module to explore publication trends, citation patterns, influential authors, journals, institutions, and country contributions. We also applied a keyword co-occurrence analysis to map the main intellectual and thematic patterns in halal tourism research. The findings demonstrate that Indonesia and Malaysia dominate both publication output and institutional productivity. We found that the Journal of Islamic Marketing is the most frequently cited journal in halal tourism research. The thematic mapping analysis highlights four principal clusters: Muslim consumer behavior and intention; service quality and competitiveness; sustainability and innovation; and governance and certification issues. This study contributes to our integrative understanding of halal tourism

scholarship by providing a comprehensive synthesis of performance indicators and thematic evolution. Our findings reveal emerging directions such as digital transformation, halal lifestyle, and international collaboration, each of which is expected to guide future research efforts among scholars, practitioners, and policymakers.

INTRODUCTION

The halal industry has undertaken a considerable transformation in the economic situation in the modern world, spanning from a food-centered niche into a multi-trillion-dollar, highly diversified economic ecosystem incorporating Islamic finance, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, logistics, and tourism (Darmawati et al., 2023; Marlina et al., 2025). This fast growing circumstance indicates the increasing awareness of halal as an indicator of both religious identity and global market competitiveness. Such trend restructures the patterns of food consumption and urges business adaptation to emerging market demand. Halal tourism has developed as one of the most progressive and fast-growing sectors within this expansive ecosystem, emerging as a pivotal driver of growth in the international travel industry. This motion aligns with the conditions of economy and demography, especially the persistent growth of the Muslim population across the world and higher disposable incomes are contributing to greater demand for for Sharia-compliant destinations and services (Lestari et al., 2023; Ruiz-Muñoz et al., 2025). Our study draws on recent data from the State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2024/25, which reports a 30.77% increase in investment deals in the Muslim-friendly travel sector in 2023/24 compared to the previous year (DinardStandard, 2025). This situation is the result of strong government support for halal infrastructure (DinardStandard, 2025). For many destinations, this sector is not only financially promising but also a chance to set themselves apart and attract loyal Muslim traveler sectors (Suhartanto et al., 2021).

Besides its economic advantage, halal tourism reflects the importance of social and cultural aspects because of its role in amalgamating Islamic values with travel practices in the modern world, and it aligns with leisure, spirituality, and cultural authenticity. Government, business, and international organization stakeholders seeking to align their development strategies with religious and ethical principles recognize the dual economic and cultural role of halal tourism as a vital stepping stone for its expansion (Khan et al., 2025; Razak et al., 2025). In recent years, halal tourism has been connected with global sustainability and innovation agendas, particularly regarding environmental responsibility, digital transformation, and inclusive development (Hasnan et al., 2024; Mahardhani et al., 2024). This phenomenon suggests that halal tourism is no longer confined to faith-based markets; instead, it is gradually emerging as a model of ethical and sustainable tourism development globally.

The rapid growth of this industry has stirred growing academic interest in the field. Scholars have studied halal tourism from various perspectives, including consumer behavior, destination competitiveness, service quality, marketing strategies, governance, and policy frameworks (Battour et al., 2022; Yagmur et al., 2020). The research output on halal tourism has expanded significantly over the past decade, signifying the sector's tangible importance in practice and the way it has gained recognition as a legitimate academic field (Mas'ud & Syamsurrijal, 2022; Rusydiana et al., 2021). However, despite this expansion, the industry continues to encounter practical challenges. Practitioners often struggle with inconsistent implementation of Sharia-compliant services and ambiguity in global standardization due to the lack of agreed-upon definitions and certification standards (Rasul, 2019; El-Gohary, 2016). Furthermore, as Battour and Ismail (2016) noted, business practitioners face uncertainties regarding the feasibility and operational implications of implementing full halal standards. These real-world issues are aggravated by a fragmented academic landscape. Our reading on the existing literature suggests that previous studies often focus on specific aspects, such as sustainability (Apriantoro et al., 2024), innovation (Ratnasari et al., 2024), or supply chain management (Hasnan et al., 2024). However, they seldom integrate these dimensions into a unified conceptual framework. As a result, Alimusa et al. (2024) observed that the literature, although valuable, offers only partial insights, which makes it difficult to follow the coherent development of the field.

Our review of the existing literature indicates that the lack of synthesis in halal tourism research highlights the need for systematic reviews capable of capturing both the breadth and depth of the field. We opted for Bibliometric analysis in our study because it is widely recognized as one of the most rigorous and objective approaches to address this need (Chantarungsri et al., 2024; Handoko, 2020). Bibliometric techniques enable researchers to quantify, visualize, and interpret patterns in scientific knowledge differing from narrative reviews that rely heavily on subjective interpretation (Moral-muñoz et al., 2020; Muñoz-Leiva et al., 2012). These methods reveal patterns in the research that are not immediately obvious, such as trends in publication and citation, key journals and influential authors, networks of collaboration, and clusters of related research topics that guide the development of ideas in the field (Alsharif et al., 2023; Rao & Shukla, 2023). By mapping these dynamics, bibliometric analysis allows researchers not only to summarize existing studies but also to uncover how ideas emerge, consolidate, and spread across academic communities. This approach provides insights into both the historical development of the field and directions for future research.

Previous bibliometric studies on halal tourism and related fields have made significant contributions to the literature. For instance, Hassan et al. (2022) analyzed ten years of the *Journal of Islamic Marketing* and identified Muslim tourist motivation and destination development as central research clusters. Similarly, Mahardhani et al. (2024) explored the role

of supporting facilities in halal tourism development. Ratnasari et al. (2024) highlighted sustainability and service quality as emerging research topics. Meanwhile, Rusydiana et al.'s (2021) study provided conceptual tools by proposing indicators to evaluate halal tourism performance, and Ilham et al. (2024) connected halal production studies with authentication frameworks. These studies collectively enrich our understanding of halal tourism development; however, they remain largely descriptive, leaving questions unanswered about the causal relationships among authors, institutions, journals, and thematic trajectories.

Based on the findings of the above-mentioned studies, our study aims to explore a more integrative and explanatory bibliometric perspective. Understanding the intellectual evolution of this dynamic field is especially important to separate short-lived trends from lasting core themes and to follow how scholarly attention has shifted from theoretical concepts to practical, empirical applications. Our study addresses this gap by analyzing halal tourism scholarship from 2020 to 2025. We have selected this period because it represents the most recent and transformative phase of academic output. This study also aims to provide a comprehensive picture of halal tourism research, highlighting both core themes and emerging issues, such as sustainability, digitalization, and innovation in service delivery. Specifically, this study aims to:

- (1) analyze the trends of productivity and citation to assess the vitality of the field;
- (2) map collaboration networks among authors, institutions, and countries to reveal the social structure of knowledge production;
- (3) examine how research themes have evolved over time to identify core, specialized, and emerging topics; and
- (4) integrate these findings into a cohesive framework that maps the intellectual structure of the field.

