

Development of Religious Tourism Destinations at Darul Fikri Islamic Boarding School, West Kalimantan

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Abstract

This article discusses the development of a religious tourism destination at Darul Fikri Islamic Boarding School in West Kalimantan. The promotion of religious tourism managed by Islamic boarding schools often faces challenges in reaching broader audiences. Therefore, development efforts—particularly in effective communication strategies utilizing digital technologies—are crucial to compete in an increasingly competitive tourism industry. This study aims to explore communication strategies employed by Pesantren Darul Fikri in Kubu Raya in promoting its religious tourism offerings. Using a qualitative approach, the study analyzes digital content, conducts on-site observations, and includes interviews with managers and visitors. The findings reveal that offline communication methods such as word-of-mouth, brochures, billboards, and direct promotional activities successfully reach wider audiences and foster strong personal connections with prospective visitors. Meanwhile, online communication strategies via the website and social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram—featuring event documentation and visitor testimonials—have created a viral effect, expanding promotional outreach and attracting a larger number of visitors. Therefore, it is essential for the pesantren to continue integrating both strategies to achieve more comprehensive and effective promotion. Further research involving other pesantren is also recommended to gain broader insights into best practices in promoting religious tourism.

Keywords: Communication Strategy; Promotion; Darul Fikri Religious Tourism.

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas tentang pengembangan destinasi wisata religi di Pesantren Darul Fikri Kalimantan Barat, mengingat, fenomena tentang promosi wisata religi yang banyak dikelola pesantren sering menghadapi tantangan dalam mencapai audiens yang lebih luas sehingga perlu pengembangan terutama dalam strategi komunikasi yang efektif dengan memanfaatkan teknologi digital sehingga dapat bersaing di industri pariwisata yang semakin kompetitif. Tulisan ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi strategi komunikasi sebagai upaya pengembangan destinasi wisata yang dijalankan oleh Pesantren Darul Fikri Kubu Raya dalam mempromosikan wisata religinya. Selanjutnya dengan pendekatan kualitatif menganalisis konten digital, observasi di lokasi, serta wawancara dengan

pengelola dan pengunjung, Sebagai temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi secara offline melalui pembicaraan “mulut ke mulut”, brosur, baliho, dan kegiatan promosi langsung berhasil menjangkau audiens lebih luas dan membangun hubungan personal yang kuat dengan calon pengunjung. Di sisi lain, strategi komunikasi online melalui website, media sosial Facebook dan Instagram, dengan dokumentasi kegiatan serta testimoni pengunjung, berhasil menciptakan efek viral yang memperluas jangkauan promosi dan menarik minat lebih banyak pengunjung. Karena itu, pesantren perlu terus mengintegrasikan kedua strategi ini untuk mencapai promosi yang lebih komprehensif dan efektif, serta mempertimbangkan perluasan studi ke pesantren lain guna memperoleh gambaran yang lebih luas mengenai praktik terbaik dalam promosi wisata religi.

Kata Kunci: Strategi Komunikasi; Promosi; Wisata Religi Darul Fikri.

INTRODUCTION

This study observes that the growing public interest in religious tourism reflects a deepening social need for spiritual exploration and meaningful cultural experiences. In recent years, this trend has been particularly noticeable among younger generations who seek travel experiences that offer not only recreation but also profound spiritual and cultural value. Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), as institutions that integrate education with spiritual development, hold significant potential to meet this demand, although they often remain relatively unknown to the broader public. With the rapid advancement of information technology and social media, the ways in which people search for and share information about tourist destinations have changed drastically. This shift necessitates the development of more effective communication strategies by pesantren to reach and attract a wider audience of tourists.

In West Kalimantan, Darul Fikri Islamic Boarding School, located in Sungai Belidak Village, Sungai Kakap, Kubu Raya, stands out as the only pesantren that manages a religious tourism program. Founded on February 21, 2013, and led by Nur Kholik, S.H.I., under Notarial Deed No. 53 (AHU-162.AH.02.01.2008), the pesantren has grown into a unique non-formal educational institution. On September 12, 2020, the religious tourism initiative was officially inaugurated by the Regent of Kubu Raya, Muda Mahendrawan, as both an educational effort and a business unit to support the pesantren's operations.



