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A Potential Framework for an Impactful Tourism Destination Innovation in Aceh

Teuku Meldi Kesuma[1], M. Ridha Siregar[2], Hendra Halim[3], Khairil Umuri[4], Muhammad Rizqi Siregar[5]
Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Syiah Kuala[1,2,3,4]
Pusat Riset Komunikasi Pemasaran, Pariwisata, dan Ekonomi Kreatif Universitas Syiah Kuala[5]
Banda Aceh, 23111, Indonesia
Correspondence Email: hendra.halim@usk.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study proposes a potential framework for impactful tourism destination innovation in Aceh by synthesizing recent evidence on smart/digital destinations, Muslim-friendly service assurance, living-lab co-creation, and sustainability–resilience. Using an integrative review method, we screened and synthesized peer-reviewed works to derive two complementary levels of intervention: a program/actor level, where four capacity blocks—personal competencies, Muslim-friendly service assurance, technology skills, and policy facilitation—produce operational artefacts (service scripts, end-to-end SOPs, Halal & Prayer Map/QR, data-entry routines, and MoUs); and a destination system level, where capacity blocks feed Integration and activate three value streams (Interpretation of Memory & Culture, Muslim-Friendly Hospitality, and Community-Based Nature Tours). Results specify a compact destination KPI set—Net Experience Score, Repeat Intention Rate, Visitor-Flow Index, Waste-to-Recycling Ratio, and Conservation Score—linked to a stage-gated pipeline (Ideas → Research & Co-design → Pre-pilot → 12-week Pilot & Commercialization → Advanced Market/Scale-up). The framework argues that a Pentahelix orchestration (DMO, industry, community/NGOs, academia, media/platforms), coupled with a weekly operational dashboard and interpretation-first design, can improve experience quality, flow management, and socio-ecological outcomes. The model yields testable propositions and a practical roadmap for destination managers in Aceh and similar contexts.

Keywords: Aceh; Destination innovation; Living labs; Muslim-friendly tourism; Pentahelix collaboration; Smart destination; Visitor-flow management.

INTRODUCTION

Building on its geographical, cultural, and religious potential, Aceh has strong potential to develop impactful destinations—not only increasing visits but also creating inclusive socio-economic value, strengthening community resilience, and maintaining sustainability. Post-disaster literature demonstrates how collective memory and networks of local actors can be reimagined into meaningful and resilient tourism propositions; studies in Aceh demonstrate that post-disaster tourism can contribute to recovery if managed sensitively and with a community focus (Liu-Lastres et al., 2020). At the same time, community practices and participation are strongly influenced by local religious values, making destination innovation in Aceh inextricably linked to the Islamic context that exists within the social sphere (Tan et al., 2022). Other research confirms that Banda Aceh's image as a tsunami tourism city is also moderated by its rich cultural and Islamic heritage—an indication that Aceh's destination differentiation stems from the synergy of narratives of memory, culture, and religiosity (Hafasnuddin et al., 2022).

At the global level, the tourism landscape is driven by the digitalization and integration of a "smart tourism" ecosystem that links local governments/DMOs, businesses, communities, and tourists through data, IoT, platforms, and applications. This innovative

ecosystem is not just technology, but a mechanism for value co-creation across actors to generate new experiences, operational efficiencies, and data-driven decisions (Bhuiyan et al., 2022). The living lab approach—a collaborative, real-world testing space—has been shown to accelerate the co-creation of more valuable tourism services and experiences (Dickinger & Kolomoyets, 2024a). Similarly, a systematic review of open innovation in the tourism sector emphasizes the need for a collaborative architecture (platforms, data governance, triple helix partnerships) to prevent innovation from being fragmented at the small business scale (Cardoso et al., 2024).

For Aceh—as a predominantly Muslim destination—the Muslim-friendly/halal dimension is a crucial differentiator. Recent research proposes a more precise "Muslim-Friendly Tourist Destination Image" construct and scale to map Muslim-friendly destination attributes (availability of religious services, halal cuisine, value-based services) (Hamdy et al., 2024; Musa et al., 2021). Other empirical findings demonstrate that halal destination performance influences perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty among Muslim tourists (Al-Ansi & Han, 2019). In the Aceh context, a recent study links Islamic attributes and destination image with satisfaction and revisit intention—providing evidence that Sharia-compliant product/service innovation can translate into tourist behavior (Permana & Adam, 2024). Bibliometric literature also confirms the surge in research on halal tourism in Indonesia in recent years, as well as its position on the global sustainability agenda (Khan et al., 2025; Kurniawan et al., 2025).