This study aims to offer a comprehensive overview of the evolution of halal tourism research and its potential future directions, providing guidance for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to make more integrated, innovative, and impactful contributions (Khan et al., 2025; Razak et al., 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Perspectives on Muslim Traveler Behavior

Recent studies have worked to deepen our theoretical understanding of how Muslim travelers make decisions. For instance, Akter and Hasan (2023) found that perceived behavioral control significantly influences Muslim tourists' intentions to engage in halal tourism, highlighting the relevance of behavioral models such as the Theory of Planned Behavior. Adding to this perspective, Said et al. (2022) explored Muslim travelers in countries where Muslimes are a minority, emphasizing specific concerns around accessibility, religious facilities, and cultural adaptation. Together, these findings indicate that halal tourism cannot be fully understood by focusing solely on majority-Muslim destinations; instead, the diverse contexts and needs of travelers must also be taken into account.

The Economic and Sustainability Dimensions of Halal Tourism

From an economic perspective, halal tourism is increasingly vital to broader development outcomes. According to Maskuroh (2023), halal tourism is part of a dynamic cycle that contributes to regional economic growth, while Syamsurrijal et al.'s (2023) study in Lombok, Indonesia, found that sharia-based regulations promote tourism development while empowering local communities economically. At a macro-financial level, Chowdhury et al. (2024) found that sustainability efforts in halal tourism can shape stock returns, underscoring that the sector's role is not limited to cultural or religious factors. These studies collectively highlight the dual role of halal tourism as both a cultural-religious practice and a key driver for economic growth. The sustainability aspect of halal tourism has recently gained fresh attention. Sulong et al. (2024) developed a composite performance index that combines economic, social, and environmental indicators, offering a more holistic way to assess the industry's progress. Along similar lines, Ruiz-Muñoz et al. (2025) noted that halal tourism faces both challenges and opportunities on its path toward global recognition, ranging from the complexities of certification to the potential to align with international sustainability agendas. Taken together, these studies highlight the growing need to position halal tourism within the broader global conversation on sustainable and responsible tourism.

New Contexts and Future Directions in Halal Tourism Research

Beyond popular cities and international destinations, researchers have also begun looking at halal tourism in rural settings. Alim et al. (2023), for example, conducted a field study in Madura, Indonesia, showing how halal principles can be woven into rural tourism to support community-based development while maintaining local cultural identities. Their work expands the conversation on halal tourism, suggesting that its benefits are not limited to mainstream destinations but can also contribute meaningfully to rural economic and social change. The field itself has also become more reflective. Islam et al. (2023) offered an in-depth review of halal tourism scholarship, outlining its major themes, theoretical roots, and methodological trends. Their analysis highlights not only the growing maturity of the field but also the value of systematic tools, such as bibliometric analysis to better understand how the research area continues to evolve. Taken together, these different studies show that halal tourism is developing into a multifaceted field, shaped by diverse contexts and growing academic sophistication.

Recent work in the field also points to several new directions that are likely to influence how halal tourism develops in the coming years. One important trend is the stronger connection between halal tourism and global sustainability agendas, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which encourages researchers to explore how Islamic values align with environmental and social responsibility (Khan et al., 2025). Another key shift is the

growing role of digital technologies, such as mobile applications, online booking systems, and halal-focused fintech tools that are increasingly used to enhance service delivery (Hasnan et al., 2024). Governance and cross-border collaboration have likewise become more prominent, as consistent certification and regulatory practices are needed to build trust and support the international expansion of halal tourism (Razak et al., 2025).

Overall, the literature shows rapid growth but remains somewhat fragmented. The field has moved beyond basic descriptions of Muslim traveler behavior and now includes more detailed analyses of service performance, competitiveness, and sustainability. Even so, much of the research is still concentrated in a few regions, and many studies lack a more integrated view. These limitations highlight the need for systematic bibliometric studies that can illustrate publication trends, identify intellectual foundations, and track how research themes evolve over time. Such approaches can offer a clearer and more comprehensive picture of halal tourism and help guide its future development both theoretically and practically.

RESEARCH METHODS

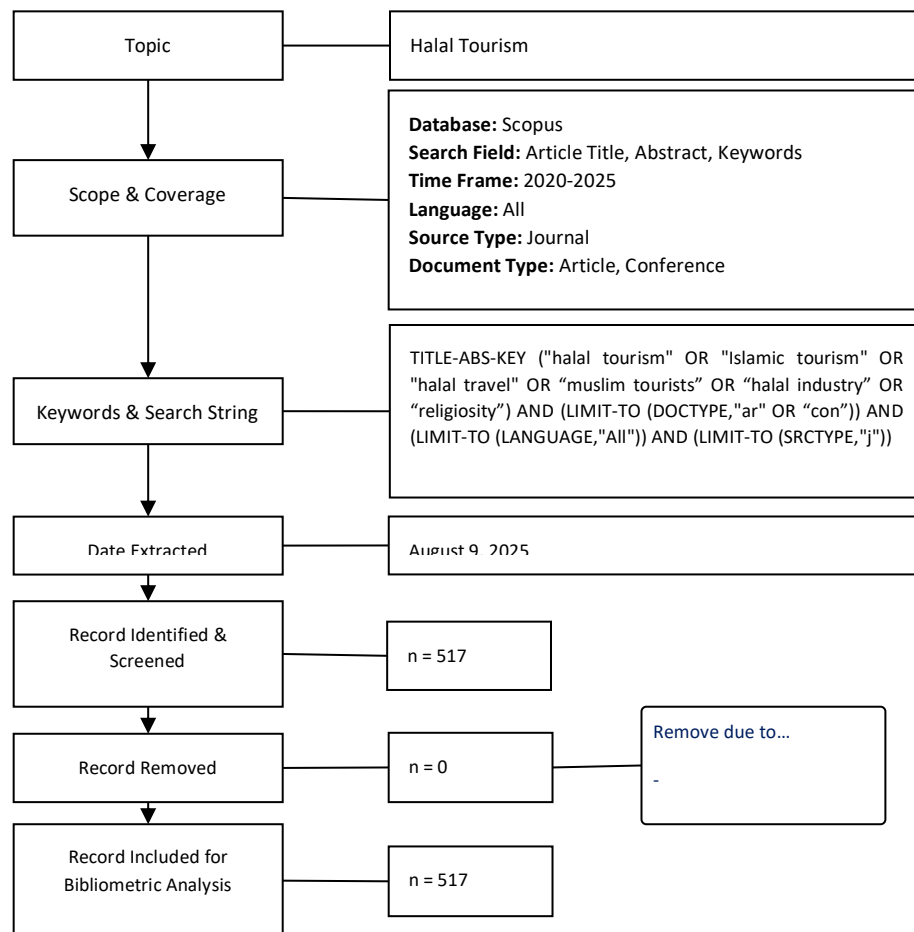
This study uses quantitative bibliometric analysis to systematically review scientific literature on halal tourism published between 2020 and 2025. In the field of marketing, several bibliometric studies have utilized a relatively short time span, approximately five years, to capture contemporary research trends. For example, Arinilhaq & Fatmawati (2025) conducted a bibliometric analysis of social media marketing, mapping research topics, keyword co-occurrence, and emerging trends over a five-year period (2019–2024). Similarly, Andriansyah et al. (2023) analyzed publications in digital marketing, focusing on innovation development, technology adoption, and sustainability in the marketing domain. These studies show that a five-year analysis window (2019–2023) is commonly applied in marketing research, especially in rapidly evolving subfields such as digital marketing and social media marketing. Therefore, in this study, the period 2020–2025 was chosen to capture the latest post-pandemic developments, ensuring that the bibliometric analysis reflects current trends, emerging themes, and sector-specific adaptations in marketing research.

