

## Exploring Economic Potential in Religious Tourism Areas Through A Tourism Awareness Paradigm

### Abstract

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**Background.** This article discusses the economic potential in religious tourism areas in Indonesia through the tourism awareness paradigm. The tourism sector, particularly religious tourism, has become an important pillar in economic growth, contributing around 4.5% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

**Aim.** With the increasing number of domestic and international tourists, religious tourism areas such as Borobudur Temple and Istiqlal Mosque show a significant impact on regional income and job creation.

**Method.** This study uses a qualitative approach with the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to identify economic opportunities and existing challenges.

**Result.** The results of the study show that the application of the tourism awareness paradigm can increase community participation in the management and preservation of religious sites, as well as encourage the development of supporting infrastructure. Empowering local communities through small and medium enterprises (SMEs) also plays an important role in achieving sustainable economic benefits. Thus, the development of religious tourism areas not only improves the welfare of the community, but also preserves local culture and traditions.

**Keywords:** Economic Potential, Religious Tourism Area, Tourism Conscious Paradigm

### INTRODUCTION

The importance of the tourism sector in the economy the tourism sector has become one of the main pillars in the global economy. According to data from the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), the tourism sector accounted for more than 10% of the world's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and created more than 300 million jobs in 2019 (World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), 2020). In Indonesia, the tourism sector contributes around 4.5% to GDP and is expected to continue to increase in line with the revival of the tourism industry post-COVID-19 pandemic. The existence of tourist areas, including religious tourism, not only brings income to the region but also improves the welfare of local communities through job creation and infrastructure development.

The tourism sector in the economy the tourism sector functions as a driving force for the economy in many countries, including Indonesia. As one of the countries with rich cultural and natural diversity, Indonesia has great potential in the tourism industry. According to a report from the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), global tourism is experiencing significant growth, with an increase in the number of international tourists reaching 1.5 billion in 2019 (Yogyakarta Tourism Office., 2023). In Indonesia, this sector is one of the main sources of foreign exchange and contributes to the development of infrastructure and public facilities. Therefore, it is important to explore more deeply how the tourism sector, especially religious tourism, can be utilized to improve the local economy.

Significance of religious tourism Religious tourism has a unique appeal because it combines spiritual and cultural aspects. In Indonesia, there are many religious sites that are tourist destinations, such as Borobudur Temple, Istiqlal Mosque, and Jakarta Cathedral Church. According to data from the



Ministry of Tourism, tourist visits to these religious sites are increasing every year, with Borobudur being one of the most visited sites, reaching more than 4 million tourists in 2019 (Tourism Statistics Data. Jakarta: Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2020). In addition, religious tourism also offers an immersive experience for visitors to understand the spiritual values and cultural traditions that exist in the local community. Thus, the development of religious tourism areas can have a positive impact not only on the economy but also on the preservation of culture and traditions.

Significance of religious tourism Religious tourism is one of the segments in the tourism industry that has great potential to be developed. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia, religious tourism not only attracts domestic tourists but also foreign tourists who are looking for spiritual and cultural experiences. An example of a famous religious tourism area in Indonesia is Yogyakarta with Borobudur Temple and Prambanan Temple which attract millions of visitors every year. In addition, cities such as Aceh with the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque and Jakarta with the Istiqlal Mosque are also significant religious tourism destinations. The existence of these sites not only provides spiritual value but also has a significant economic impact on the local community.

This research aims to explore the economic potential that can be generated from the development of religious tourism areas. In this context, economic potential includes increasing regional income, creating jobs, and developing local businesses such as homestays, restaurants, and souvenir shops. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2023), the tourism sector in Indonesia has the potential to generate revenue of up to Rp 300 trillion in 2023 if managed properly. Therefore, by focusing on the development of religious tourism areas, it is hoped that it can make a significant contribution to the local and national economy.