Digital transformation broadens the spectrum of destination innovation—from business models and service processes to supply chains—and correlates with resilience and competitive advantage. A cross-industry study of tourism shows that innovation labs can foster digital innovation capacity and business model renewal for destinations/DMOs (Santarsiero et al., 2024). Other research maps how technological collaboration and digital capabilities shape tourism product excellence and the resilience of future tourism supply chains (Ku, 2025). On the sustainability front, the technology-organization-environment match guides the "ecologization" of tourism, while the socio-ecological systems framework emphasizes the adaptation of destinations to shocks (Wang et al., 2024; Zeng et al., 2023). At a macro level, a mature innovation ecosystem is a crucial condition for high tourism competitiveness (Zhang, 2025).

However, the review of Aceh studies is still fragmented: some focus on post-disaster recovery and destination image, others assess Islamic/halal attributes, and still others explore citizen participation and post-disaster communication. What remains relatively unanswered is an integrated framework that ties together diverse innovations—product, process, marketing, and organizational—with co-creation governance (living labs), digital ecosystem readiness (smart tourism), halal compliance standards, and measurable impact indicators (economic, social, environmental, and resilience). Such a framework aligns with the latest trends in destination management, which leverage AI/intelligent technologies for decision-making and actor orchestration, and would be highly relevant for Aceh (Bingöl & Yang, 2025).

Based on these knowledge gaps, the research "A Potential Framework for an Impactful Tourist Destination Innovation in Aceh" will formulate a conceptual framework that: (1) orchestrates co-creation across actors (government/DMO, tourism players, MSMEs, communities, academics) through living labs; (2) links digital infrastructure (data, platforms, applications) in an innovative destination ecosystem; (3) integrates Muslim-friendly/halal attributes as core values of differentiation; and (4) formalizes impact metrics (inclusive economy, quality of experience, sustainability, and resilience). Thus, Aceh's destination innovation is not only "new," but also "impactful"—measurable, manageable, and sustainable.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts the integrative review method, which assesses, critiques, and synthesizes literature on a research topic in ways that enable new theoretical frameworks and perspectives to emerge (Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2005). Literature reviews in their various forms have been recognized as effective research methods for building a firm foundation for advancing knowledge and facilitating theory development (Webster & Watson, 2002). In contrast to a systematic review, an integrative review does not aim to cover every article ever published on the topic; rather, it combines perspectives and insights from different fields or research traditions to construct a coherent, actionable model (Snyder, 2019).

Aligned with our aim—to propose a potential framework for impactful tourist destination innovation in Aceh—this study selects pertinent literature across tourism innovation, smart/digital destinations, value co-creation/living labs, Muslim-friendly/halal tourism, and sustainability–resilience. The selected works are reviewed, summarized, and synthesized to formulate a conceptual framework and a set of testable propositions. The integrative review proceeded through five steps:

1. Defining the research question

We set the guiding question: What are the key components of a potential framework for an impactful tourist destination innovation in Aceh that integrates data-driven smart destination capabilities, Muslim-friendly service assurance, co-creation through Pentahelix collaboration (government/DMO, industry–MSMEs, academia, community/NGOs, and media/platforms), and sustainability–resilience? The question is broad enough to accommodate multiple strands of evidence, yet specific enough to direct the identification of essential elements and relationships for the proposed framework.

2. Conducting a comprehensive search

We searched prominent international databases—primarily Scopus-indexed portals such as ScienceDirect (Elsevier), SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis, SAGE, Emerald, Wiley, and MDPI—to locate the most relevant peer-reviewed articles. To complement database retrieval, Google Scholar was used for forward–backward snowballing of key references. Core keyword families included: “destination innovation”, “smart tourism” OR “smart destination”, “living lab” OR “value co-creation”, “Muslim-friendly” OR “halal tourism”, “sustainability” OR “resilience”, “visitor flow” OR “overtourism analytics”, and “Aceh” OR “Banda Aceh” OR “Sabang” OR “Gayo/Takengon”. Boolean operators and truncations were adapted to each portal; searches were conducted in English and Indonesian.

3. Screening and selecting studies

After compiling potential records, we evaluated relevance against the research question. Titles/abstracts were screened, followed by full-text reading where needed. Inclusion prioritized peer-reviewed journal articles (conceptual, empirical, or reviews) that: (a) present frameworks/models or clearly articulated constructs related to destination innovation, smart/digital capabilities, co-creation/living labs, Muslim-friendly/halal attributes, and/or sustainability–resilience; and (b) offer insights transferable to the Aceh context. Editorials, non-refereed pieces, and works with insufficient conceptual or methodological clarity were excluded. Final selection balanced breadth across themes with depth on construct definitions and relationships.