The methodology of this study is based on bibliometric analysis, which was chosen as an objective and structured approach to measure publication productivity, citation impact, collaboration networks, influential authors, leading institutions, and dominant publication outlets in the domain of halal tourism. This method is highly effective for identifying core research trends, knowledge structures, and emerging thematic areas. The analysis is divided into two main components: performance analysis, which focuses on descriptive metrics regarding the contributions of authors, journals, institutions, and countries (Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020), and science mapping analysis, which explores the intellectual and thematic evolution of the field through co-occurrence networks to reveal relationships between concepts and emerging research clusters (Muñoz-Leiva et al., 2012). This approach has grown in popularity due to the availability of large bibliographic databases such as Scopus and Web

of Science, supported by advanced open-source tools. For this study, Biblioshiny 4.1 (RStudio package) was used due to its comprehensive statistical capabilities and superior visualization functions, making it a more integrated choice than other tools such as VOSviewer or CiteSpace. This rigorous and transparent methodology ensures systematic and replicable analysis.

This study adopts a methodology divided into two main and systematic stages: The first stage focuses on identifying and collecting relevant scientific contributions by searching the Scopus database. Next, the second stage involves conducting an in-depth bibliometric analysis of all the collected literature, using special software, namely the RStudio bibliometric package. The detailed research process and steps as a whole have been visualized and explained in the Flow Chart in Table 1 to ensure transparency and ease of replication.

Table 1.
Research Framework



Phase I Document Selected

First, the scope of this study was defined within the theme of Halal Tourism, focusing on articles published between 2020 and 2025. Scopus was chosen as it is widely recognized as one of the most comprehensive and reliable bibliographic databases for retrieving relevant academic literature. The documents were limited to journal articles (document type: article, conference), restricted to the fields of title, abstract, and keywords, and only those written in English were included in the analysis. The search was conducted using the following Boolean query: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("halal tourism" OR "Islamic tourism" OR "halal travel" OR "Muslim tourists" OR "halal industry" OR "religiosity") AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar" OR "con") AND LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "All") AND LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE, "j")).

This query was designed to capture literature directly related to the practices, concepts, and academic studies of halal tourism, including supporting terms such as "Islamic tourism," "halal travel," "Muslim tourists," "Halal travel," "Halal industry," and "Religiosity." Data extraction was performed on August 9, 2025. From the initial search results, 517 articles met the inclusion criteria. These articles were then screened to remove duplicates or non-relevant document types. However, because all results already met the requirements, no articles were removed ($n = 0$). Consequently, the entire set of 517 articles was included in the bibliometric analysis.

Phase II Bibliometric Analysis

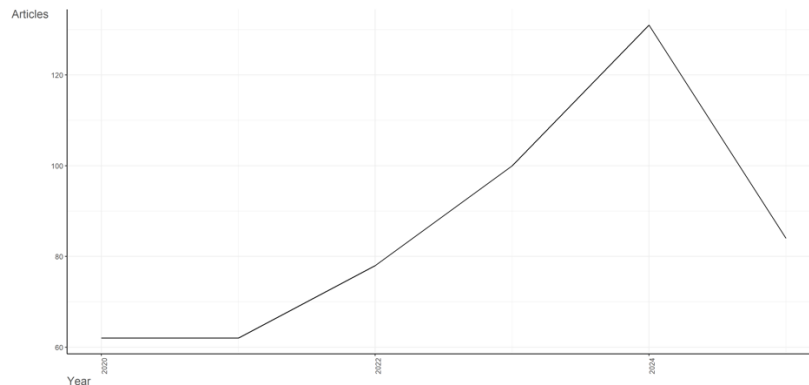
Bibliometric analysis consists of two main aspects: performance and scientific mapping analyses. Performance analysis evaluates the characteristics of research contributions through indicators such as the annual number of publications, the most cited articles, journals, and authors, collaboration patterns, leading institutions, and the most contributing countries in the field of halal tourism. Scientific mapping focuses on identifying the structural and developmental dynamics of a research field, for example, through keyword co-occurrence analysis. In this study, the analysis period was set comprehensively from 2020 to 2025 without dividing it into sub-periods. This time frame was chosen because it is considered sufficiently representative of the dynamics of recent research developments, ranging from fundamental issues to more contemporary trends such as digitalization, sustainability, and service innovation. By covering the entire period, this study aims to provide a holistic overview of major themes and evolving directions in halal tourism research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Productivity and Citation Trends of Halal Tourism Research

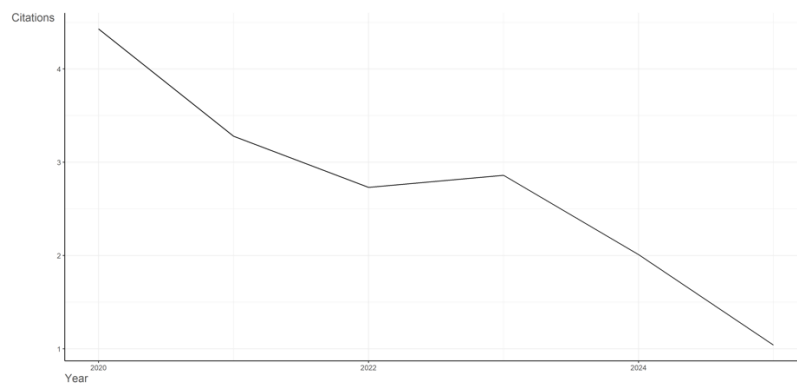
Figures 1a and 1b collectively present a comprehensive picture of the vitality and structural development that occurred in halal tourism research during the period from 2020 to 2025; this visualization as a whole not only shows a shift in quantitative aspects, but also

reveals a deeper epistemic transition, which ultimately indicates that this field of study is moving towards intellectual maturity.



Source: Biblioshiny

Figure 1a. Annual Scientific Production



Source: Biblioshiny

Figure 1b. Average Citations per Year)

