

# FACEBOOK AS A TOURISM PROMOTION TOOL

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## ABSTRACT

Tourism promotion in Facebook has gained tremendous attention from tourism organisation as part of their marketing strategy. Choosing Facebook to promote tourism has facilitate the tourism organisation to reach wider audience with limited resources. This study aims to explore Facebook usage among four Muslim friendly related tourism organisation promoting Muslim friendly tourism in Malaysia. The study uses content analysis to examine the employment of Facebook to promote Muslim friendly tourism in Malaysia and also identifies a framework of strategies for other tourism organisation to apply from. This study concluded that, tourism organisation not fully utilised Facebook and Facebook usage was still in a stage of trial-and-error with strategies of promotion among tourism organisation was vary significantly especially between government tourism organisation and private tourism organisation. This finding is relevant to understand how information been disseminated, and provided a valuable and useful implications for the Muslim friendly tourism organization to promote their tourism products and marketing strategy via Facebook.

**Keywords:** tourism, Facebook, content analysis, tourism promotion strategy

## INTRODUCTION

The emergences of internet have drastically changed how people gather and access information. Beginning with the Web 1.0, information shared was considered as one-way communication, and face-to-face communication non-existent. Later, Web 2.0 was introduced

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which promote the notion of wisdom of crowds,<sup>i</sup> that includes a wide range of internet platform such as social network, review websites, blogs, interactive website and photo and video sharing platform. Social networking sites (SNS) has become very popular and attracted interest from both, marketers and consumers<sup>ii</sup>. Today, consumers go online as this platform accommodate them with the ability to exert powerful influences upon each other while marketers go online to harness and manage interactions in this online platform to their own advantage<sup>iii</sup>. As of 2019, Facebook as a popular SNS has earned 26.3 per cent of social media users worldwide with 2.372 billion of its users is an active user<sup>iv</sup>. On a global scale, 79 per cent of travel marketers used Facebook as according to them Facebook are seen as the most effective platforms for targeting new audience, driving reach, establish brand awareness and organisation personalisation<sup>v</sup>.

This paper seeks to examine the employment of Facebook among Muslim friendly related tourism organisation. The research will proceed on three objectives as follows:

- 1) To explore how Muslim friendly related tourism organisation, employ Facebook to promote Muslim friendly tourism.
- 2) To demonstrate the varying degree of usage of Facebook among Muslim friendly related tourism organisation.
- 3) To determine factors that contribute to the different level of engagement activity.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA AND TOURISM**

Social media has changed the way information produced, consumed and how society can contribute to the information creation. Travel and tourism for example, are information-oriented business, where updated information is essential. Hence, social media is a suitable environment for building a dynamic platform for information supply and exchange.<sup>vi</sup> In the tourism context, social media shift the role of information provider from tourism organisation to user, consequently giving people an unprecedented power on the web<sup>vii</sup>. Social media has

become the most powerful and effective channel for information seeking and tourism promotion. It intensely used by consumers to seek information from the stages of decision-making, product or service consumption during travel and post experience engagement<sup>viii</sup>. Meanwhile, travellers were using social media as a platform from pre, during to post travelling in form of travel planning, decision making and later sharing experience and opinion on their recent trips.<sup>ix</sup>

Aside from that, prior research also suggested that social media has been used by tourism marketers for customer engagement and participation in order to fulfil customer social gratifications<sup>x</sup>. Social media has provided a platform for the tourism marketers to establish brand awareness and create a sense of belongingness<sup>xi</sup> among consumer as social media allowed interaction between both consumer with tourism organisation and other consumer. Consumer engage in social media to avoid risk since tourism products and services is intangible and experiential in nature<sup>xii</sup>. In order to increase engagement in social media page, tourism marketers should utilise promotional content as an instrument to attract consumer. Past studies suggest for the content with high level of interactivity, vividness with updated information on related subject in tourism product and services<sup>xiii</sup>

## **FACEBOOK USAGE AMONG MUSLIM FRIENDLY RELATED TOURISM ORGANISATION**

Adopting social media to promote tourism is indeed a new challenge to many tourism's organisation,<sup>xiv</sup> as it is totally a new environment that limit the control power of tourism organisation. Tourism organization needs to communicate more effectively with the consumer and understand the consumer behaviour in order to fulfil market needs. Facebook has been adapted by the Muslim friendly related tourism organisation especially in Southeast Asia to promote Muslim friendly tourism. For instance, Halal Trip has created its Facebook page in 2010 and manage to reached 682,712 likes and 683,081 followers as of September 2019. Based in Singapore, Halal Trip has become the fastest-growing travel Facebook page in Singapore in