Figure 1. Location and Inscription of Darul Fikri Tourism

The uniqueness of this religious tourism lies in its blend of local culture and religious education, a combination not found in other pesantren in West Kalimantan. The program is designed to introduce the pesantren to the public while providing an engaging educational experience. Unlike most pesantren, Darul Fikri allows visitors to purchase a ticket for IDR 5,000, granting them the opportunity to experience the daily lives of the students (*santri*). This hands-on engagement offers visitors a deep understanding of spiritual life while showcasing the lives of children from diverse backgrounds, including orphans, the underprivileged, and children from broken homes. Through these interactions, visitors are not only inspired to develop greater empathy and social awareness but also gain firsthand insight into various social issues.

In managing religious tourism, effective communication strategies are essential for successful promotion. Communication plays a pivotal role in disseminating information, whether through conventional means or increasingly through digital media. A well-crafted communication strategy is especially crucial for increasing visitor numbers, particularly in the wake of the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector, including religious tourism destinations such as Darul Fikri. Recovery efforts through a communication perspective aim to restore tourist interest in the current post-pandemic context.

Originally intended as an educational initiative, the religious tourism program at Darul Fikri has successfully attracted numerous visitors and generated significant revenue to support the pesantren's operations. The program serves not only as entertainment for visitors but also as a platform for public engagement with the pesantren. Through direct interaction with the students, the program aims to inspire visitors to participate more actively in supporting the pesantren's development. This phenomenon of religious tourism promotion within pesantren presents a compelling area of study, considering that pesantren function not only

as religious educational institutions but also as spiritual and cultural centers that can appeal to a broad spectrum of tourists.

Religious tourism in the context of pesantren represents a form of tourism that integrates spiritual and cultural activities with religious education. As traditional Islamic educational institutions, pesantren offer a unique experience that is both spiritually enriching and educational, introducing visitors to Islamic educational traditions and the everyday lives of santri. Research indicates that religious tourism at pesantren can generate substantial economic, social, and cultural benefits. According to Rinschede, religious tourism plays a vital role in supporting local economies and preserving cultural and religious heritage. Pesantren as religious tourism destinations also serve as sites for pilgrimage, education, and cultural exchange, where activities such as religious studies, rituals, and visits to the graves of renowned scholars act as major attractions. Thus, pesantren not only serve religious educational purposes but also emerge as religious tourism destinations rich in spiritual and cultural value.

This study responds to the limited scope of previous research, which has often failed to accommodate communication perspectives and local dynamics in the context of religious tourism. Earlier studies have tended to overlook the essential role of communication in the development of religious tourism, thereby lacking a holistic view of promotional effectiveness. The roles of both offline and online communication strategies have been underrepresented in existing literature. Furthermore, many studies have not sufficiently considered local and cultural specificities of pesantren, which can significantly influence how communication is conducted and received by audiences. Accordingly, this study raises two research questions: (1) What offline communication strategies are used to promote the Darul Fikri Religious Tourism? and (2) What online communication strategies are employed for the same purpose? Addressing these questions provides insight into how offline and online communication contribute to enhancing awareness, interest, and visitor attendance at Darul Fikri.

This study is grounded in the argument that effective communication strategies, both offline and online, are critical to the promotion of religious tourism, particularly in the context of pesantren, which possess unique characteristics. By integrating these two approaches, pesantren can strengthen their image as attractive spiritual destinations while reaching broader and more diverse audiences. Additionally, understanding local dynamics and cultural specificities enables pesantren to deliver messages that are more relevant and meaningful, thereby enhancing visitor experience and increasing engagement.

METHOD

This study focuses on the religious tourism initiative managed by Darul Fikri Islamic Boarding School in West Kalimantan. The pesantren, known for its active promotion of religious tourism, provides valuable insights and offers a relevant case study for exploring offline and online communication strategies in religious tourism promotion. A qualitative research approach was employed to capture the complexity of the phenomenon. In line with this approach, a case study method was adopted to allow in-depth exploration and the use of multiple data sources to build a rich and holistic understanding.

Data were collected through interviews with tourism managers to gather information on communication strategies and interviews with visitors to understand their experiences and perceptions. Direct observation was conducted at the pesantren to document tourism activities, interactions between managers and visitors, and the use of promotional media. Additional data were obtained through the review of relevant written and digital sources, including journal articles, books, and online materials discussing communication strategies and the promotion of religious tourism, to strengthen the analysis.