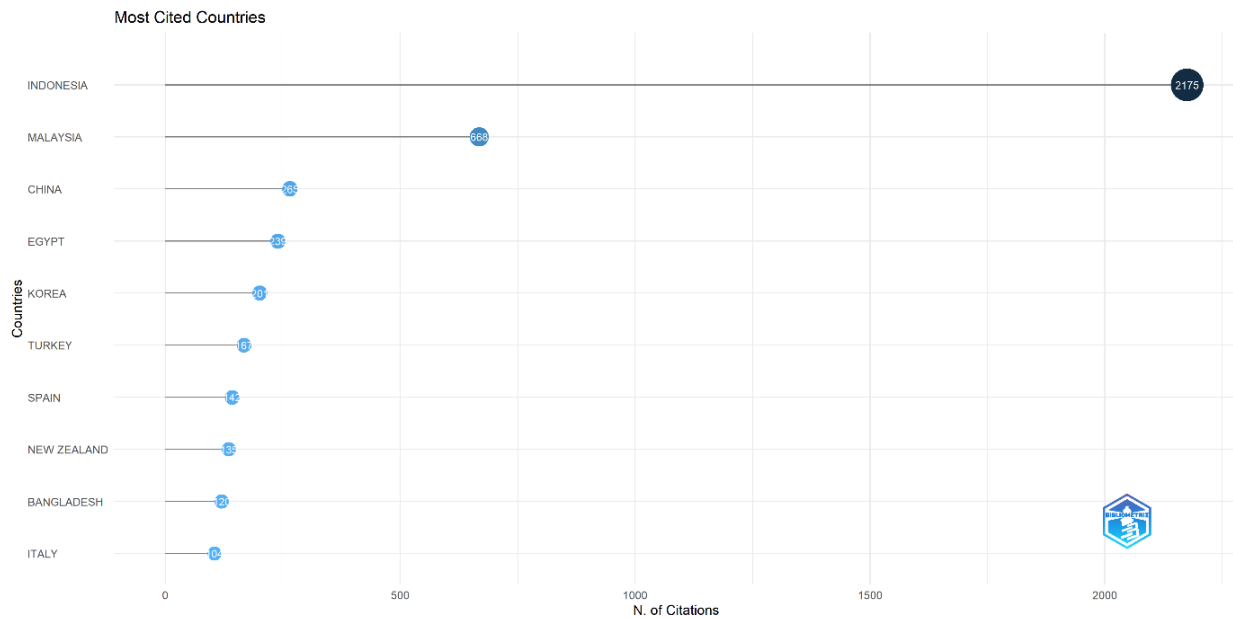
The annual publication productivity of halal tourism research (as shown in Figure 1b) shows a layered growth pattern, starting with an output of around 62 articles per year during the initial consolidation phase (2020–2021) in which basic conceptual boundaries were established. However, the field experienced significant acceleration starting in late 2021 and peaked at around 130 articles in 2024, a surge that went beyond mere numerical expansion; it signifies a substantive transformation in which halal tourism has shifted from a niche field to a recognized mainstream area of research in tourism studies, Islamic economics, and marketing, in line with the global expansion of the halal economy, the rise of Muslim-friendly tourism initiatives, and the academic need for stronger theoretical and empirical frameworks.

The annual citation trend (Figure 1a) shows a pattern of “citation aging” that is common in bibliometric analysis, where older publications, such as those from 2020, receive the highest average number of citations (around 4.4), while newer works (2024–2025) receive fewer citations due to their shorter exposure time, a natural delay that reflects the citation accumulation cycle without implying a decline in quality; importantly, the thematic consistency of highly cited works—particularly those addressing Muslim tourist perceptions, halal service quality, emotional experiences, and destination loyalty—underscores that these fundamental topics remain key anchors for the intellectual development of the halal tourism field.

Overall, the results of the analysis of research productivity and citation dynamics collectively confirm that the field of halal tourism is currently experiencing strong academic momentum, characterized by a rapid increase in publication volume, supported by a stable intellectual foundation, and consistent attention to core themes. this vitality effectively builds a solid foundation for further research on the social, institutional, and thematic architecture of this field of study in the subsequent sections of the analysis. A study conducted by Kurniawan et al., (2025) on the same topic, halal tourism, showed an increasing trend from 1997 to 2024. The current study shows a similar trend, with a continued increase in publications. In their 2024 study, only 36 articles were recorded, while the latest data shows a significant increase (around 130 articles). A similar study by Asnawi & Abdullah, (2025) also showed a pronounced growth pattern highlighting the growing academic interest in the field.

Collaboration Networks Among Authors, Institutions, and Countries

The social structure of halal tourism research, comprehensively visualized through Figures 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4a–4e, and 5, indicates that the development of this field is strongly influenced by geographical concentration, institutional strength, and the configuration of academic collaboration networks. a review of all these figures consistently shows that Southeast Asia , particularly Indonesia and Malaysia , has emerged as a dominant global center of gravity for halal tourism studies.



Source: Biblioshiny

Figure 2a. Most Cited Countries

Figure 2a shows Indonesia's absolute dominance in the distribution of halal tourism research citations with 2,175 citations, a figure that creates a significant gap compared to Malaysia (668 citations) and other contributing countries such as China, Egypt, and Turkey. This advantage highlights Indonesia's central role in directing scientific discourse, which is driven not only by publication volume but also by strategic success in developing the halal ecosystem through strong government support, tourism roadmaps, and a national certification framework. Together with Malaysia, which has mature governance and established branding, these two countries have established themselves as leaders in international research capacity, while the involvement of other countries indicates a growing global interest and the emergence of new research centers in this field. This is also in line with the studies of Asnawi & Abdullah, (2025). They explained that Indonesia and Malaysia are playing central roles and have growing contributions from countries across Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Similar results were found by Karmanto et al., (2025), who concluded that Indonesia and Malaysia were the two countries that produced the most publications about halal tourism.

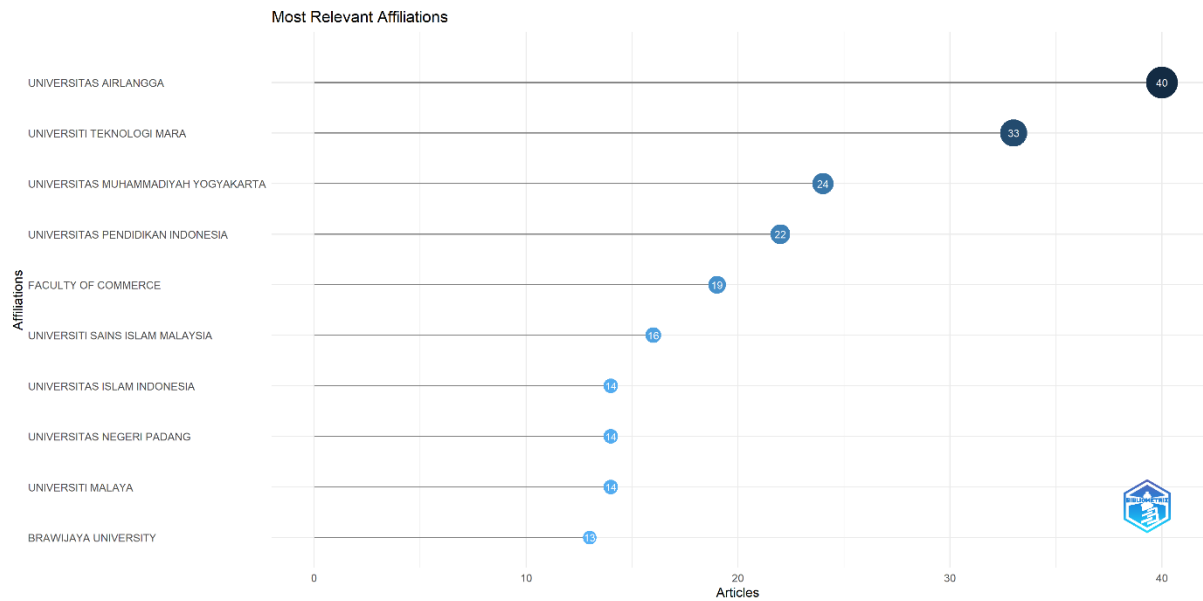
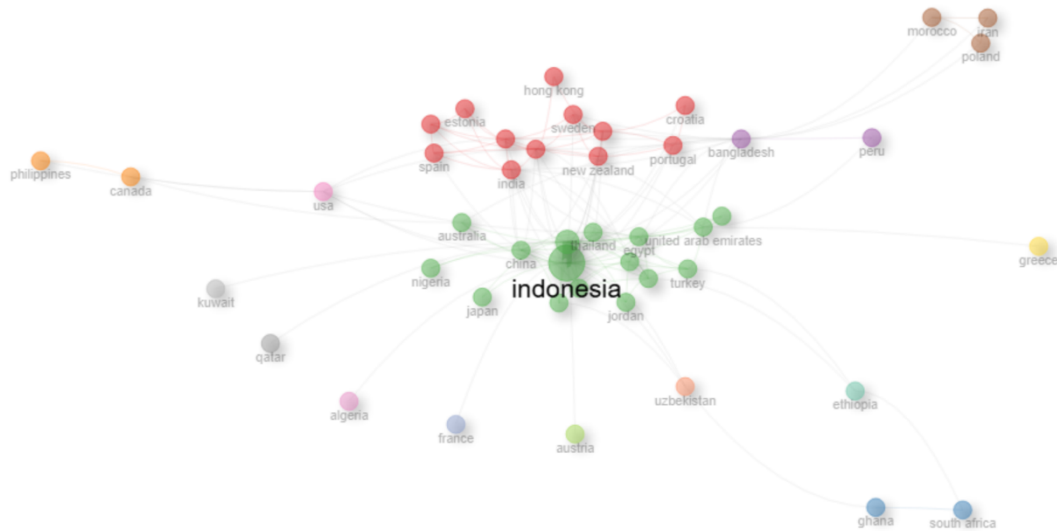