Introducing a tourism awareness paradigm the tourism awareness paradigm is an approach that emphasizes the importance of public awareness and concern for the tourism potential in their area. In the context of religious tourism, this paradigm can help the community to be more active in maintaining and preserving existing religious sites, as well as understanding the economic benefits that can be obtained from tourism development. By implementing a tourism-aware paradigm, the community is not only the beneficiary but also plays a role as a manager and conservator of the existing cultural and spiritual heritage. This is in line with the principle of sustainable development which prioritizes the balance between the economy, society, and the environment (Mason, 2008).

Exploring the economic potential of religious tourism areas The main purpose of this study is to identify and explore the economic potential that can be obtained from the development of religious tourism areas. By analyzing relevant data and statistics, it is hoped that new opportunities can be found that can be taken advantage of by local communities. For example, the development of homestays and culinary businesses based on local traditions can be an alternative source of income for the community. In addition, improving infrastructure such as transportation and accessibility to tourist sites will also contribute to regional economic growth.

Introducing a tourism awareness paradigm the tourism awareness paradigm is expected to be the foundation in the development of religious tourism areas. This concept emphasizes the importance of community involvement in the management and preservation of tourist sites. By increasing public awareness of the economic and social benefits of religious tourism, it is hoped that they will be more committed to maintaining and preserving existing cultural heritage. This approach is also in line with the principle of sustainable tourism which prioritizes a balance between economic, social, and environmental interests (Swarbrooke, 1999).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Concept of Religious Tourism**

Religious Tourism Religious tourism can be defined as a trip undertaken by individuals or groups with the aim of visiting places that have spiritual or religious value. (Cohen, 2021), religious tourism covers various aspects, from visits to places of worship, participation in religious rituals, to deep spiritual experiences. This type of religious tourism can be divided into two main categories: places of worship and religious activities. 1. Places of Worship Places of worship, such as mosques, churches,

temples, and temples, are one of the main attractions in religious tourism. In Indonesia, which has religious diversity, there are many places of worship that are tourist destinations. For example, the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, which is the largest mosque in Southeast Asia, attracts thousands of visitors every month (Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), 2022). In addition, Borobudur Temple, which is a UNESCO world heritage site, not only has historical but also spiritual value for Buddhists. Data shows that tourist visits to Borobudur reach more than 4 million people every year, making a significant contribution to the local economy (Report on Tourist Visits to Borobudur Temple. Ministry of Tourism. Exploring Economic Potential in Religious Tourism Areas through the Tourism Awareness Paradigm, 2023).

**Religious Activities** In addition to places of worship, religious activities are also an integral part of religious tourism. These activities include various religious events, such as holiday celebrations, pilgrimages, and spiritual retreats. For example, the celebration of Eid al-Fitr in Indonesia is not only an important moment for Muslims, but also attracts domestic and international tourists who want to experience a distinctive religious atmosphere. According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, more than 1 million people make pilgrimages to the tombs of guardians in Java every year, which not only strengthens faith but also has an economic impact on local communities through the service and trade sectors (Report on Tourist Visits to Borobudur Temple. Ministry of Tourism. Exploring Economic Potential in Religious Tourism Areas through the Tourism Awareness Paradigm, 2023).

**The Role of Religious Tourism in Society** Religious tourism not only functions as a means of recreation, but also has an important role in strengthening cultural identity and educating the community. In the context of Indonesia, which is rich in cultural and religious diversity, religious tourism can be a bridge to understand and appreciate differences. **Strengthening Cultural Identity** Religious tourism contributes to strengthening people's cultural identity. Visits to sacred places and participation in religious rituals help individuals to connect with their cultural roots. For example, the Vesak Festival at Borobudur Temple is not only a celebration for Buddhists, but also attracts the attention of the wider community and tourists to learn about the traditions and cultural values contained in it. According to research conducted by the Culture and Tourism Office, this festival increases public awareness of the importance of preserving local culture (Community Empowerment Program in the Tourism Sector. Jakarta: Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy., 2022). **Educating the Community** In addition to strengthening cultural identity, religious tourism also functions as an educational tool for the community. Through visits to holy sites and participation in religious activities, people can learn about different histories, moral values, and religious practices. This is especially important in Indonesia's multicultural context, where interfaith understanding can encourage tolerance and harmony. A study by the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies shows that religious tourism can increase interfaith understanding among the younger generation (CRCS, 2021).