2019<sup>xv</sup>. Aside from Halal Trip, Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC), Ministry of Tourism Malaysia also created its Facebook page in 2011 in order to promote Islamic tourism news and activities in Malaysia and global.<sup>xvi</sup>

Statistics had proved that 79 per cent of travel marketers has opted to social media to promote tourism products and services. However, there are still limitation on understanding on how they utilise social media and whether social media was use to its full potential especially among Muslim friendly related tourism organisation.<sup>xvii</sup>. The following discussion discuss how Facebook been use by Muslim friendly related tourism and its influence to the consumer.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted deductive approach to investigate how tourism organisation utilise Facebook to promote Muslim friendly tourism in Malaysia. A deductive content analysis was used since this study partially adopted instruments from previous literature<sup>xviii</sup>. A quantitative content analysis method is use to analyse Facebook post by tourism organisation as is the most suitable method for this study. Content analysis allows researcher to ‘use a set of procedures to make valid inferences from the text’<sup>xix</sup>. Social media can be considered as a new media, hence there will be difference in the way tourism organisation utilise social as part of their marketing efforts.

This study chooses Facebook instead of other social media because: 1) Facebook has millions active users; 2) a large participation from businesses and organisations; and 3) has a various function, scope and usage<sup>xx</sup>. The study identified Muslim friendly related tourism organisation which use Facebook to promote Muslim friendly tourism in Malaysia. To the end, two tourism organisations were selected to represent Malaysia (ITC and Tripfez Travel) and another two selected tourism organisations based in Singapore (Have Halal Will Travel and Halal Trip) which actively promoting Malaysia as a Muslim friendly destination.

The duration of post examine is from June 2017 to December 2017. This duration was choose based on the assumption that many Muslim and national festival celebrated within these seven months which requires increased marketing initiatives by tourism organisation and diverse sample of social media content to analyse<sup>xxi</sup>.

Aside from identifying strategies use in promoting Muslim friendly tourism, this study also conducted comparison between tourism organisation types of content and information. A pilot study was conducted in order to determine appropriate categories to represent strategies as well themes for each post. During the pilot study, several weeks were spent to examine Facebook posts in order to understand content types, suitable categories, information categories and types of engagement produced in tourism organisation Facebook page. Facebook graph API were used to collect data as it provides information on the list of post, type of media post, number of likes, comments and share as well as the post time and date created. Data were coded manually by two independent coders. They were explained on the coding procedures that later clarified by main researcher. Pilot study coded an initial portion of 35 samples which reliability test produced .953 coefficients which showed a high agreement between two coders<sup>xxii</sup>. Based on the pilot study Figure 1 was constructed which lists the categories used to code data.

**Figure 1: List of Categories for Content Analysis**

Categories	Description
General Information	Name of social media and link Total followers Total likes Page background (1. type of page e.g travel agency, official government page, etc. 2. Date page created) Total post from June 2017 – December 2017

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**Strategies**

**Categories**

**Description**

Post Frequency

Total post monthly  
Repeated post in overall post each month

Interaction

(online engagement is measure by looking at the number of like, comment and share)

**1) Interactive post**

No interactivity – status and photo  
Low interactivity – link to website and ask user to choose for alternative  
Medium interactivity – request user to interact (e.g. (visiting a certain web site, liking the post, commenting and entering contests for which they can win prizes)  
High interactivity – question and quiz

Type of Content and Categories

**1) Type of Content (Vividness)**

No vividness – text status  
Low vividness – photo and image  
Medium vividness – link to website  
High vividness – video

**2) Post Categories**

Arts and architecture  
Islamic/national festival  
Halal gastronomy  
Promoting local destination  
Promoting MFT services and product (e.g., Muslimah fashion, accommodation, Muslim friendly salon and spa etc.  
Islamophobia misconceptions

Travel in Islam  
Tips and conduct  
Sharing travel experience  
Report and event on MFT  
Islamic sharing/hadith  
*Dua* ' for traveler  
Muslim friendly information (e.g., prayer times)