Figure 2b. Most Relevant Affiliations

Based on the visualization in Figure 2b, Airlangga University and Universiti Teknologi MARA clearly dominate the academic landscape of halal tourism, with their superior publication volume reflecting their central role in leading intellectual progress in this field. Under the leadership of these two institutions, there is a group of contributors with moderate productivity, including Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, and the Faculty of Commerce, followed by a number of other universities that contribute research on a more limited scale but are still essential to the development of the literature.

The concentration of scientific output in a number of elite institutions indicates a hierarchical structure in the development of halal tourism knowledge, with established universities serving as the main intellectual centers. The dominance of Airlangga University and Universiti Teknologi MARA is driven by a robust research ecosystem—encompassing active collaboration, strategic partnerships, and a sustained thematic focus—which significantly expands their academic influence. At the same time, consistent contributions from various other institutions signal the dynamic growth of this field, where new study centers are emerging and helping to shape the direction of future research.



Source: Biblioshiny

Figure 3a. Collaboration Network of Countries

The analysis in Figures 3a and 3b further confirms Indonesia's dominance in the international collaboration map, where the country appears as the most significant central node. As seen in Figure 3a, Indonesia functions as a strategic hub that integrates cross-continental research activities—covering Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. The high density of links surrounding Indonesia not only reflects the intensity of strong collaboration, but also confirms its crucial role as the main gateway for other countries to access the global halal tourism research ecosystem.

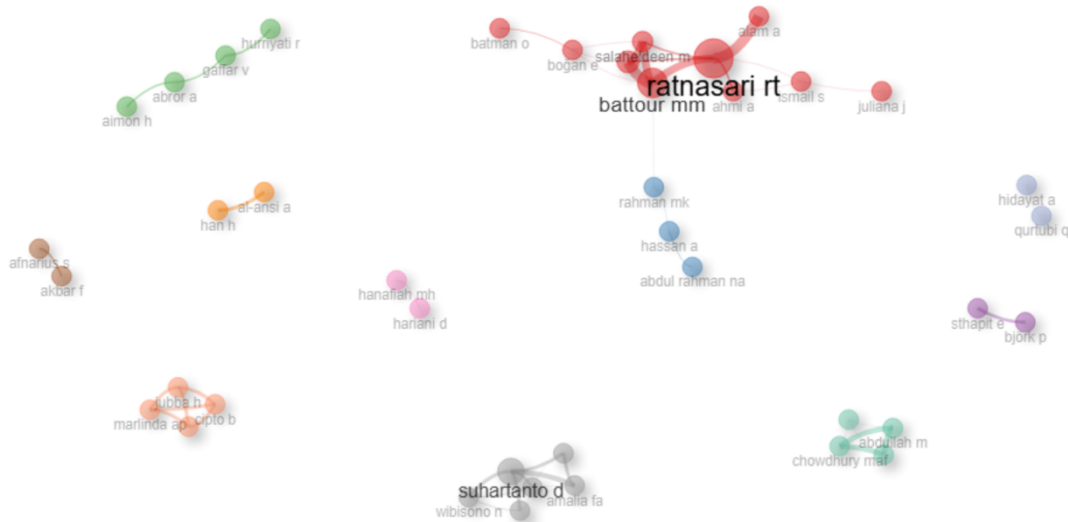
This network configuration visualizes a clear core-periphery structure, in which Southeast Asia—with Indonesia as its main representative—serves as the driving force in global knowledge exchange. Conversely, countries in peripheral positions show minimal connectivity and weak cross-regional engagement, thus having limited influence in determining the direction of research. Thus, Indonesia's central position goes beyond mere publication quantity; it affirms its strategic role as a key actor in weaving and maintaining the dynamics of scientific collaboration at the international level.

Figure 3b. Collaboration Network of Institution

Meanwhile, UMY and Brawijaya University form distinctive sub-clusters that reflect a sharper and more focused thematic orientation. Their position separate from the core network indicates specialized research paths that are essential for the diversification of the overall knowledge ecosystem. The dynamics of coexistence between dominant institutions that maintain network cohesion and these developing sub-clusters paint a picture of an evolving research landscape, where smaller groups enrich the literature by delving deeper into niche topics..



Author	Impact Measure: H
VABBERT	1.0
TELEMAN	0.85
DIA	0.65
A.A.	0.55
H	0.52
ATTANTOU D.	0.5
LLAN M.	0.35
AGA A.	0.32
BLP	0.3
ANDRURY HAF	0.28



Source: Biblioshiny

Figure 5. Network Map of Authors

Figure 5 shows that the author collaboration network is highly fragmented. A large cluster forms around Battour and Ratnasari, while other clusters stand in isolation, lacking strong links between them. This pattern points to two simultaneous tendencies: a growing level of thematic specialization and significant unused potential for cluster collaboration that could strengthen the field's theoretical development. Overall, the evidence supports the idea that in halal tourism, knowledge production is concentrated in centers of excellence, hierarchical collaboration structures, and segmented author networks. As a result, the field's intellectual development is unevenly distributed, shaped by a small number of influential institutions and scholars who drive the main research agenda. The hierarchical structure of collaborations reinforces this imbalance, as leading universities often attract and coordinate partnerships, thereby strengthening their position as key knowledge producers. At the same time, institutions at the margins contribute mainly as supporting partners rather than agenda setters. Meanwhile, the presence of distinct and relatively disconnected author clusters reflects a field that offers substantial thematic depth but still lacks cross-disciplinary integration. This segmentation may deepen expertise within specific subareas, yet also limits the flow of ideas across clusters, potentially slowing the development of unified theoretical frameworks. Overall, this structure highlights both the strengths and structural constraints of halal tourism scholarship, emphasizing the importance of broader, more interconnected collaboration to build a more cohesive, globally representative research environment. This social structure provides the basis for understanding the thematic developments in the next section.