Thus, religious tourism not only provides economic benefits, but also contributes to the formation of people's character and identity. In this context, efforts are needed to develop the potential of religious tourism in a sustainable manner, by paying attention to the social and cultural aspects that exist in the community.

### **Tourism Conscious Paradigm**

Public awareness of tourism potential the tourism awareness paradigm is an important concept in the development of tourist areas, including religious tourism. Public awareness of the tourism potential around it is the key in creating destinations that are not only attractive, but also sustainable. According to data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia, the tourism sector contributed around 4.5% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022, showing how important awareness of tourism potential is in driving local economic growth (Community Empowerment Program in the Tourism Sector. Jakarta: Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy., 2022).

People who have a high awareness of the tourism potential in their area tend to be more active in developing and promoting these destinations. For example, in religious tourism areas such as Borobudur Temple, local communities play an active role in managing tourism activities by offering homestay services and local products. This not only increases people's income, but also strengthens local cultural identity. According to a survey conducted by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), areas with

high tourism awareness have shown an increase in tourist visits of up to 30% in the last five years (BPS, 2023). Public awareness also includes an understanding of the historical and spiritual values contained in religious sites. People who are aware of the importance of preserving these sites will not only maintain their authenticity and integrity, but will also strive to attract more visitors. For example, in the city of Yogyakarta, the community has developed an educational tourism program that teaches visitors about the history and cultural significance of each religious site, thereby increasing interest and tourist visits (Yogyakarta Tourism Office., 2023).

Responsibility for the environment and culture Responsibility for the environment and culture is an important aspect of the tourism awareness paradigm. In the context of religious tourism, this includes efforts to preserve the environment around religious sites, as well as maintain existing cultural values. According to a report by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), sustainable tourism does not only focus on economic aspects, but also on environmental and cultural preservation (Yogyakarta Tourism Office., 2023).

People who have a high awareness of this responsibility tend to be more active in maintaining cleanliness and environmental sustainability. For example, in religious tourism areas on the island of Bali, local communities routinely hold beach clean-up activities and places of worship, which not only improve the aesthetics of the environment but also attract tourists to visit. Data from the Bali Tourism Office shows that a clean and well-maintained area can increase tourist visits by up to 25% (Widiastuti, 2021).

In addition, maintaining cultural values is also important to attract tourists who are looking for an authentic experience. People who are aware of this responsibility will strive to maintain existing traditions and customs. For example, in the Minangkabau area, the community holds cultural festivals that showcase local traditions, which serve as an attraction for tourists as well as a means to preserve their culture (Dinas Pariwisata Minangkabau, 2023).

Benefits of the tourism awareness paradigm increases community participation One of the main benefits of the implementation of the tourism awareness paradigm is the increase in community participation in tourism development. When people are aware of the existing tourism potential, they tend to be more involved in various activities related to tourism, from management to promotion. According to research conducted by Gadjah Mada University, community participation can increase tourist satisfaction and strengthen the competitiveness of destinations (Gadjah Mada University (UGM)., 2023).

High community participation can also create new jobs. In the context of religious tourism, the community can play the role of tour guides, craftsmen, or accommodation service providers. For example, in the religious tourism area in Central Java, many people have switched professions to become tour guides after realizing the economic potential of tourist visits. This has a positive impact on family income and the local economy as a whole (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022).