4. Extracting data and analyzing findings

We summarized each article using an extraction matrix (authors, year, purpose/context, focal constructs and definitions, methods, key findings, and implications). Following integrative review guidance, we highlighted patterns, themes, and tensions that inform concept development (Seuring & Müller, 2008). We applied an integrated conceptual development process that moves from simple abstractions to increasingly precise

models capable of capturing real-world complexity while remaining context-sensitive (Jones & Coviello, 2005). As a conceptual paper outcome (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009), we carefully structured arguments so that the emergent framework is internally coherent and theoretically meaningful (Smithey Fulmer, 2012). The synthesis converged on four pillars (co-creation & governance; data-driven smart destination; Muslim-friendly service assurance; meaningful experiences & community impact) and three value streams (memory–culture interpretation, Muslim-friendly hospitality, and community-based nature tours), together with a practical set of KPIs.

5. Drawing conclusions and making recommendations
In the final step, we consolidated the review findings to articulate the conceptual framework and propositions that can guide implementation and future empirical testing. We translated the synthesis into managerial recommendations and a 12-month roadmap (beginning with 12-week living-lab pilots) and specified monitoring indicators (NES, RIR, LSS, HCS, WRR, CVFI) to facilitate adaptation and scale-up.

This study did not impose a strict time limit on literature retrieval; however, because destination innovation, smart systems, and Muslim-friendly assurance are contemporary agendas, the final set predominantly comprises recent works (with emphasis on 2019–2025). The resulting framework is conceptual and is intended to guide future empirical work to test the propositions and refine the model in the Aceh context.

RESULTS

Technological Innovation and Tourism Destination Innovation

Modern destinations gain an advantage when they consolidate reservation data, reviews, complaints, and visitor flow counts into a regularly reviewed operational dashboard, enabling agile, evidence-based operational decisions. For Aceh, the digital layer is aimed at (i) curating thematic itineraries that link tsunami memory, Islamic culture, and nature, (ii) implementing congestion warnings and time-slotting/e-ticketing at queue-prone points (Baiturrahman Grand Mosque courtyard, Iboih pier, Lake Laut Tawar promenade), and (iii) closing reviews to action within 24 hours or less. Research synthesis reveals those innovative data capabilities—such as analytics from reservations/reviews, simple dashboards, and real-time service feedback—consistently enhance experience quality and improve service recovery agility (Bhuiyan et al., 2022; Cerdá-Mansilla et al., 2024; Ndou et al., 2023). At the same time, the interpretation-first approach (integrated audio guides and signage) maintains the ethics of narrative memory and cultural legibility—key to strengthening identity and place attachment in the post-disaster Aceh context (Liu-Lastres et al., 2020).

Capacity Building and Tourism Destination Innovation

At the program/actor level, the Destination Innovation Program (see Figure 1) receives input from four capacity blocks—Personal Competencies, Service Assurance (Muslim-friendly), Technology Skills, and Policy Facilitation—and transforms them into operational artifacts ready for deployment, not just hours of training. The expected outcomes are: (1) service scripts and incident handling guides (personal competencies), (2) end-to-end Muslim-friendly SOPs and a Halal & Prayer Map (QR) (service assurance), (3) operator data input routines, dashboard accounts, and alert protocols (technology skills), and (4) a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for data sharing, facility access, and a simplified halal certification pathway (policy facilitation). Empirical evidence confirms that Muslim-friendly assurance increases perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty/repurchase intention (Abror et al., 2025; Al-Ansi & Han, 2019; Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2020; Hamdy et al., 2024).

