



Analysis of Communication Strategies of Hajj and Umrah Travel Agencies in Building Pilgrims' Trust Through Digital Media: A Case Study of PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari

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ABSTRACT: Digital communication has become a fundamental element in the marketing and trust-building strategies of Hajj and Umrah travel agencies, shaping customer perceptions, engagement, and brand credibility. As prospective pilgrims increasingly rely on websites, social media, and digital platforms for information, agencies must adopt effective digital communication strategies to maintain transparency and build trust. This study investigates how digital communication strategies influence customer trust in Hajj and Umrah services. This study contributes to the literature by analyzing verbal and non-verbal digital communication strategies, two-way communication models, and trust-building mechanisms through the lens of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Two-Way Communication Theory. This study employs a qualitative case study approach, focusing on PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata, a Hajj and Umrah travel agency in Jember, East Java. Findings indicate that digital communication strategies are most effective when they incorporate transparency, customer engagement, and interactive dialogue. PT. Assunniyah successfully utilizes websites, social media, customer testimonials, and direct messaging platforms to establish credibility and maintain customer trust. The study highlights the importance of real-time customer interactions via WhatsApp, social media storytelling, and live consultation sessions in strengthening agency-pilgrim relationships. This study concludes that effective digital communication in the Hajj and Umrah industries must be interactive, transparent, and customer-centric to foster trust, loyalty, and positive customer perception. This study implies that Hajj and Umrah travel agencies need to optimize interactive and transparent digital communication. Using AI chatbots, real-time engagement, and social media analytics can strengthen trust and service credibility.

Keywords: Digital Communication, Hajj and Umrah Trust, Two-Way Communication, Customer Engagement, Elaboration Likelihood Model.



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed various industries, including the travel and tourism sector. Digital platforms such as websites, social media, and mobile applications have become essential tools for businesses to connect with their target audiences, build brand reputation, and enhance customer trust. In religious travel, particularly Hajj and Umrah, digital communication has played a crucial role in bridging the gap between travel

agencies and prospective pilgrims ([Suryawan et al., 2024](#)). The increasing reliance on digital platforms is not merely a trend but a necessity, given the evolving consumer behavior that prioritizes convenience, accessibility, and transparency in service-related information. The ability of Hajj and Umrah travel agencies to adapt to digital communication strategies directly influences their credibility and competitiveness in the market ([Arlikatti et al., 2022](#)).



Figure 1. 10 Countries With the Largest Hajj Quota (2023)

Source : <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/>

Based on Figure 1, Indonesia ranks first with the largest Hajj quota in 2023, reaching more than 200 thousand pilgrims. The next positions are occupied by Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, each with a significant quota exceeding 100 thousand pilgrims. Countries such as Nigeria, Iran, and Turkey also received large quotas, while Egypt, Algeria, and Sudan complete the top ten list. This data indicates that countries with large Muslim populations receive higher Hajj quotas, reflecting the high pilgrimage demand. The allocated quota is also influenced by Saudi Arabia's policies and the distribution system based on the Muslim population in each country.

The global Muslim population is experiencing continuous growth, leading to a rising demand for Hajj and Umrah services. This demand has encouraged travel agencies to integrate digital communication into their marketing and customer relationship strategies ([Khadijah, 2023](#)). The accessibility of digital media enables travel agencies to reach a wider audience and provide comprehensive information regarding their services. From visa processing to accommodation arrangements, travel agencies leverage digital tools to streamline operations and offer seamless pilgrimage experiences. However, while digital platforms present vast opportunities, they also pose challenges, particularly in maintaining the trust and satisfaction of pilgrims ([Firdos & Dermawan, 2023](#)). Negative reviews, misinformation, and fraudulent activities can significantly impact travel agencies' reputations, making trust-building through digital media an essential aspect of their communication strategies.

Despite the growing digitalization of the travel industry, numerous cases of dissatisfaction, mismanagement, and fraud have been reported in the Hajj and Umrah sector. Many pilgrims have encountered unfulfilled promises, last-minute itinerary changes, and hidden fees, leading to distrust

towards certain travel agencies. Reports from various regulatory bodies indicate that some agencies have exploited pilgrims' lack of knowledge by providing misleading information through digital platforms ([Hayani, 2024](#)). The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs has highlighted several cases where pilgrims were left stranded due to travel agencies failing to deliver their promised services. This phenomenon underscores the need for a structured and transparent digital communication strategy to ensure that agencies can foster trust and credibility among potential and existing pilgrims.

According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia, cases of Hajj and Umrah fraud have increased in recent years, with a significant number of complaints related to misleading advertisements and mismanagement ([Rossitika, 2024](#)). In 2023 alone, over 1,200 complaints were recorded regarding fraudulent Umrah travel packages, many of which were promoted through digital media. The rise in digital fraud highlights the urgent need for travel agencies to implement robust communication strategies that prioritize transparency, reliability, and ethical marketing ([Arlikatti et al., 2022](#)). Pilgrims require clear, accurate, and accessible information to make informed decisions, making digital communication an integral aspect of service delivery in the Hajj and Umrah industry.