In addition, community participation in tourism development can also increase the sense of ownership of tourist destinations. When people feel involved and belonging, they will be more committed to protecting and preserving the environment and local culture. This can be seen in religious tourism areas in West Nusa Tenggara, where the community is actively involved in the management and promotion of places of worship, thereby increasing tourist visits by up to 40% in the last two years (Dinas Pariwisata Lombok, 2023). Preservation of cultural and environmental assets The tourism awareness paradigm also contributes to the preservation of cultural and environmental assets. With the increasing public awareness of the importance of protecting the environment and culture, there will be greater efforts to preserve religious sites and the surrounding environment. According to a report from UNESCO, well-managed world heritage sites can attract more tourists and provide significant economic benefits to local communities (CRCS, 2021). For example, in the religious tourism area in Sumatra, communities have succeeded in maintaining the authenticity and integrity of their cultural sites by involving tourists in conservation activities. Programs such as handicraft workshops and training on local traditions not only preserve the culture, but also provide a unique experience for tourists. Data from the Sumatra Tourism Office shows that tourist participation in conservation activities can increase

interest in visits by up to 35% (Dinas Pariwisata Minangkabau, 2023). Environmental conservation is also the main focus in the tourism awareness paradigm. People who are aware of the importance of protecting the environment will strive to reduce the negative impact of tourism activities. For example, in the religious tourism area in Kalimantan, the community has implemented waste management programs and the use of renewable energy to support environmental sustainability. This not only makes the area cleaner and more attractive, but also helps maintain the local ecosystem (Indonesian Tourism Statistics. - Kalimantan Tourism Office., 2023).

Thus, the implementation of the tourism awareness paradigm not only provides economic benefits, but also ensures that culture and the environment are preserved for future generations. People involved in the preservation of cultural and environmental assets will create sustainable and attractive tourist destinations for tourists, thereby increasing the attraction and visits to religious tourism areas.

## **METHOD**

**SLR Qualitative Research** This study uses a qualitative approach with the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. This method was chosen to identify, evaluate, and integrate relevant research on the economic potential within religious tourism areas. SLRs allow researchers to gather information from a variety of verified sources, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of the topic being researched. According to (Tranfield, 2003), SLR is a systematic and transparent process in identifying, assessing, and interpreting previous research. In this context, SLR helps in exploring how the tourism awareness paradigm can be implemented to increase the economic potential of religious tourism areas.

In the SLR process, researchers conduct literature searches in various academic databases, such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Scopus. This search is focused on articles that discuss the relationship between religious tourism and its impact on the local economy. The data obtained is then analyzed to find emerging patterns and themes, as well as to identify research gaps that need to be filled. The results of this SLR are expected to provide deeper insights into how religious tourism areas can be used to improve the welfare of local communities. Relevant case examples can be found in religious tourism areas in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. According to research conducted by (Prabowo, 2020), this region has experienced a significant increase in the number of tourists in recent years, which has had a positive impact on the local economy. Using the SLR approach, researchers can collect data on various factors contributing to this growth, including the role of local communities in creating memorable tourism experiences. Furthermore, SLR also allows researchers to evaluate various strategies that have been implemented in other religious tourism areas. For example, in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, a good infrastructure and service development strategy has increased the number of visitors and, in turn, increased local income (Alsharif, 2019). By comparing these various case studies, researchers can draw conclusions about best practices that can be applied in other religious tourism areas. Finally, this qualitative SLR research is expected to provide useful recommendations for the development of religious tourism areas in Indonesia. By understanding the existing economic potential, the government and other stakeholders can formulate policies that support the sustainable development of the tourism sector and provide benefits to local communities.

**Types of Data** In this study, the types of data used consisted of primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with stakeholders in the religious tourism area, such as tourist attraction managers, local business actors, and visitors. This interview aims to explore their views on the existing economic potential, as well as the challenges faced in the development of religious tourism areas. According to (Creswell, 2014), in-depth interviews allow researchers to gain richer and more in-depth information regarding individual experiences and perspectives. Secondary data, on the other hand, are drawn from a variety of relevant literature sources, including journal articles, research reports, and policy documents. This data provides a broader context on religious tourism trends and their impact on the local economy. For example, a report from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that the tourism sector contributed 4.5% to Indonesia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022, with religious tourism as one of the fastest-growing sub-sectors (BPS, 2023). In collecting data, researchers also considered variations in existing types of religious tourism, such as pilgrimages, religious festivals, and other spiritual activities. By understanding the different types of religious tourism, researchers can identify different economic potentials. For example, religious festivals in Bali,

such as Galungan, attract thousands of domestic and international tourists, which has a positive impact on the local economy (Widiastuti, 2021).