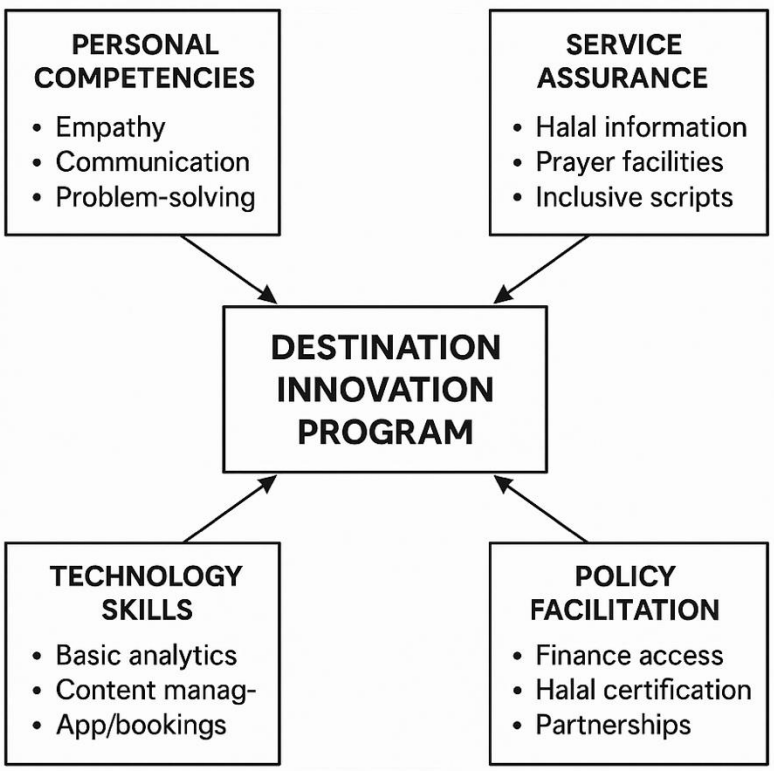

Figure 1. Destination Innovation Program

Pentahelix Collaboration and Tourism Destination Innovation

Innovation performance improves when government/DMOs, academia, businesses/operators, communities/NGOs, and media/platforms function as a unified orchestration system. In the Aceh scheme, the DMO acts as the orchestrator (performance charter, data standards, quality gates, pilot funding), academia supplies research, curation, and evaluation, operators ensure reliability and service recovery, communities maintain the authenticity of memory-sensitive sites, faith, and nature, and media/platforms close the review-to-action loop. The living-lab mechanism accelerates ideation, prototyping, and iteration across actors (Dickinger & Kolomoyets, 2024b), while the smart destination perspective connects the interests of visitors, residents, operators, and policymakers within a holistic architecture (Cerdá-Mansilla et al., 2024). In the post-disaster context of Aceh, the ethical curation of memories linked to Islamic culture and nature has been shown to strengthen destination identityi (Halim et al., 2023; Liu-Lastres et al., 2020; Madjid et al., 2024; Musa et al., 2021; Sitepu et al., 2024; Tan et al., 2022; Utami et al., 2023).

Integration, Value Streams, and Outcomes

The Conceptual Framework (see Figure 2) explains how Capacity Blocks are integrated into three value streams most readily tested in Aceh: (1) Interpretation of Memory & Culture (Tsunami Museum–Baiturrahman audio-guide route; ethical storytelling; integrated signage); (2) Muslim-Friendly Hospitality (consistent assurance across the guest journey: transportation–attractions–accommodation–F&B); and (3) Community-Based Nature Tours (Iboih–Rubiah & Takengon) with conservation touchpoints, safety notes, and capacity limits. The Framework establishes comprehensive Outcomes & KPIs that are reported at the destination level: Net Experience Score, Repeat Intention Rate, Visitor-Flow Index, Waste-to-Recycling Ratio, and Conservation Score. The literature on flow management and socio-ecological resilience supports the use of these indicators for density mitigation and carrying capacity maintenance (Julio Guerrero & Dias, 2024; Rogowski et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024).

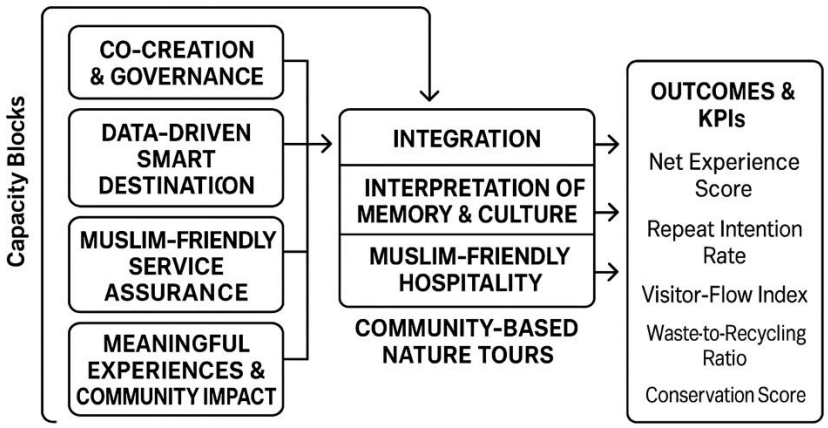

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework Impactful Tourimt Destination Innovation in Aceh

Stage-Gated Implementation

The collaboration is executed through a phased pipeline: (1) Ideas → (2) Research & Co-design (field observations, user walk-throughs, quick studies) → (3) Pre-pilot (routes/SOPs/signage/audio-guides ready for testing) → (4) Pilot & Commercialization (12 weeks, KPI gates) → (5) Advanced Market/Scale-up (integration of the Banda Aceh–Sabang/Weh–Takengon portfolio). Transition between stages depends on agreed-upon thresholds—for example, a Net Experience Score increase of ≥ +10 points from baseline and a peak Visitor-Flow Index decrease of ≥ 20% at priority nodes (aligned with innovative destination practices and density control; (Julio Guerrero & Dias, 2024; Ndou et al., 2023)).