The data were analyzed through coding, categorization, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation was also applied as a key technique to enhance the credibility and validity of the research findings.¹

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Developing Religious Tourism Destinations through Offline Communication Strategies

This study reveals that communication strategy plays a vital role in promoting religious tourism, particularly in attracting and retaining visitors' interest. One crucial approach identified is the use of offline communication to reach a broader audience, foster personal relationships with visitors, and enhance awareness and interest in religious tourism. The findings show that the management primarily utilizes word-of-mouth communication, in which prospective visitors receive information from individuals who have previously visited the destination..

*"We often deliver messages to visitors when they arrive, explaining the various attractions we manage. Upon returning home, these visitors share their experiences with friends and family," one respondent stated.."*²

Additional data suggest that this method is considered effective in building personal relationships, thereby fostering trust between the management and the

¹ Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña, 2014

² Hasil interview dengan Abdul Khalik, pengasuh pesantren dan pengelola wisata, 2024

visitors. This results in a word-of-mouth effect, where the satisfaction of previous visitors encourages others to come.

“Information about tourism programs shared by family or friends is usually more trusted. That’s why people are interested in visiting—they rely on trusted sources, which makes them more willing to come.”³

The management also engages in direct marketing through brochures, billboards, and signage displayed in strategic locations and during specific events. As expressed by Dede, “...we distribute brochures at religious events and on other occasions.” Moreover, they conduct promotional outreach during various community activities..



Figure 2. Darul Fikri sign

Another strategy includes organizing special events, such as open houses, which allow potential tourists to directly experience the activities conducted at the pesantren. Observations indicate that face-to-face interactions during physical visits provide tangible experiences that strengthen the desire to return. This strategy highlights the importance of personal engagement and direct interaction in establishing strong connections with the audience. Visitors are able to walk through the pesantren environment, directly experiencing the atmosphere and activities, thereby increasing their interest and likelihood of revisiting or recommending it to others.



Figure 3. Enthusiasm visitors ⁴

Gambar 3 memperlihatkan situasi wisatawan yang sedang berkunjung terlihat antusias mendengarkan penjelasan dari pemandu wisata, serta tanya jawab yang memperlihatkan keingintahuan dan minat besar dari para pengunjung. Beberapa pengunjung terlihat mengambil foto dan video untuk mendokumentasikan pengalaman mereka. Suasana interaksi yang ramah dan akrab antara pengunjung dan pemandu wisata mencerminkan keberhasilan strategi komunikasinya dalam menciptakan pengalaman yang mendalam dan berkesan. Selain itu, tampak juga adanya fasilitas pendukung seperti area duduk dan papan informasi yang membantu pengunjung memahami lebih lanjut tentang pesantren, Cafe anti galau, miniatur kapal Nabi Nuh, area dengan tajuk "rumahku surgaku," dan fasilitas lainnya.



Figure 4. Miniature of Noah's Ark and Entrance Ticket Counter ⁵

An analysis of promotional materials confirms that the offline communication strategy includes brochure distribution, billboard installation, and open house events open to the public. Documentation shows that visitor numbers increase following each promotional activity. Overall, the data suggests that offline communication strategies not only broaden promotional outreach but also strengthen personal relationships with visitors, resulting in a more meaningful and memorable religious tourism experience.

⁴ Dokumentasi. Peneliti 2024

⁵ Dokumentasi. Peneliti, 2024

Three key points emerge from the data. First, word-of-mouth significantly strengthens the promotional network and increases visitation. Second, the use of brochures and billboards proves effective in raising public awareness of the destination. Third, open house events inviting the wider community generate positive effects on public interest and awareness. These findings underscore how offline communication strategies can effectively raise awareness, expand promotional reach, and strengthen promotional networks.

The success of brochures and billboards in raising awareness of the religious tourism site at Pesantren Darul Fikri aligns with the concepts of outdoor advertising and direct marketing, which remain effective, particularly in local marketing contexts. Printed media such as brochures and billboards are especially useful in communities with limited digital access. Brochures allow for detailed information delivery, while billboards attract attention through their visual appeal. This can be explained through the mere exposure effect, which posits that repeated exposure increases the likelihood of a positive response. By distributing brochures during religious events and placing billboards in strategic locations, the pesantren increases the frequency of exposure, ultimately influencing visitors' decisions to come.