Source of information      Tourism organisation  
  
Other tourism organisation  
  
Freelance contributor (hired by tourism organisation to write travel article)  
  
User Generated Content (UGC) – write by traveller in their respective FB page or personal blog and  
  
News agency  
  
Blog, website  
  
Islamic authority

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Figure 2 below, shows the general characteristics of Muslim friendly related tourism organisation. The earliest Facebook adopter, Halal Trip established a Facebook account in 2010, followed by ITC in 2011. Have Halal Will Travel (HHWT) created its Facebook account in February 2015, followed by Tripfez Travel 2016. It is to be noted that, the date which tourism organisation joined Facebook does not depict the numbers of its followers. For instance, HHWT created its Facebook in 2015, but has over 300,000 likers and followers. In regards to the frequency of post, both private Muslim friendly related tourism organisation from

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Singapore, Halal Trip and HHWT was actively post promoting Malaysia in their Facebook with over 100 posts in seven months. Compared to ITC, all three private tourism organisations in this study did not only post promoting Malaysia but also promoting other destination which offers a Muslim friendly service while ITC only post 69 posts in seven months.<sup>xxiii</sup>.



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**Table1: General Characteristics of the Muslim Friendly Related Tourism Organisation Facebook Pages**

Facebook Link	Facebook Page Name	No. of likes	No. of followers	Member since	Total posts	June 2017 – December 2017
facebook.com/Islamic-Tourism-Centre-21188	Islamic Tourism Centre	7,671	7,671	May 23, 2011	69	
facebook.com/tripfez	Tripfez Travel	69,135	69,395	2016	84	
facebook.com/HalalTrip	Halal Trip	630,542	630,710	2010	129	
facebook.com/havehalalwilltravel	Have Halal Will Travel	361,927	372,724	February, 2015	134	

## TOURISM ORGANISATION INTERACTION WITH CONSUMERS

Facebook encourages its users to interact by utilising an engagement button (like, comment and share). Users can also leave a review and give a rating to followed Facebook page. However, to encourage interaction, a content must be interactive. As suggested by previous study interactivity can be assigned to four level; No interactivity for text and photo, Low interactivity for link to website where users can view additional information, medium interactivity if page administrator asked for user feedback and High interactivity for question, contest and quizzes which encourage user to participate<sup>xxiv</sup>. The pilot study identified that, all tourism organisation in this study provided a low interactivity post in their Facebook (79.3

percent). There was an effort to varies post by providing a medium and high interactivity post especially among private tourism organisation although the post number is still lower (Table 2).

**Table 2: Summary of Interactive/Non-Interactive Posts by Tourism Organisations**

Tourism Organisation	No Interactivity		Low Interactivity		Medium Interactivity		High Interactivity	
	Total Post	%	Total Post	%	Total Post	%	Total Post	%
	ITC	30	43.5	39	56.5	0	0	0
Tripfez Travel	17	20.2	63	75.0	2	2.4	2	2.4
Halal Trip	18	13.9	107	82.9	3	2.3	1	0.8
HHWT	5	3.7	121	90.3	4	2.9	4	2.9

## TOURISM ORGANISATION FACEBOOK CONTENT

### *Vividness*

Content vividness refers to the degree to which a post stimulates the various senses<sup>xxv</sup> which requires the use of different types of content<sup>xxvi</sup>. Prior research indicated that vividness is among important factor to form positive attitude towards online promotion and user engagement<sup>xxvii</sup>. There are four levels of vividness; no vividness for text status, low vividness for photos and images, medium vividness for links to website and high vividness for videos<sup>xxviii</sup>. Table 4 shows that tourism organisations in this study likely to use medium vividness (link to website) type of content approximately 67.3 percent from overall posts, followed by high level of vividness content or video (44.3 percent). HHWT and Halal Trip use video mostly to give

information on food and food outlet as well as Malaysia local destination while Tripfez Travel video are mainly focus on inspiring talk clip from Muslim figure talk on topic on Islamophobia, Muslim revert and another story related to Muslim traveller experience.