In addition, the data collected also includes demographic information about visitors, such as age, regional origin, and frequency of visits. This data is important for understanding patterns of travelers' behavior and how they contribute to the local economy. This demographic analysis can help tourism area managers in designing programs and services that are more in line with the needs of visitors. By combining primary and secondary data, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive picture of the economic potential in religious tourism areas. The results of this analysis are expected to provide useful recommendations for the development of more effective marketing policies and strategies.

**Data Triangulation** Data triangulation is a method used to improve the validity and reliability of research by combining various data sources, methods, and theories. In the context of this study, triangulation was carried out by integrating data from in-depth interviews, document analysis, and field observations. According to (Denzin, 1978), triangulation can help researchers to gain a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied. First, triangulation of data sources is carried out by collecting information from various related parties in religious tourism areas. This includes tourist attraction managers, business actors, and visitors.

## **RESULT**

### **Economic Potential in Religious Tourism Areas**

**Economic Impact of Religious Tourism** Religious tourism has a significant impact on the regional economy. One of the main impacts is the increase in regional revenue. According to data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, the tourism sector in Indonesia accounts for around 4.5% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with religious tourism being one of the rapidly growing subsectors ((Community Empowerment Program in the Tourism Sector. Jakarta: Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy., 2022). Areas such as Yogyakarta and Lombok, known for their religious sites, experienced a significant surge in regional income due to domestic and international tourist visits. For example, in 2020, Yogyakarta recorded revenue from the tourism sector reaching Rp 3.7 trillion, even though it was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (BPS, 2023; Yogyakarta Tourism Office., 2023).

In addition, the provision of jobs is also a positive impact of the development of religious tourism. With the increasing number of tourists, the need for labor in the tourism sector, such as tour guides, accommodation managers, and food service providers, is increasing. According to BPS data, the tourism sector absorbed more than 13 million workers in Indonesia in 2021, with a large contribution coming from religious tourism areas (Statista, 2021). This not only helps reduce the unemployment rate, but also improves the quality of life of the local community. This economic impact can also be seen from the increase in investment in the tourism sector.

Many investors are interested in building supporting facilities, such as hotels, restaurants, and souvenir centers around religious tourism sites. For example, the construction of star hotels around Borobudur and Prambanan Temples that not only attract tourists but also create business opportunities for the surrounding community. According to a report from the Investment Coordinating Board (BKPM), investment in the tourism sector increased by 15% in 2022 compared to the previous year (Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata, 2022).

It is undeniable that religious tourism also contributes to the promotion of local culture and traditions. When tourists come to visit religious sites, they also interact with the local people and local culture, which in turn can increase the selling value of local products. For example, handicrafts and traditional foods sold around religious tourism sites are often a special attraction for tourists, thus providing additional benefits for the community. Overall, the economic impact of religious tourism is very broad and diverse. With the right approach and understanding of the importance of the tourism awareness paradigm, this potential can be maximized to improve community welfare and regional economic sustainability.

**Infrastructure Development** Infrastructure development is a crucial aspect in maximizing the economic potential of religious tourism areas. Good infrastructure, such as transportation and

accommodation, will support the smooth accessibility of tourists to religious sites. For example, the increase in road access to Borobudur Temple and Prambanan Temple has been proven to increase the number of tourist visits. Data from the Central Java Tourism Office shows that after road repairs, visits to Borobudur increase by 30% in a year (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2021). Efficient transportation is also very important. The construction of new airports, such as Yogyakarta International Airport, aims to support the growth of the tourism sector in the region. The airport is expected to accommodate more domestic and international flights, making it easier for tourists to access religious tourist sites. According to a report from Angkasa Pura I, after the opening of this airport, the number of passengers increased by 40% in the first six months of its operation (Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), 2022).

