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ATTRACTING TOURISTS TO GOA TERAWANG, BLORA: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF DESTINATION MARKETING AND ISLAMIC MARKETING ETHICS

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Abstract
This study examines how the management of Goa Terawang in Blora Regency, Central Java, seeks to attract visitors and how its practices can be interpreted through the principles of Islamic marketing ethics. Using a qualitative case-study design, the study draws on in-depth interviews with one destination manager and four visitors, together with observation and documentary materials. The material was analysed through data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing, with source and method triangulation used to strengthen credibility. The findings suggest that the attraction's appeal was being repositioned through a combination of its natural cave setting, the introduction of a café inside the cave, supporting recreational facilities, and social-media communication. Visitors' accounts also point to the importance of consistency between promotional information and on-site conditions. The management practices described by participants can be interpreted in relation to honesty (shiddiq), trustworthiness (amanah), fairness, and public benefit (maslahah). The case illustrates how destination differentiation and visitor experience may complement ethically grounded marketing. However, the small, purposively selected group of informants and the absence of independently verified visitor-count time series mean that the study does not establish a causal increase in visitation. The contribution is therefore an interpretive account of destination-management practices rather than a measurement of marketing effectiveness.

Keywords: destination marketing; visitor experience; social media; Islamic marketing ethics; qualitative case study; Goa Terawang

Introduction

Tourism destinations compete not only through the presence of attractions but also through the meanings, experiences, and service encounters they offer to prospective and actual visitors. Destination marketing consequently extends beyond promotional communication to include product development, accessibility, stakeholder coordination, service quality, and the management of destination image (Buhalis, 2000; Pike & Page, 2014; Morrison, 2019). In experience-oriented markets, visitors evaluate destinations through a sequence of pre-visit information search, on-site

encounters, and post-visit recollection and sharing (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Neuhofer et al., 2012; Hosany et al., 2022).

Digital platforms have further altered how destinations are discovered and evaluated. Social media enables destination organisations and visitors to circulate visual narratives, reviews, and user-generated content, potentially shaping destination image, trust, and travel intentions (Hays et al., 2013; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Leung et al., 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Yet visibility alone does not guarantee a satisfactory visit. Promotional claims must correspond with the facilities, prices, accessibility, and service conditions encountered at the destination. Research on electronic word of mouth and online travel information underscores the importance of credibility and perceived usefulness in travel decision-making (Litvin et al., 2008; Filieri & McLeay, 2014).

The national and regional context also matters. Statistics Indonesia reported 89.21 million domestic tourist trips to Central Java from January to July 2025, a 0.39% decrease from the corresponding cumulative period in 2024; the figure indicates the scale of domestic travel in the province, but it should not be interpreted as evidence of growth in every individual destination (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Jawa Tengah, 2025). For smaller attractions, differentiation may depend on how local managers combine distinctive natural or cultural resources with facilities and experiences that respond to visitors' expectations. Broader international tourism reporting similarly provides context for interpreting local destination development, although international aggregates cannot substitute for site-level evidence (UNWTO, 2019).

Goa Terawang, located in Kedungwungu Village, Todanan District, Blora Regency, provides a relevant case. The source study describes changes to the attraction, including the development of a café inside the cave, additional facilities and recreational activities, and the use of TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook to communicate with prospective visitors. The manuscript also reports that visitors considered information about ticket prices and facilities to be broadly consistent with on-site conditions. These accounts invite analysis of destination transformation as a combination of product differentiation, digital communication, and service delivery.

A further analytical dimension is the ethical orientation of marketing. Islamic marketing scholarship places ethical conduct, fairness, trust, transparency, and social welfare alongside the creation and communication of customer value (Wilson, 2012; Alserhan, 2010; Sood & Nasu, 1995; Sandikci & Jafari, 2013). In this study, shiddiq and amanah are treated as interpretive ethical principles rather than as a formal certification of the attraction as halal tourism. This distinction is important: evidence of honest communication or responsible service does not, by itself, establish comprehensive Sharia compliance.