**Table 3: Percentage and Distribution of Types of Content in Tourism Organisations Facebook Posts from June – December 2017**

Tourism Organisation	Type of Content							
	Text		Photo		Link to Website		Video	
	Total Post	%	Total Post	%	Total Post	%	Total Post	%
ITC	3	4.4	27	39.1	38	55.1	1	1.4
Tripfez Travel	0	0	16	19.1	59	70.2	9	10.7
Halal Trip	17	13.2	0	0	83	64.3	29	22.5
HHWT	4	3.0	8	6.0	100	74.6	22	16.4

In regard of engagement, user is likely to interact in high level of vividness (vividness) content (Like:  $M = 333.82$ ,  $SD = 702.82$ , Comment:  $M = 366.52$ ,  $SD = 366.52$  and Share:  $M = 279.11$ ,  $SD = 808.02$ ). Followed by medium level of vividness (link to website) content (Like:  $M = 330.35$ ,  $SD = 939.62$ , Comment:  $M = 40.59$ ,  $SD = 122.80$ ). However, compared to link to

website (medium vividness), user is likely to share text status (no vividness). This finding is parallel with previous literature that indicates that information presented in the form of video is highly favourable and exhibited more online engagement than presented with only text or photo<sup>xxix</sup> (Table 5).

**Table 4: Summary Statistics of Online Engagement for Types of Content in Tourism Organisations Facebook Posts from June – December 2017**

Type of Content	Like		Comment		Share	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Text	187.25	395.31	13.04	40.63	163.43	623.40
Photo	159.55	335.62	17.88	61.31	69.29	419.95
Link to Website	330.35	939.62	40.59	122.80	97.93	250.07
Video	333.82	702.82	105.51	366.52	279.11	808.02

Notes: *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation

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**Post categories**

There are 13 categories identified from the Muslim friendly related tourism organisation Facebook post. Overall, 19.7 per cent of post was on halal gastronomy, followed by 15.4 per cent promoting Malaysia local destination. There are few new post categories that has been introduced in tourism organisation Facebook page. For instance, a post on reports and events related to Muslim friendly tourism and traveller sharing their experience by writing their travelling story either in their personal Facebook account (than been shared by tourism organisation) or writing it in tourism organisation Facebook page as a freelance contributor hired by tourism organisation.

Table5: Distribution and Percentage of Posts Categories by Tourism Organisations

Post Categories	Tourism Organisation							
	ITC		Tripfez Travel		Halal Trip		HHWT	
	Total Post	%	Total Post	%	Total Post	%	Total Post	%
Arts and Architecture	2	2.9	3	3.6	3	2.3	2	1.5
Islamic/National Festival	3	4.6	5	6	12	9.3	6	4.5
Halal Gastronomy	0	0	6	7.1	25	19.4	51	38.1

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Promoting Destination	9	13.0	21	25	14	10.9	20	14.9
Promoting MFT Products and Services	8	11.6	12	14.3	7	5.4	18	13.4
Islamophobia Misconceptions	0	0	10	11.9	0	0	2	1.5
Travel in Islam	0	0	1	1.2	5	3.9	4	3
Tips and Conduct	0	0	9	10.7	23	17.8	11	8.2
Sharing Travel Experience	0	0	9	10.7	1	0.8	17	12.7
Report and Event on MFT	45	65.2	6	7.1	7	5.4	0	0
Islamic Sharing/Hadith	1	1.5	2	2.4	11	8.5	1	0.7
<i>Dua</i> ' for Traveller	0	0	0	0	17	13.2	2	1.5
Information on Muslim Matters	1	1.5	0	0	4	3.1	0	0

## TOURISM ORGANISATION SOURCE OF INFORMATION

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Source of information is important in determining content credibility and determine the role of particular source to influence user attitude. Prior literature suggested that in the age of new media, User Generated Content (UGC) had replaced the role of information provider from organisation to media user<sup>xxx</sup>. Nonetheless, this study proves otherwise. Most of the content was produced by tourism organisation (54.3 per cent) with 84.5 per cent from Halal Trip posts was generated by the organisation itself, followed by Tripfez Travel 57.1 per cent and ITC 52.2 per cent. HHWT has given more space to the freelance contributor about 66.4 per cent to provide them with post related to tourism, mostly written by traveller, telling story on their travelling journey. Freelance contributor is the independent traveller hired by tourism organisation to write travel story. Instead of share an UGC post, private tourism organisation opted to hired a freelance contributor might be to avoid biased opinion that individual made based on his or her personal impression towards the company<sup>xxxi</sup>. ITC did not open their Facebook page to either UGC or freelance contributor where posts was mainly produced by ITC and shared from other news agency (Table 10).