Accommodation is also an important factor in the development of religious tourism infrastructure. The availability of quality hotels and lodging will increase the comfort of tourists during their visit. For example, the development of community-based homestays around religious tourist sites such as Mendut Temple and Pawon Temple not only provides a unique experience for tourists, but also provides additional income for the local community. Data from the Ministry of Tourism shows that homestays can increase people's income by up to 50% compared to income from the agricultural sector (Community Empowerment Program in the Tourism Sector. Jakarta: Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy., 2022).

In addition, the development of other supporting infrastructure, such as tourist information centers, public toilets, and parking lots, is also very important. These facilities will enhance the traveler's experience and encourage them to spend more time at tourist sites. For example, the provision of information centers in religious tourism areas can help tourists get the information they need, so that they are more interested in exploring more places. Thus, planned and sustainable infrastructure development can be a key driver in increasing the economic potential of religious tourism areas. This will not only attract more tourists, but also improve the quality of life of the local community through job creation and increased income.

**Empowerment of Local Communities** Empowerment of local communities is an important element in the development of religious tourism areas. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) managed by the local community can be the driving force of the regional economy. With the increasing number of tourists, the demand for local products such as handicrafts, food, and souvenirs is also increasing. According to data from the Indonesian Employers Association (APINDO), the contribution of SMEs to national GDP reached 60% in 2021, and the tourism sector is one of the largest contributors to the growth of SMEs (APINDO, 2021). A real example of local community empowerment can be seen in Tanjung Village, Lombok, which is famous for its weaving and weaving crafts. With support from government programs and private institutions, local communities are trained to improve the quality of their products and promote them to tourists. As a result, people's income has increased by 70% in the last two years (Dinas Pariwisata Lombok, 2023). This kind of empowerment not only improves the local economy but also preserves culture and traditions. Local products also play an important role in attracting tourists. Products that have regional values, such as traditional food and handicrafts, are often the main attraction. For example, typical foods such as Gudeg in Yogyakarta and Nasi Tumpeng in Central Java are the choice of tourists to taste local cuisine. Data from the Ministry of Tourism shows that 70% of tourists prefer to try local food when visiting an area (Community Empowerment Program in the Tourism Sector. Jakarta: Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy., 2022).

Community empowerment can also be done through training and education. By providing training to the public on business management, marketing, and customer service, they can better manage their businesses. Programs like this have been implemented in various religious tourism areas, and the results have been very positive. According to a report from the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas), training provided to local communities in religious tourism areas is able to increase their business turnover by up to 50% within one year (Statista, 2021). Overall, empowering local communities in the context of religious tourism not only improves the economy but also strengthens the cultural and social identity of the community. By involving the community in tourism development, sustainability and long-term benefits for the community can be achieved

## DISCUSSION

### Strategy for the Development of Religious Tourism Areas

Research and Development of Identification of Tourist Attractions In the context of the development of religious tourism areas, the identification of tourist attractions is a crucial first step. This attraction is not only limited to religious sites, but also includes the historical, cultural, and traditional values inherent in each location. According to data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia, there are more than 30,000 religious sites in Indonesia spread throughout the archipelago, ranging from mosques, churches, temples, to temples (Annual Report on Tourism Development. Jakarta: Ministry of Tourism., 2021).

Therefore, in-depth research on the characteristics and uniqueness of each location is needed to attract tourists. One relevant example is the religious tourism area in Yogyakarta, which is known for the existence of Borobudur and Prambanan Temples. These temples attract visitors not only because of their spiritual value, but also because of the architectural beauty and history that comes with it. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that the number of tourist visits to Borobudur Temple reached 4.5 million people in 2019, making it one of the main attractions in Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), 2022). Therefore, the development of research that focuses on this attraction will make a significant contribution to the tourism sector. Market Analysis After identifying tourist attractions, the next step is to conduct a market analysis. This analysis aims to understand the behavior and preferences of consumers who visit religious tourism areas.

According to a survey conducted by the Association of Indonesian Travel Companies (ASITA), around 70% of tourists who visit religious places are looking for spiritual experiences and peace (ASITA, 2020). This data shows that there is great potential to develop products and services that suit market needs. In addition, it is important to pay attention to the demographics of visitors. For example, millennials tend to be more active in seeking information through social media and prefer interactive experiences. Therefore, the development of religious tourism areas must consider these aspects in order to reach a wider market segment. By understanding market preferences, area managers can create marketing strategies that are more effective and in accordance with the needs of visitors.