Although destination marketing, social-media promotion, visitor experience, and Islamic marketing have each received scholarly attention, their intersection in the management of a small nature-based attraction remains underexplored in the source manuscript's local context. The present study addresses this contextual gap by examining (a) the strategies described by Goa Terawang's management for attracting visitors, (b) the factors that participants perceived as supporting those strategies, and (c) how the reported practices may be interpreted through selected

Islamic marketing principles. Its contribution is an in-depth, context-specific account rather than a generalizable estimate of the effects of marketing interventions.

Theoretical Framework

Destination marketing and differentiation

Destination marketing is a coordinated process through which a place communicates and delivers a distinctive value proposition to selected visitor markets. It involves the interaction of attractions, amenities, accessibility, image, and the interests of multiple stakeholders (Buhalis, 2000; Pike & Page, 2014; Morrison, 2019). Differentiation can arise from the distinctive combination of core resources and complementary experiences rather than from the core attraction alone. From this perspective, a café within a cave may be understood as a product-extension strategy that adds a new consumption and social experience to a nature-based attraction. This interpretation does not presume that the innovation is universally attractive; its value depends on visitor perceptions, environmental compatibility, and service execution. Destination image formation is also shaped by cognitive and affective evaluations that influence how places are perceived before and after a visit (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). The strategic competitiveness of destinations also depends on the coordination of resources, stakeholder relationships, and sustainability considerations (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Gretzel et al., 2006).

Visitor experience, satisfaction, and behavioural intention

The experience-economy perspective argues that organisations create value by staging memorable experiences in addition to providing goods and services (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). In tourism, memorable experiences involve multiple dimensions, including novelty, involvement, learning, refreshment, and social interaction (Kim et al., 2012; Hosany et al., 2022). Service quality and satisfaction are also relevant because the visitor evaluates the whole encounter, including facilities, staff interactions, and the physical setting (Otto & Ritchie, 1996; Baker & Crompton, 2000; Chen & Tsai, 2007). Destination image and perceived experience have been associated with behavioural intentions such as recommendation and revisit intention, although the strength and direction of these relationships vary by context (Stylos et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2014; Wang & Hsu, 2010). Employee and service interactions can also contribute to how a destination or service brand is experienced (King & Grace, 2010).

Digital destination communication

Social media functions as both a promotional channel and an environment in which destination images are co-produced by organisations and visitors. Visual content, online reviews, and user-generated narratives can influence awareness, information search, and destination choice (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Hays et al., 2013; Leung et al., 2013; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). The effectiveness of such communication depends not only on reach or engagement but also on source credibility, informational accuracy, and the congruence between online representations and the actual experience (Litvin et al., 2008; Filieri & McLeay, 2014). Accordingly, this study considers digital promotion together with the quality and accuracy of the information conveyed. Tourism organisations have increasingly used social platforms as part of their wider destination

communication mix (Mariani et al., 2016), while travel blogs and online narratives can function as information sources for prospective visitors (Volo, 2010; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012).

Islamic marketing ethics

Islamic marketing is commonly discussed as a value-oriented approach in which commercial exchange is expected to be consistent with ethical obligations and social welfare. Relevant principles include shiddiq (truthfulness), amanah (trustworthiness), fairness or ‘adl, and maslahah (the pursuit of benefit). These principles can inform the accuracy of promotional claims, fulfilment of service commitments, transparent pricing, fair treatment, and consideration of local community interests (Alserhan, 2010; Wilson, 2012; Abbas et al., 2019; Shah et al., 2021). The present study uses these concepts as sensitising analytical categories. It does not assess religious compliance through a formal audit or certification framework.

Research Method

Research design and participants

This study employed a qualitative case-study design to examine destination-marketing and management practices at Goa Terawang in their real-life setting. A case-study approach is appropriate for investigating a bounded case in context and integrating evidence from multiple sources (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). The research was conducted at Goa Terawang, Kedungwungu Village, Todanan District, Blora Regency, Central Java, in November 2026. The case focused on the management of the attraction and visitors’ experiences, with particular attention to changes that the source manuscript associates with 2025. The study involved one destination manager and four visitors.