Managerial Implication

The findings point to destination (not just business unit) actions: (1) publish a one-page performance charter and run quarterly Pentahelix forums to fill the pilot pipeline; (2) implement a destination dashboard and enforce weekly review-to-action; (3) standardize Muslim-friendly SOPs and publish Halal & Prayer Maps (QR) at entry points/online; (4) launch modular thematic routes with audio guides and uniform signage; (5) implement visitor-flow playbooks (one-way lanes, time slots, buffer zones) at the Baiturrahman platform, Iboih-Rubiah pier, and the Danau Laut Tawar promenade; (6) monitor KPIs (Net Experience Score; Repeat Intention Rate; Visitor-Flow Index; Waste-to-Recycling Ratio; Conservation Score) at the site → cluster → destination level and scale interventions that prove effective.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that impactful destination innovation in Aceh requires a mutually reinforcing two-tier orchestration. At the program/actor level, the Destination Innovation Program, which receives input from four capacity building blocks—personal competencies, service assurance (Muslim-friendly), technology skills, and policy facilitation—must produce concrete operational artifacts (SOPs, service scripts, QR-based halal and prayer maps, data input routines, and MoUs/partnerships). These artifacts are a prerequisite for implementation readiness and ensure that changes do not stop at training but culminate in service improvements that can be tested and measured. At the destination system level, the Conceptual Framework demonstrates that four capacity blocks—Co-creation & Governance, Data-Driven Smart Destination, Muslim-Friendly Service Assurance, and Meaningful Experiences & Community Impact—need to be integrated by DMOs to activate the three most relevant value streams for Aceh: Interpretation of Memory & Culture, Muslim-Friendly Hospitality, and Community-Based

Nature Tours. This integration ensures a common thread between experience curation (memory, culture, and nature), inclusive service assurance, and data-driven operations at densely populated points (Baiturrahman, Iboih-Rubiah, and Danau Laut Tawar).

The results also confirm that smart/data capabilities and living-lab mechanisms accelerate the ideation-prototyping-iteration cycle and enable weekly, evidence-based decisions via operational dashboards (reservations, reviews, complaints, and visitor flow). When these digital features are paired with interpretation-first design (integrated audio guides and signage) and consistent Muslim-friendly standard operating procedures (SOPs), the quality of the experience improves, service recovery becomes more agile, and Aceh's differentiation as an ethical and sustainable Muslim-friendly destination becomes clearer.

To ensure measurable impact, this study established a set of destination-level Outcomes & Key Performance Indicators: Net Experience Score, Repeat Intention Rate, Visitor-Flow Index, Waste-to-Recycling Ratio, and Conservation Score. This set of KPIs is concise yet sufficient to connect visitor experience, flow, and socio-ecological health. The implementation of a stage-gated pipeline—Ideas → Research & Co-design → Pre-pilot → Pilot & Commercialization (12 weeks, KPI gates) → Advanced Market/Scale-up—provides a disciplined implementation path, with clear progress thresholds (e.g., increasing NES and decreasing VFI peaks).

Substantively, the findings demonstrate that the Pentahelix (DMO/government, academia, industry/operators, communities/NGOs, media/platforms) is a necessary condition for innovation to avoid fragmentation. The DMO's role as an orchestrator—through performance charters, data standards, quality gates, and pilot support—is a lever for aligning program artifacts (micro-level) with system architecture (macro-level), so that Aceh's destination innovation becomes measurable, manageable, and sustainable.

Final implications: (1) success is determined more by consistency of execution (artifact → pilot → scale-up) than by the size of the initiative; (2) regular KPI-based measurement must become an organizational habit, not just a project activity; (3) Muslim-friendly differentiation needs to be positioned as a destination-level service guarantee, not a sporadic attribute per-venue. A limitation of this research is its conceptual nature—findings need to be tested empirically (e.g., surveys and PLS-SEM to test causal pathways; quasi-experimental evaluation in a 12-week living-lab). Further research directions are suggested to compare the effectiveness of governance scenarios, test the sensitivity of KPIs across seasons/segments, and analyze the distribution of benefits to MSMEs and communities so that portfolio replication in Aceh can be organized fairly and sustainably.

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