Thematic Evolution of Halal Tourism: Core, Niche, and Emerging Themes

Figures 6 and 7 give a clearer look at how the thematic structure of halal tourism research has changed over time, and together they show not only how the field's priorities have shifted but also where its internal tensions lie. The visuals point to a development that starts from wide conceptual discussions and gradually moves into more focused research areas, although this progression isn't fully linear or spread evenly across all themes.

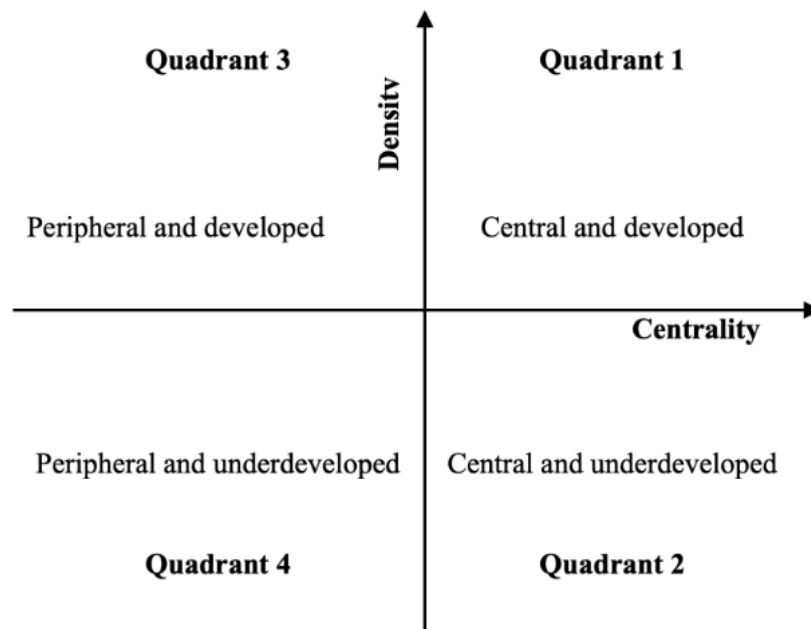
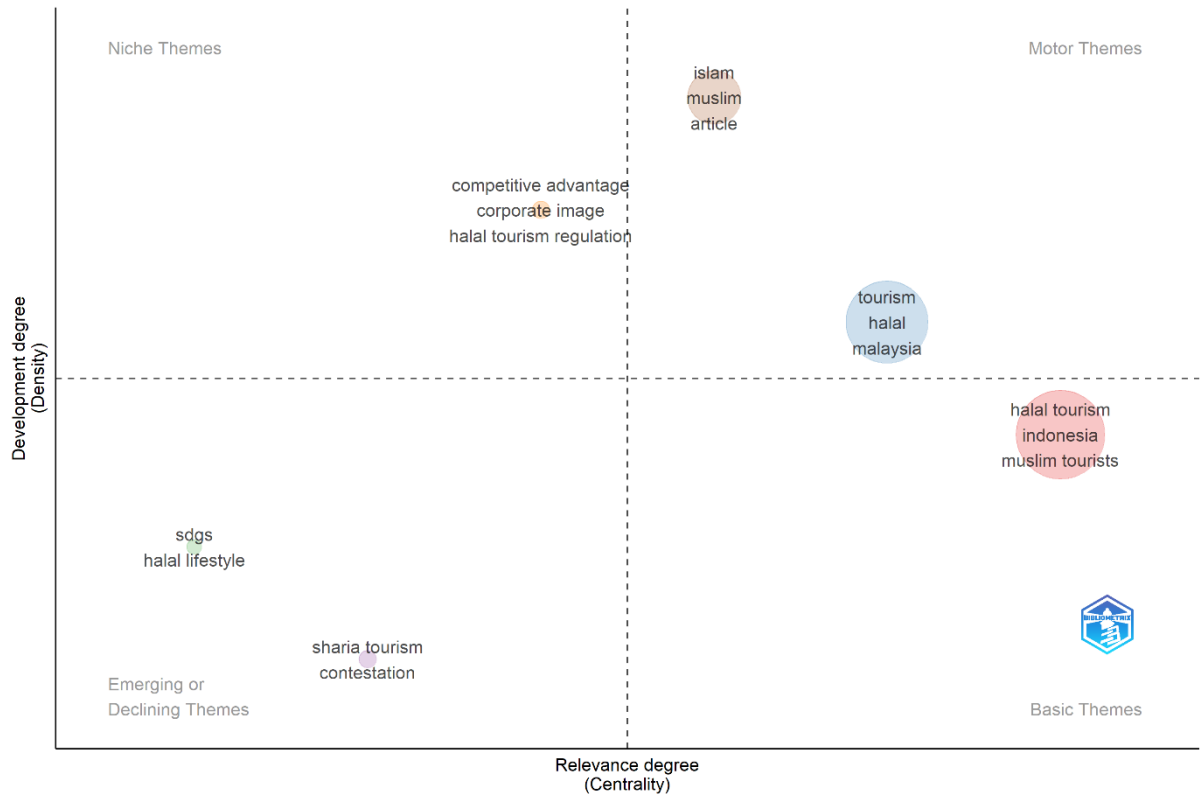