**Table 6: Distribution and Percentage of Tourism Organisation Source of Information**

Source of Information	Tourism Organisation							
	ITC		Tripfez Travel		Halal Trip		HHWT	
	Total Post	%	Total Post	%	Total Post	%	Total Post	%
Tourism Organisation	36	8.7	48	11.5	109	26.2	33	7.9
Other Tourism Organisation	3	0.7	6	1.4	1	0.2	1	0.2

Freelance Contibutor	0	0.0	10	2.4	9	2.2	89	21.4
UGC	0	0.0	3	0.7	8	1.9	3	0.7
News Agency	30	7.2	12	2.9	2	0.5	0	0.0
Blog, Website	0	0.0	5	1.2	0	0.0	4	1.0
Islamic Authority	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	1.0

## DISCUSSION

From the above discussion, it is identified that, the selected tourism organization adopted a strategy which is not related to the actual meaning of content but represent the structural characteristics of the posts. This study identified four themes to revealed tourism organisation strategies in promoting Muslim friendly tourism in Facebook namely post frequency, interaction using content, type of content and source of information. The study also identified several issues and challenges in using social media as medium to promote tourism activities. Those are as follows.

A major concern for tourism organisation to adopt social media, is to measure social media effectiveness. In this study social media presence and effectiveness was measured by looking at the audience size (numbers of likes and followers) and also engagement (like, comment and share). In regards of audience size, time period does not determine the number of followers; the longer time tourism organisation adopt Facebook, the bigger the numbers of likers and followers. However, this study proved otherwise. For instance, ITC adopted Facebook since 2011 but only managed to gather 7,671 likes and followers as of end of 2018 while HHWT



which only established its Facebook account in 2015 managed to gather more than 300,000 likes and followers after three years of establishment.

Secondly, in regards of post frequency, there are no specific patterns on which month had more posts compared to other months. However, private tourism organisation does increase post at end of year to promote travel package and asking user for next year travel plan. In regards of post repetition, tourism organisation in this study rarely repeated previous information in their post. Nevertheless, if repetition happened often the information was the same without or too little updated information. The degree of measuring social media adoption success also measured by looking at the consumers engagement and interaction. This was measured by looking at the consumer response to particular post (like, comment and share)<sup>xxxii</sup>.

Thirdly, in regards to which type of content attracted more interaction, most of the consumers is likely to engage (like, comment and share) on a high level of vividness content (video) most probably because of the detail's information in video or the way information presented in the video. This finding is contrary with previous study that suggested that images and photo is a popular choice among consumer compared to video assume it might take longer time to view and understand than other posts<sup>xxxiii</sup>. Halal gastronomy post was the most occurred post by tourism organisation in their Facebook page (19.7 per cent). It may relate to the fact that food is among the factors considered by traveller before and during travel and for Muslim traveller searching for halal food is paramount important<sup>xxxiv</sup>. As for information source, although UGC as previously mentioned in literature played an important role to influence consumer decision making and had replaced the role of information providers from tourism organisation, this study showed that tourism organisation mostly write their own post and rarely shared a UGC post. However, private tourism organisation did hired traveller to be their freelance contributor to fulfil consumer empowerment need.

## CONCLUSIONS

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The problem with many current online advertising strategies is that, organisations try to fit everything into existing structures and models. The success of social media adoption is really about is the ability to adjust quickly to changes from the demand, supply, and technology side. Without a clear understanding tourism organisation marketing effort in social media is based on gut feelings and trial and error approaches rather than strategic and persuasive experience.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>vii</sup> George Carlisle and Jackie Scerri, “Web 2.0 and User-Generated Content: Legal Challenges in the New Frontier,” *Journal of Information, Law and Technology* 2, (2007): 1-22.

<sup>viii</sup> Marianna Sigala, “WEB 2.0 in the Tourism Industry : A New Tourism Generation and New e-Business Models,” *Travel Daily News*, no. January 2007 (2007), <http://www.traveldailynews.com/columns/article/20554/web-2-0-in-the-tourism>.

<sup>ix</sup> This phenomenon or known as User Generated Content (UGC) or e-Word of Mouth (e-WOM) has shaped the way information being disseminate in the online media. UGC in social media has created both new possibilities and challenges to the tourism marketers. The information exchange and content accessibility are high, fast and cheap, but the challenge is to the tourism marketers is to manage the unprecedented large-scale information by taking control of format and types of communication

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