Informants and sampling

Informants were selected purposively on the basis of their direct knowledge of, or experience with, the case. The primary informant was one destination manager who was familiar with destination development, promotional activities, and operational management. Four visitors who had visited Goa Terawang during the period associated with the reported changes were included as supporting informants. They were selected because they could describe information sources, motivations for visiting, perceptions of attractions and facilities, service encounters, and the correspondence between promotional information and on-site conditions. This small, information-oriented sample supports an exploratory account of the case but does not represent the full diversity of visitor perspectives.

Data sources and collection

The study drew on primary information from in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, as identified in the source manuscript. Interviews with the manager addressed the attraction’s development, promotional practices, facilities, service management, and ethical values. Interviews with visitors addressed pre-visit information, reasons for visiting, perceived attractions, facilities, service, and expectations. Observation and documentary materials were used to contextualise and compare interview accounts. The source manuscript does not specify interview dates, interview duration, the complete interview guide, a detailed observation protocol,

or an inventory of documents. These procedural details should be added by the authors if the relevant records are available; they cannot be reconstructed from the information provided.

Analytical procedures

The analysis followed the interactive model of qualitative data analysis, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2020). Interview, observation, and documentary materials were organised in relation to the research focus: destination development and differentiation; digital communication; visitor experience and service; and Islamic marketing ethics. Accounts were compared across informants and evidence types to identify recurring patterns, convergent information, and claims requiring qualification. The source manuscript does not report a formal codebook, qualitative-analysis software, independent coding, or a saturation assessment. Accordingly, the present account does not claim that these procedures were undertaken.

Trustworthiness and reporting

The source manuscript reports source triangulation, through comparison of the manager's and visitors' accounts, and method triangulation, through comparison of interviews, observation, and documentation. Triangulation can contribute to credibility when differences between sources are examined rather than treated as automatic confirmation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). In reporting the findings, claims are therefore qualified according to the type and extent of evidence available. In this study, the researcher did not use written consent forms from the participants; however, the researcher ensured that the confidentiality of the participants' names was maintained.

Results

Destination repositioning through experience-oriented development

The source material indicates that Goa Terawang's management sought to broaden the attraction beyond the cave's natural features. The development of a café inside the cave, additional facilities, and recreational activities was described as a way to create new reasons to visit. This represents a repositioning of the destination's offer: the cave remains the core attraction, while complementary activities expand the range of experiences available on site. The finding is consistent with destination-marketing perspectives that regard product differentiation and coordinated visitor experiences as elements of competitiveness (Buhalis, 2000; Pike & Page, 2014).

Visitors' accounts in the source manuscript identify the café-in-the-cave concept as a distinctive feature that contributed to their interest. This should be interpreted as a perceived point of differentiation among the four interviewed visitors, not as evidence that all visitor segments prefer the innovation. The experience-economy literature suggests that novelty and the staging of distinctive experiences can make a destination more memorable (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Kim et al., 2012; Hosany et al., 2022). However, the present case does not measure memorability or compare visitor responses before and after the development.

Digital promotion and information consistency

The manager reportedly used TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook to introduce the destination and communicate its facilities and atmosphere. These platforms offer visual and interactive

channels through which destinations can reach prospective visitors and encourage the circulation of visitor-generated content (Hays et al., 2013; Leung et al., 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). The visitor accounts also suggest that information about ticket prices and facilities was broadly consistent with conditions encountered at the site. This perceived consistency is analytically important because credible information can reduce uncertainty during travel planning (Litvin et al., 2008; Filieri & McLeay, 2014).

The findings therefore suggest that digital communication and on-site delivery operated as complementary elements in the case. Social-media exposure may draw attention, but the credibility of the destination's communication depends on whether the actual experience corresponds with the expectations created online. The study did not collect platform analytics, campaign expenditure, reach, engagement, referral traffic, or booking data. It therefore cannot determine which platform was most effective or quantify the contribution of digital promotion to visitor numbers.

Facilities, service responsiveness, and visitor experience

The source manuscript describes additional facilities and recreational activities as supporting a broader visitor experience. The manager also reportedly responded to visitor feedback by maintaining facilities and improving service. These practices align with research that treats service quality and destination attributes as contributors to visitor evaluations and loyalty-related intentions (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Schlesinger et al., 2020). The case suggests that facility development is not simply a physical investment; it is part of the service environment through which visitors assess the value of their visit.