Previous studies also support the ongoing relevance of traditional media in tourism promotion, especially in areas with limited internet access or where audiences prefer traditional communication methods. Offline communication methods complement digital strategies, creating a more holistic and effective approach to reaching diverse audience segments

From the perspective of Islamic communication, brochures and billboards may be considered as part of tabligh, an important component of conveying Islamic messages with wisdom and appropriate methods. In this context, these media serve as tools to communicate the Islamic values embedded within the tourism experience. Based on the Maqashid Sharia theory, using printed media to promote religious tourism can also be seen as an effort to preserve religion (hifz al-din) by introducing spaces that strengthen faith and religious knowledge.

The promotion of Darul Fikri's religious tourism through outreach activities at strategic locations aligns with marketing communication theories and the concept of event marketing. Socialization efforts during religious events or exhibitions allow messages to reach relevant audiences directly, effectively enhancing awareness and interest. This supports previous findings that event marketing, when paired with promotional mix strategies, design, and experiential elements, can increase interest and engagement.

By conducting outreach at strategic events, the management successfully captures attention and draws more visitors. This reflects principles of place-based

marketing, which emphasizes conducting promotions in places relevant to the target audience. Research shows that promotions conducted in locations frequently visited by target audiences have a greater impact on awareness and visitation decisions.

The word-of-mouth (WOM) strategy implemented at Pesantren Darul Fikri has significantly strengthened its promotional network and increased the number of visitors. WOM leverages the power of personal recommendations, which are known to be among the most effective methods in influencing tourist decisions. In religious tourism, WOM not only functions as a promotional tool but also as a form of social validation. When satisfied visitors share their positive experiences—either directly or via social media—it builds trust among potential tourists. This is supported by studies such as Sarapang et al., which found that social media-based WOM significantly affects visit intentions and destination perceptions.

Furthermore, WOM organically strengthens promotional networks. Each visitor who shares their story expands the promotional reach at no extra cost, making it an efficient tool in tourism communication strategies. Nabilla (2024) emphasizes that WOM can enhance destination visibility and attractiveness through widespread information sharing across visitor networks. Thus, WOM is not just a complement but a key element in promoting religious tourism, directly contributing to increased visits to Darul Fikri.

This WOM approach, where satisfied visitors share their experiences, resonates with the concept of *syiar Islam*. In Islam, sharing goodness and positive experiences—especially those related to faith—is considered a form of *dakwah*. In the context of religious tourism, WOM promotes not only the site but also the Islamic values experienced by visitors. This aligns with the principle of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (promoting good and preventing evil), where positive shared experiences invite others to visit and benefit from similar spiritual experiences.

The open house initiative inviting the general public to visit Darul Fikri has also positively influenced public awareness and interest. Through direct interaction during visits, potential tourists can experience the pesantren environment firsthand, fostering personal connections and reinforcing a positive image. Studies show that promotional activities involving direct experience, such as open houses, are effective in influencing visitor decisions and broadening destination promotion. These open houses may also be seen as a form of interactive *dakwah*, where visitors engage directly with Islamic life, aligning with the Islamic communication concept of *al-bayan*—conveying messages clearly and understandably to the audience. These firsthand experiences not only reinforce the positive image of the pesantren but also contribute to fostering *ukhuwah* (brotherhood and unity).

Developing Tourism Destinations through Online Communication Strategies

Online communication plays a pivotal role in promoting, attracting, and sustaining visitor interest. The use of social media and engaging content has proven to be an effective tool in reaching a broader audience. This method not only facilitates dynamic interaction with visitors but also supports the development of an active online community. Furthermore, understanding visitor preferences and satisfaction through the analysis of social media interactions has become a key factor in increasing tourist visits and leveraging the potential of digital word-of-mouth recommendations.