Effective Marketing Campaigns Effective marketing campaigns are the key to attracting tourists to religious tourism areas. In today's digital era, marketing must be done creatively and innovatively. One approach that can be applied is to use storytelling to describe a unique spiritual experience in each location. For example, Borobudur Temple is not only promoted as a world heritage site, but also as a place for meditation and self-reflection (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2021).

Data shows that marketing campaigns that involve hands-on experience are able to increase interest in visits. A study conducted by Nielsen showed that 92% of consumers are more likely to trust recommendations from others compared to advertising (Nielsen, 2019). Therefore, creating an experience that can be shared by visitors on social media will have a positive impact on the promotion of religious tourism areas. 2. Utilization of Social Media Social media has become a very effective marketing tool in promoting religious tourism areas. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok can be used to share engaging visual content, such as beautiful photos from religious sites, visitor testimonials, and short videos depicting spiritual experiences. According to Statista data, social media users in Indonesia reached 170 million people in 2021, making it one of the largest markets in the world (Statista, 2021). The use of influencers in marketing campaigns can also increase the visibility of religious tourism areas. Influencers who have a large following can help spread the word and attract new visitors. For example, several travel influencers have managed to attract tourists to visit religious places with engaging and inspiring content. Therefore, area managers must make optimal use of social media to reach a wider audience.

Government Cooperation between religious tourism area managers and the government is very important for sustainable development. The government has a strategic role in providing supporting infrastructure, such as road accessibility, public facilities, and security. According to a report from the Ministry of Tourism, investment in tourism infrastructure in Indonesia increased by 15% in 2021, demonstrating the government's commitment to supporting this sector (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2021). In addition, the government can also provide support in the form of promotion

and marketing through various official platforms. With good cooperation, religious tourism areas can be better known at the national and international levels. For example, the "Wonderful Indonesia" program initiated by the government has succeeded in increasing tourist visits to various destinations, including religious tourism areas.

**Local Communities** Local communities also have a very important role in the development of religious tourism areas. Their involvement in the management and promotion of the area can create a harmonious relationship between tourists and the local community. According to research conducted by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the participation of local communities in tourism development can improve the visitor experience and support the sustainability of the local economy (World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), 2020). For example, in the religious tourism area in Bali, local communities are often involved in organizing religious ceremonies and festivals that attract tourists. This activity not only increases tourist attractions, but also provides economic benefits for the community. Therefore, it is important to build strong partnerships between area managers and local communities to create an authentic and memorable experience for visitors.

**Religious Institutions** Cooperation with religious institutions is also an important aspect in the development of religious tourism areas. Religious institutions can act as a liaison between area managers and visitors, as well as provide a deeper understanding of the spiritual values that exist in each location. In addition, religious institutions can help in organizing events or activities that can attract tourists. For example, in a religious tourism area in Central Java, several religious institutions have collaborated with area managers to hold spiritual events involving tourists, such as retreats or meditations together. This activity not only provides an immersive experience for visitors, but also strengthens the position of the area as an attractive religious tourism destination. Thus, synergistic cooperation between area managers, religious institutions, and local communities will greatly support the development of sustainable religious tourism areas.

### **Challenges and Solutions**

One of the challenges in the development of religious tourism is inadequate infrastructure. The development of religious tourism areas is often hampered by inadequate infrastructure. A study conducted by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2022 showed that only about 30% of the total religious tourism destinations in Indonesia have good transportation access (Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), 2022). This causes difficulties for tourists to visit these locations, especially for those who come from outside the region. For example, access to Borobudur Temple, which is one of the world heritage sites, is often congested due to inadequate road infrastructure. In addition, public facilities such as toilets, parking lots, and information centers are also often unavailable or in poor condition, which in turn can reduce the tourist experience (Annual Report on Tourism Development. Jakarta: Ministry of Tourism., 2021).