The evidence, however, is largely descriptive and based on a small group of informants. The source manuscript does not provide systematic observation records, visitor satisfaction scores, or a breakdown of complaints and responses. Accordingly, the finding is framed as a reported management practice and visitor perception, not as a verified improvement in service performance.

Islamic marketing ethics in destination management

The source manuscript interprets the management's communication about prices and facilities as an expression of shiddiq, because the information was described as transparent and consistent with actual conditions. The reported willingness to respond to visitor feedback and maintain facilities is interpreted as amanah, because management is expected to honour the commitments implied by its promotional communication. These interpretations are compatible with Islamic marketing literature that emphasises truthfulness, trust, and ethical customer relations (Alserhan, 2010; Wilson, 2012; Abbas et al., 2019).

Fairness is interpreted in the source manuscript through the perceived relationship between the cost of admission and the facilities or experiences received. This is a relevant ethical question, but the available evidence does not include a systematic price comparison, visitor affordability analysis, or accounts from visitors who were dissatisfied. The principle of maslahah is discussed in relation to opportunities for the surrounding community. The manuscript reports that local economic opportunities may arise from tourism-related activity, but it does not identify beneficiaries, quantify local employment or income, or assess environmental effects. These claims

should therefore remain cautious and be treated as reported or inferred community benefits rather than demonstrated outcomes.

Taken together, the case suggests that ethical marketing is not confined to promotional messages. It also concerns how the destination delivers services, handles feedback, communicates prices, and considers the wider community. The study does not establish that Goa Terawang is a certified halal destination or that all operational dimensions meet a formal Sharia-compliance standard. Rather, it identifies selected management practices that can be interpreted through Islamic ethical principles.

Discussion

The central insight is that the attraction's perceived appeal was associated with the combination of a distinctive natural resource and complementary experience-oriented development. The café inside the cave and supporting facilities appear in the participants' accounts as elements that broaden the destination's value proposition. This extends the destination-marketing discussion by showing how a small attraction may seek differentiation through the integration of its core natural feature with additional consumption and recreation experiences. It also supports the view that memorable tourism experiences are constructed through multiple interacting dimensions rather than through the attraction alone (Kim et al., 2012; Hosany et al., 2022).

A second insight concerns the relationship between digital visibility and delivery credibility. The case does not support a causal claim that social-media promotion increased visitor numbers; rather, it shows that participants recognised social media as an information channel and valued the correspondence between online information and on-site conditions. This distinction matters because tourism marketing outcomes depend on more than exposure. Destination image, perceived credibility, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions are related but analytically distinct constructs (Zhang et al., 2014; Stylos et al., 2016; Filieri & McLeay, 2014). Future evaluation should therefore track digital metrics alongside visitor feedback, satisfaction, and actual visitation records.

A third insight is the potential contribution of Islamic marketing ethics as an operational lens for destination management. Shiddiq can guide accurate communication; amanah can inform the fulfilment of service promises; fairness can guide transparent and proportionate pricing and treatment; and maslahah can orient management toward community and environmental benefits. This interpretation connects destination marketing with Islamic marketing scholarship, while avoiding the unsupported claim that isolated ethical practices amount to comprehensive Sharia certification (Alserhan, 2010; Wilson, 2012; Khan, 2017; Shah et al., 2021).

The theoretical contribution is therefore integrative and contextual. The case brings together destination differentiation, digitally mediated information, visitor experience, and ethical marketing in one small nature-based attraction. It does not propose a new causal model or establish the relative effect of each factor. Its value lies in illustrating how these dimensions may be jointly considered in qualitative destination-management analysis.

Implications

The findings have several implications for destination management. First, managers of small nature-based attractions may consider developing complementary experiences that reinforce, rather than displace, the destination's defining natural asset. At Goa Terawang, the café-in-the-cave concept and supporting facilities were described by the interviewed visitors as distinctive elements. Management should assess such innovations in relation to visitor safety, environmental carrying capacity, and conservation of the cave environment. These operational considerations were not directly evaluated in this study and should be incorporated into future management assessments.