This study found that the communication strategy employed involves the development and management of the website <https://darulfikri.org/>, which provides informative and appealing content. The website offers comprehensive information about the activities, programs, and facilities of the pesantren, along with various educational and inspirational content that supports religious tourism promotion. The strengths of the Darul Fikri website include a user-friendly design that enables visitors to easily navigate and quickly access the information they need. Additionally, the website features interactive elements such as online registration forms, photo galleries, and videos of pesantren activities, offering visually engaging insights for potential visitors. The content is regularly updated to ensure accuracy and relevance. Testimonials from previous visitors further enhance trust and provide reassurance regarding the quality and experience offered at Darul Fikri.

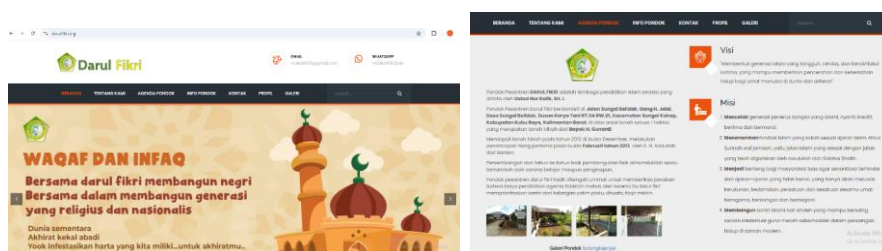


Figure 5. Website of Darul Fikri⁶

In addition to the website, the management also applies a two-way symmetrical communication model by utilizing social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to share compelling content, including photos, videos, and success stories related to religious tourism at Darul Fikri. Abdul Khalik, the tourism manager, stated that online media like Facebook and Instagram are employed to broaden the dissemination of information about tourism programs.

⁶ Dokumen dalam Website Pondok Pesantren Darul Fikrim 2024

“These online media are intended to disseminate information more widely, especially to audiences who have not yet been reached by offline communication such as events, lectures, word-of-mouth, and others.”

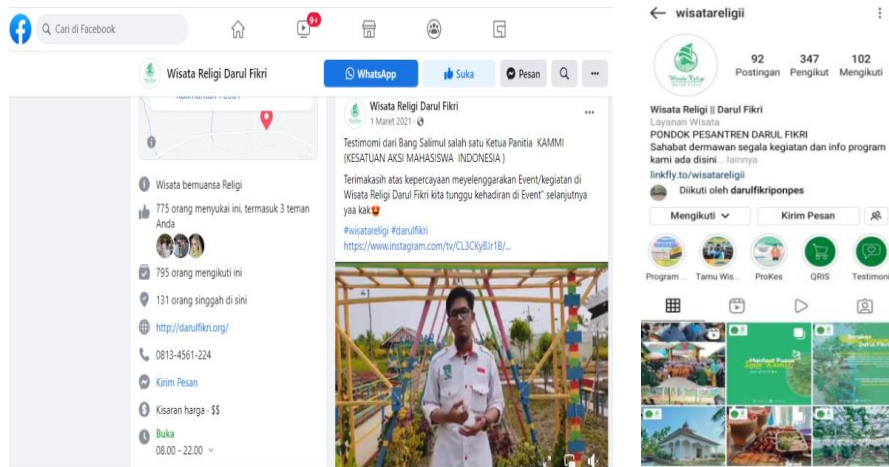


Figure 5. Darul Fikri Religious Tourism Social Media

To prepare content for social media, the management has formed an IT team responsible for producing content in text, photo, and video formats. According to Dede, the content preparation begins with documenting tourism visits and activities through photography and videography, followed by writing descriptions to accompany the media. “After documenting the activities, we prepare descriptive texts, which are then handed over to the IT (media) team to be edited and uploaded to online platforms.” The final content is published on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, showcasing engaging pesantren activities that attract visitor attention and encourage interaction.

The image above displays various promotional materials, including photos and videos of pesantren activities, visitor testimonials, and announcements of upcoming events. This content is designed to attract social media users, encourage interaction through comments and tags, and increase awareness and interest in visiting. The management of these social media platforms demonstrates how online communication strategies are effectively employed to promote religious tourism, leveraging the power of visual storytelling and digital interaction to build relationships with a wider audience.