Poor infrastructure conditions also have an impact on the safety and comfort of tourists. According to a report from the World Economic Forum, safety and comfort factors are one of the main considerations for tourists in choosing a destination (Yogyakarta Tourism Office., 2023). If the infrastructure is not supportive, then the potential for tourist visits will decrease, which ultimately has an impact on local economic income. Therefore, it is important for the government and stakeholders to make greater investments in infrastructure development in religious tourism areas.

**Lack of public awareness** In addition to infrastructure, another challenge faced in the development of religious tourism is the lack of public awareness about the tourism potential in their area. Many local communities do not understand the economic benefits of religious tourism development. A survey conducted by the Institute for Research and Community Service of Gadjah Mada University in 2023 found that only 25% of people around religious tourism areas are aware of the economic potential that can be generated from the tourism sector (Gadjah Mada University (UGM), 2023). This shows the need for more efforts to increase public understanding of the importance of tourism as a source of income. This lack of awareness also has implications for community participation in tourism development. Many people are reluctant to get involved in tourism activities because they do not see direct benefits from their participation. For example, in some areas, people are reluctant to open small businesses such as stalls or homestays because of a lack of understanding of how to attract tourists.

Without the active participation of the community, the development of religious tourism will not be maximized and the existing economic potential cannot be explored properly.

Solutions to overcome challenges through education and training One of the solutions to overcome challenges in the development of religious tourism is through education and training for the local community. Educational programs can help people understand the importance of tourism and how they can contribute to the development of the sector. For example, training on small business management, customer service, and promotion of local products can improve people's skills in welcoming tourists (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022). With better skills, people will be more confident to open businesses related to tourism. In addition, education can also be carried out through awareness programs that involve the community in tourism promotion activities. For example, the "Community-Based Religious Tourism" program is implemented in several regions in Indonesia, where the community is involved in the process of planning and promoting religious tourism destinations.

This not only increases public awareness, but also creates a sense of belonging to existing tourist areas. Thus, the community will be more motivated to maintain and develop the tourism potential in their area. Strengthening regulations Strengthening regulations is also an important step in overcoming the challenges of religious tourism development. The government needs to establish policies that support infrastructure development and training for the community. For example, policies that provide incentives for investors who want to build facilities in religious tourism areas can attract more investment. In addition, clear regulations regarding the management of tourist areas also need to be implemented to ensure that development is carried out in a sustainable manner and does not damage the environment (Sustainable Tourism Area Management Policy. Jakarta: Ministry of Environment and Forestry., 2023).

Strict regulation can also help protect religious sites from irresponsible exploitation. For example, the designation of protection zones around religious sites can prevent development that could damage cultural and historical values. In addition, the government must also strengthen cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local communities in the supervision and management of tourist areas. By involving various parties, the development of religious tourism can be carried out in a more inclusive and sustainable way.

## CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings In this study, it has been identified that religious tourism areas have significant economic potential for the region and the surrounding community. Through the tourism awareness paradigm approach, it is hoped that the management and development of this area can be carried out in a sustainable and responsible manner. Data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy shows that the religious tourism sector in Indonesia is experiencing rapid growth, with a contribution to national GDP reaching 7.5% in 2022<sup>[1][2][3][4][5][6][7][8][9][10]</sup>. For example, religious tourism areas such as Borobudur Temple and Istiqlal Mosque not only attract domestic but also international tourists. According to a BPS report, foreign tourist visits to Indonesia in 2022 reached 5.5 million, of which 20% were interested in religious tourism. This shows that there is a great opportunity to increase regional income through the further development of religious tourism destinations.

Furthermore, the findings show that the application of the tourism awareness paradigm can increase the awareness of local communities about the importance of maintaining and preserving religious sites. By involving the community in management, they are not only beneficiaries but also active actors in local economic development. This is in line with the findings of the World Tourism Organization which states that sustainable tourism can improve the quality of life of local communities. Religious tourism areas also have the potential to become educational and cultural centers. By educating visitors about the spiritual and historical values behind these sites, we can create a more immersive and meaningful travel experience

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