Figure 6. Representative strategic diagram



Source: Biblioshiny

Figure 7. Representative Strategic Diagram for Halal Tourism

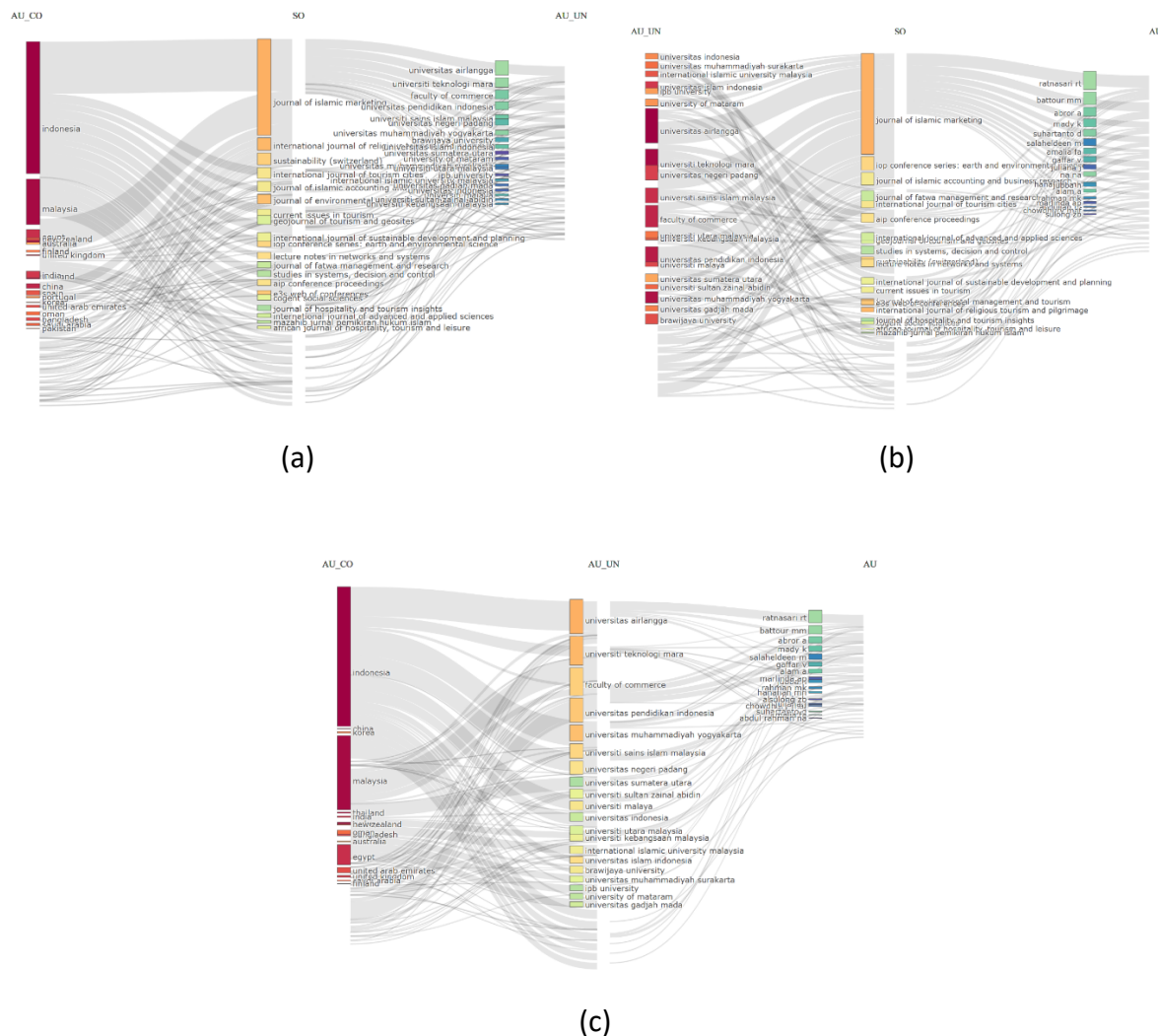
Basic themes like halal tourism, Indonesia, and Muslim tourists still show high centrality but low density. This means they serve as critical conceptual anchors, but the theoretical work surrounding them is still underdeveloped. These themes are broad, and many studies still treat them in a descriptive or exploratory way, so they have not turned into solid conceptual frameworks that can guide the long-term direction of the field. Because of that, these basic themes continue to act more as starting points than as entirely shaped theories. Motor themes such as tourism, halal, and Malaysia appear with both high centrality and high density. This data show that these topics are more mature and well-established, but at the same time their dominance might restrict the variety of perspectives coming into the field. Since these themes attract most of the scholarly attention, they can overshadow new issues or contexts that are not yet widely studied. Even though they form the core of halal tourism research, their central position raises concerns that the field relies too heavily on a narrow set of conceptual frameworks that largely originate in specific regions and institutions. Niche themes such as halal certification, competitive advantage, and regulation exhibit high density but low centrality. These clusters produce detailed, technically strong insights, but their peripheral position suggests they are not well connected to the main discussions in the field. This situation may slow down the integration of important governance and regulatory viewpoints into broader theoretical debates. Even so, the depth inside these niche themes suggests they have

real potential to challenge established paradigms if future research can link them better to central topics. Emerging themes such as sustainability, SDGs, halal lifestyle, and digital innovation are positioned with low density and low centrality. Their early stage of development shows that the field has only recently started to approach these global issues. These topics actually offer promising directions, but their weak connection to the overall knowledge structure suggests that research on halal tourism still does not have a strong and unified framework for discussing sustainability transitions, digital change, or the global spread of Muslim consumer lifestyles. Without stronger conceptual and methodological development these emerging themes may remain scattered instead of becoming influential pillars. Overall the thematic development shown in Figures 6 and 7 describes a field that is advancing but still limited by structural imbalances. Conceptually mature themes dominate the conversation, while specialized and emerging themes are not yet well integrated. This pattern highlights the need for stronger cross-theme synthesis, more theoretical innovation and wider geographic and disciplinary diversity. A more inclusive and interconnected intellectual structure will be necessary for positioning halal tourism research as a solid and globally relevant academic area. According to a bibliometric analysis of previous studies, halal tourism is increasingly linked to sustainability principles and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Structural Topic Modeling identified three research focus clusters: Integration of Halal Tourism and Sustainability (42%), Alignment with SDGs (32%), and Technology and Support Systems (26%) (Khan et al., 2025). Other studies indicate growing global attention to halal tourism as a form of sustainable tourism, with increasing contributions from various countries, both Muslim and non-Muslim. This indicates a shift in focus toward integrating religious values, ethics, and environmental aspects into the tourism sector (Timur et al., 2025). In aggregate, the thematic evolution depicted in Figures 6 and 7 reflects a growing discipline that is still constrained by structural imbalances, where the dominance of conceptually mature themes goes hand in hand with a lack of integration on new specialization topics. This gap underscores the urgency for deeper cross-thematic synthesis, strengthening theoretical innovation, and expanding diversification both geographically and disciplinarily. The transformation towards a more inclusive and interconnected intellectual architecture is an absolute prerequisite for establishing halal tourism research as a robust and relevant academic domain on the global stage.

Toward an Intellectual Architecture of Halal Tourism Research

The synthesis of findings from the previous stages of analysis facilitates the construction of an intellectual architecture that presents a holistic understanding of the cycle of production, dissemination, and transformation of halal tourism knowledge over time. Within this framework, Figures 8a to 8c and Figures 9a to 9c serve as fundamental components

to gain scientific recognition. This condition puts the field of halal tourism at risk of stagnation within a narrow conceptual lens, which in turn weakens its adaptability to dynamic global challenges. Therefore, in order to maintain its relevance and intellectual vitality, this field needs to expand its publishing ecosystem by supporting the diversification of scientific outlets that can facilitate epistemic experimentation and cross-pollination between disciplines.



Sources: Biblioshiny

Figure 9. Three-field Plot. (a) Countries-Journals-Institution, (b) Institutions-Journals-Authors, (c) Countries-Institutions-Authors

Figures 9a to 9c visualize the layered flow of knowledge, moving from the national level to publication sources, institutions, and ending with individual authors. This configuration reveals an established hierarchy in which the national context—particularly dominated by

Indonesia and Malaysia—acts as the main engine of knowledge production that sets the geographical boundaries of scientific authority. Furthermore, journals function as a gatekeeping mechanism that not only disseminates research but also standardizes epistemic norms and methodological preferences. This role is reinforced by institutions that act as coordination centers in aligning research agendas and mediating collaboration. Ultimately, this flow culminates in a small group of influential authors who act as epistemic anchors, producing core ideas that drive theoretical development in this field. Although this hierarchical structure provides stability and coherence, it simultaneously reveals a concentration of academic authority in certain limited areas, publication outlets, and actors. This concentration carries the risk of stagnation through the reinforcement of established perspectives, which in turn reduces theoretical pluralism and hinders the emergence of alternative conceptual paradigms that are crucial for challenging and expanding the intellectual horizons of halal tourism research.