Some visitors also shared their experiences through positive testimonials. Dede noted, “Some posted their experiences on their personal Facebook timelines and tagged the pesantren’s Facebook account. The posts were seen by many and received comments from others expressing their interest in visiting. They not only wrote statuses but also uploaded pictures taken at the location, which triggered

questions and curiosity from others.” One visitor stated that they learned about the pesantren’s tourism offerings through a friend’s Facebook post. “This is not my first time coming—I’ve been here three times, and I even brought a group as their tour guide” (Gusti). These personal experiences shared by visitors attracted many comments, indicating growing interest. User-generated content (UGC) produced by visitors appears to significantly aid in organically expanding the reach of promotional efforts.

Based on the findings, four key insights emerge. First, the management utilizes a website and social media (Facebook and Instagram) to extend the reach of promotion, which has proven effective in increasing tourist appeal. Second, personal testimonials shared by visitors generate positive buzz on social media. Third, visitor engagement holds potential in creating informal brand ambassadors for the destination. Fourth, visitors who act as tour guides contribute to strengthening word-of-mouth promotion, which is highly effective in attracting more visitors. These four findings highlight how online communication has transformed the landscape of religious tourism—both from the perspective of visitor experience and destination management.

The online media communication strategies implemented play a significant role in promoting tourism programs. One key aspect is the documentation of pesantren activities through photos and videos uploaded on Facebook and Instagram. These visual contents not only capture attention but also provide a vivid representation of the visitor experience. Data analysis also reveals that social media communication is effective in attracting new visitors through dynamic interaction while also fostering a broader and more engaged community. The management can utilize feedback from visitors to enhance the services and religious tourism experiences offered. Regularly shared documentation and content also help maintain relationships with the audience, making social media an invaluable component of the pesantren’s communication strategy.

The findings of this study reinforce previous research indicating that social media significantly impacts promotional efforts and can increase visitor numbers to religious tourist destinations. Social media is effective in raising public awareness and destination popularity while helping construct a positive informational image. The online communication strategies align with the theory of social interaction in digital media, which posits that social media platforms enable interaction and collaboration among users and offer opportunities for organizations to directly engage with their audiences. Instagram, for example, has emerged as a dominant platform in this context, demonstrating its effectiveness in attracting and maintaining audience interest.

Testimonials shared by visitors on their social media also play a significant role in enhancing trust and interest among potential visitors. As Dede, the

pesantren manager, stated, “Some posts on Facebook and Instagram show visitors sharing the tourism programs with others, along with testimonials from those who have previously visited.” These findings confirm earlier studies that social media plays a crucial role in information dissemination. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook are utilized to deliver various types of content, including informative, promotional, and inspirational materials, reflecting a diversified communication strategy. Social media also serves as an effective tool for spreading positive messages (Adinda Shofa Walmarwa, 2024). This is consistent with the concept of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), where testimonials and online recommendations shared by users can significantly influence perceptions and decisions of prospective consumers.

Social media use also facilitates active two-way interaction between management and audiences. Visitors can leave comments, provide testimonials, ask questions, and share their experiences—interactions that are responded to by management and subsequently inform adjustments and improvements to communication strategies. These interactions contribute to viral effects, expanding promotional reach and increasing the pesantren's visibility within society. For example, visitor posts tagging the pesantren's Facebook account received numerous comments and attention, generating buzz that encouraged more people to visit. Previous studies have shown that social media enables organizations to build closer relationships with their audiences through interactive communication and direct engagement. This is supported by Xiang and Gretzel's findings that active social media presence enhances both visibility and reputation of tourist destinations.⁷

CONCLUSION

The communication strategies employed by the management of Darul Fikri Religious Tourism in West Kalimantan—both offline and online—have succeeded in expanding promotional outreach and increasing the destination's appeal. Offline strategies involve brochures, banners, word-of-mouth, and open house events, effectively reaching wider audiences and building personal connections with prospective visitors. Online strategies, through Facebook and Instagram, have enhanced visibility and attracted greater public interest via documented activities and visitor testimonials, contributing to increased visitor numbers and satisfaction. The implication is that management should continue integrating both strategies to achieve more comprehensive and effective promotion, strengthen their social media presence with creative content, and engage in deeper interactions with audiences to sustain and grow visitor numbers for religious tourism. This study is limited to a single tourism site; future research

⁷ Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism Management*, 31(2), 179–188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2009.02.016>

should explore other pesantren-based tourism initiatives to gain broader insights into the most effective communication strategies for promoting religious tourism..

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