Second, digital promotion should be managed as an ongoing information and service responsibility, not simply as a visibility tactic. Managers should keep information about admission prices, facilities, access, and available activities accurate and current across TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and other communication channels. A practical evaluation system could combine platform-level indicators with visitor feedback and verified visitation records. The present study did not collect those metrics, so it cannot identify the most effective platform or quantify promotional effects.

Third, the case illustrates how Islamic marketing ethics can be translated into everyday management practices. Shiddiq may inform accurate and transparent communication; amanah may guide the fulfilment of service commitments and responsiveness to complaints; fairness may inform transparent pricing and equitable treatment; and maslahah may encourage attention to local community welfare and environmental stewardship. These are interpretive implications drawn from the reported practices, not evidence of formal Sharia certification or comprehensive compliance.

For tourism policymakers and local stakeholders, the case points to the value of supporting small destinations through management training, digital-communication capability, service-quality improvement, and mechanisms for community participation. Such support should be accompanied by monitoring of visitor experience, local economic benefit, and environmental impact so that destination development remains both competitive and responsible.

Conclusion

This study examined strategies described by the management of Goa Terawang to attract visitors, the factors perceived to support those strategies, and their interpretation through Islamic marketing ethics. The findings indicate that the destination's offer was broadened through the combination of the natural cave attraction, a café inside the cave, supporting facilities, and recreational activities. Social-media platforms were used to communicate the destination's features, while visitor accounts highlighted the importance of information consistency and the on-site experience.

The case also suggests that selected management practices can be interpreted through shiddiq, amanah, fairness, and maslahah. These principles provide an ethical lens for assessing promotional accuracy, service responsibility, perceived value, and community benefit. The evidence does not, however, establish formal Sharia compliance, quantify the impact of marketing,

or verify a causal increase in visitation. The study's contribution is an exploratory account of the interaction between experience-oriented destination development and ethical marketing practices in a local tourism setting. These ethical considerations also need to be situated within broader debates about Muslim consumer behaviour, Islamic branding, and the evolving scope of Islamic marketing (Sood & Nasu, 1995; Alserhan, 2010; Wilson, 2012; Sandikci & Jafari, 2013).

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be considered. First, the study involved only five informants: one manager and four visitors. Their accounts provide contextual insight but cannot represent the diversity of visitor segments, local residents, employees, vendors, or other stakeholders. Second, the study relies on qualitative interviews, observation, and documentation, but the source manuscript does not provide detailed interview protocols, observation logs, document inventories, or verbatim quotations. Third, the manuscript refers to increased visitor interest and visitation in 2025, yet it does not report an independently verifiable monthly or annual visitor-count series. The findings therefore cannot establish the magnitude, timing, or causes of any increase in visitation. Fourth, the study was conducted in November 2026 while participants were asked about experiences associated with 2025, which may introduce recall limitations. Fifth, digital marketing effectiveness was not assessed through platform analytics or campaign-level data. Finally, the ethical interpretation is based on selected principles and does not constitute a formal Sharia-compliance audit.

Future research should include a broader range of visitors and stakeholders, including local residents, workers, vendors, and relevant tourism authorities. Longitudinal research could compare visitor counts, visitor profiles, and operational indicators before and after specific destination-development initiatives. A mixed-methods design could combine interviews and observation with verified visitation records, social-media analytics, visitor surveys, and service-quality measures. Comparative studies of cave-based or nature-based attractions in Central Java could test whether the observed pattern is specific to Goa Terawang or reflects a wider destination-management approach. Further work should also operationalise Islamic marketing principles into transparent indicators covering promotional accuracy, pricing fairness, service accountability, community participation, and environmental stewardship.

CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Angellysa Chomaidah Maolina: Conceptualization, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft. **Muhammad Nabil:** Supervision, Methodology, Validation, Writing – review and editing.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The source manuscript does not report an institutional ethics approval reference or detailed participant-consent procedure.

Consent for publication

Not reported in the source manuscript.

Competing interests
The authors declare no competing interests.
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Data availability
The author states that the interview material has been anonymized and that supporting records can be made available upon reasonable request by contacting the author, while ensuring the confidentiality of participants and adherence to institutional requirements.
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