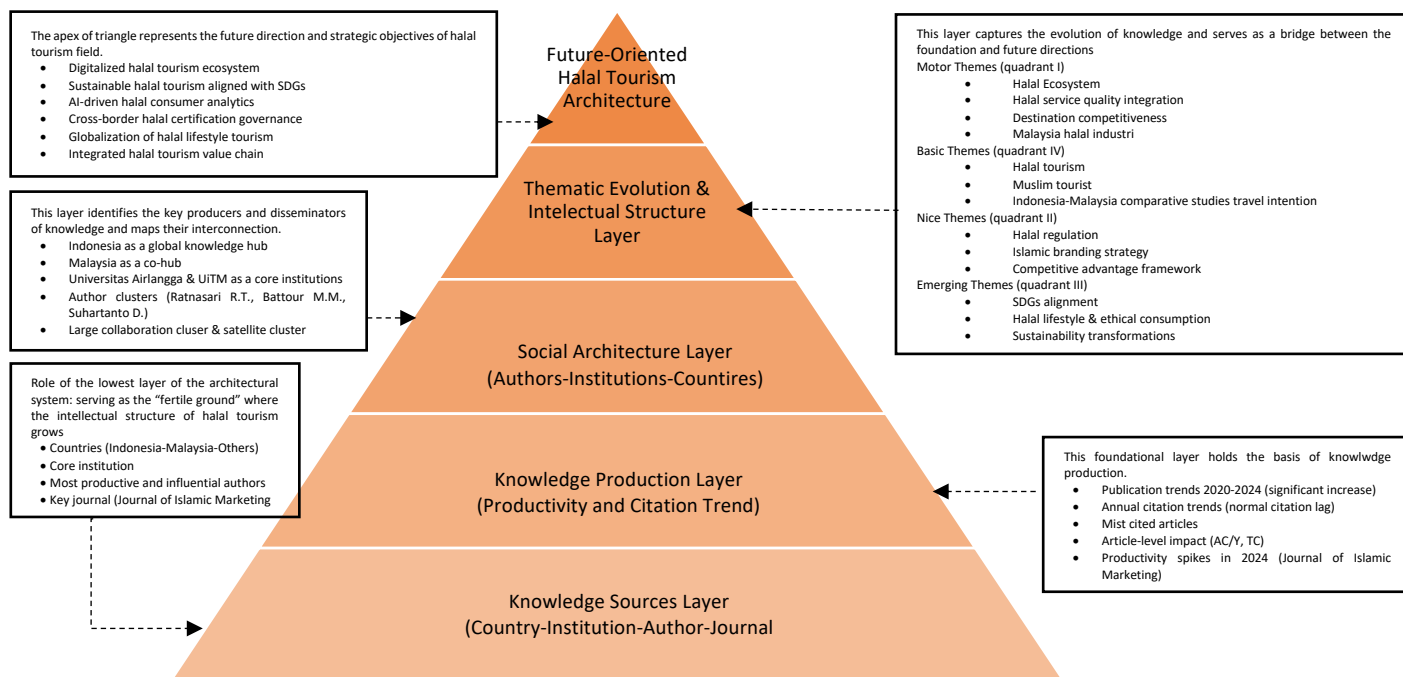


Figure 10. The Intellectual Architecture of Halal Tourism

The long-established hierarchy of global knowledge production—still dominated by a small number of influential academic centers—forms the foundation of the Halal Tourism Intellectual Architecture Model, as shown in Figure 10. This triangular model illustrates a hierarchical and interconnected knowledge system, revealing the dynamics of the field's development and its future direction. At the base, the model places the key elements that shape knowledge—including countries, institutions, authors, and journals—as the main foundation for scientific output. Above this is a layer of knowledge production that reflects

publication trends, citation patterns, and the influence of articles that collectively shape the empirical landscape of this discipline. The next layer depicts the social architecture that displays the collaborative networks between authors, institutions, and countries that determine how ideas circulate and gain authority. Finally, the thematic evolution layer maps the intellectual structure of this field through driving themes, fundamental themes, niche themes, and emerging themes, thereby showing the conceptual changes and shifts that occur over time. At the top of the structure is the objective layer, which formulates the future direction of halal tourism, including digital transformation, sustainability integration, cross-border standardization, and the development of a globally interconnected halal ecosystem. These layers form an integrated triangular architecture that connects fundamental knowledge with evolving research dynamics and long-term strategic aspirations for the discipline.

Based on this architectural understanding, the intellectual landscape that has been formed shows that this field is developing rapidly, but is still vulnerable to conceptual narrowing due to geographical and institutional concentrations that are apparent at the basic levels. This structural imbalance underscores the need for broader cross-border collaboration, diversification of publication platforms, and strengthening the integration of global themes such as digital transformation, sustainability, and cross-border halal governance—which were previously emphasized in the model's objectives layer. Strengthening these aspects is important so that the development of halal tourism theory is not only more robust and systematically structured, but also inclusive, adaptive, and capable of responding to emerging global challenges through a visionary and conceptually innovative approach.

CONCLUSION

This study systematically traces the development of halal tourism research from 2020 to 2025 by assessing the vitality of the field, its social structure, the dynamics of thematic evolution, and the intellectual architecture that has been formed. The findings show that halal tourism has shifted from a marginal issue to a major field with rapid growth, although knowledge production is still concentrated in Southeast Asia. In terms of themes, the focus of research has moved from basic issues such as service quality to more cutting-edge strategic areas, including sustainability and digitalization, thereby constructing a comprehensive Intellectual Architecture of Halal Tourism.

These findings provide strategic insights for stakeholders, suggesting that industry practitioners need to shift their focus to service quality and technology integration. For policymakers, the prominence of governance underscores the need for more uniform halal regulatory standards to reduce compliance burdens, particularly for MSMEs. Meanwhile, the rise of sustainability issues opens up new market opportunities, where combining Islamic values with eco-friendly tourism practices has the potential to attract high-net-worth Muslim

travelers. This study has several limitations, including the use of only the Scopus database, the limited historical analysis prior to 2020, and the filtering process relying on metadata without manual full-text checking, which may introduce margin noise. To address these limitations and the identified geographic concentration, future research is recommended to emphasize cross-continental collaboration, adopt a mixed-methods approach, and consider strategic boundaries that can ensure long-term global relevance and inclusiveness in this field.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The authors' contributions are outlined as follows: The first author was responsible for the initial conceptualization and design of the study, including the formulation of the core research questions, development of the theoretical framework, and design of the methodology. The second author focused on the development and refinement of analytical tools and bibliometric techniques, ensuring the validity and robustness of the data analysis. The third author handled the acquisition and collection of the necessary empirical data, while the fourth author provided substantive input regarding the interpretation of the findings, particularly the economic and managerial implications, and assisted in the drafting of the discussion and conclusions. The first author led the preparation of the final manuscript, including editing and proofreading, with contributions from all co-authors. All authors collaborated effectively and have read and approved the final manuscript.

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