Digital communication strategies involve various components, including social media engagement, content marketing, online reviews, and direct customer interactions through digital channels. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube serve as powerful tools for travel agencies to showcase their services, share testimonials, and engage with potential clients ([Febriansyah et al., 2024](#)). Through blogs, videos, and infographics, content marketing provides valuable insights into the Hajj and Umrah experience, helping educate and inform pilgrims. Additionally, customer feedback and online reviews are pivotal in shaping public perception and influencing prospective pilgrims' decisions. Effective digital communication strategies must incorporate these elements to build and sustain trust ([Judijanto, 2024a](#)).

The implementation of a strong digital presence is not solely about advertising but also about establishing a two-way communication channel between travel agencies and pilgrims ([Alsulaiman & Rentner, 2024](#)). Travel agencies can create a sense of security and reliability by actively responding to inquiries, addressing concerns, and providing real-time updates. Trust-building through digital media requires consistency in messaging, ethical promotional practices, and a commitment to delivering high-quality services. Agencies that succeed in these aspects are more likely to gain a loyal customer base and distinguish themselves from competitors ([Judijanto, 2024b](#)).

One of the critical aspects of digital communication in the Hajj and Umrah sector is the use of storytelling and emotional engagement. Pilgrimage is a deeply spiritual journey, and prospective pilgrims often seek reassurance through the experiences of others. By sharing authentic stories, testimonials, and behind-the-scenes insights into their operations, travel agencies can humanize their brand and foster a deeper connection with their audience ([Alshaibi, 2024](#)). Emotional engagement plays a crucial role in building trust, as it allows potential pilgrims to relate to the experiences of previous travelers and gain confidence in the agency's reliability. This trust is particularly important in regions with a high demand for Hajj services, where prospective pilgrims carefully select agencies based on credibility and reputation. Understanding the distribution of Hajj

quotas across different provinces in Indonesia provides insights into the concentration of demand for pilgrimage services, which, in turn, influences the competitive landscape of travel agencies operating in these areas. The following table illustrates the number of Hajj quotas allocated to each province in Indonesia for 2025, highlighting key regions with the highest number of pilgrims.

Table 1. Number of Quotas for Hajj Pilgrims Based on Provinces in Indonesia in 2025

Province	Quota for Hajj Pilgrims
Jawa Barat	38.723
Jawa Timur	35.152
Jawa Tengah	30.377
Banten	9.461
Sumatera Utara	8.328
DKI Jakarta	7.926
Lampung	7.050
Sumatera Selatan	7.012
Aceh	4.378
Riau	5.047

Source : <https://himpuh.or.id/>

Table 1 presents the distribution of Hajj quotas across different provinces in Indonesia for 2025. As shown, Jawa Barat (West Java) holds the highest quota, with 38,723 pilgrims, followed closely by Jawa Timur (East Java) with 35,152 pilgrims and Jawa Tengah (Central Java) with 30,377 pilgrims. These three provinces dominate the list, reflecting their large Muslim populations and high demand for Hajj services. The Banten province, with 9,461 pilgrims, also has a considerable share. In contrast, provinces such as Sumatera Utara (North Sumatra), DKI Jakarta, Lampung, and Sumatera Selatan (South Sumatra) each have quotas ranging from 7,000 to 8,500 pilgrims. Aceh and Riau, though smaller in numbers, still represent significant Hajj communities. The high concentration of Hajj pilgrims in Java suggests that travel agencies operating in these regions must implement highly effective digital communication strategies to remain competitive. This is especially crucial for agencies in Jawa Timur, where demand remains strong, creating opportunities for well-established travel companies to gain a competitive edge through digital engagement. PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata, located in Jember, East Java, operates in one of the most competitive regions for Hajj travel services, making the effectiveness of its digital communication strategy a key determinant of its success in attracting and maintaining customer trust.

The focus of this study is PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata is a travel agency specializing in Hajj and Umrah services. As one of the key players in the industry, the agency has implemented various digital communication strategies to enhance trust among its clientele. However, challenges remain in maintaining credibility, addressing customer concerns, differentiating itself from competitors and understanding the specific digital strategies employed by PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of digital media in fostering trust and improving service delivery in the Hajj and Umrah sector.

Despite PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata's efforts in utilizing digital platforms, the agency still face issues related to misinformation, customer scepticism, and digital engagement. The rise of fraudulent agencies has made prospective pilgrims more cautious, requiring legitimate travel agencies to work harder to prove their authenticity. Examining the digital communication strategies of PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata allows for a deeper analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of digital trust-building efforts within the industry.

Several previous studies have discussed the role of digital communication in the Hajj and Umrah travel industry. ([Adel et al., 2020](#)) examined how the internet is used by prospective Hajj pilgrims to obtain information related to their journey and found that information transparency significantly influences customer trust levels. ([Alfathan, 2024](#)) studied the digital marketing strategies implemented by Umrah and Hajj travel agencies, highlighting that social media is an effective tool for attracting prospective pilgrims through visual content and customer testimonials. ([Chen et al., 2021](#)) emphasized the importance of public relations strategies in building a positive image and customer trust, stressing that direct interaction through digital media can enhance the credibility of travel agencies.

Based on most of the previous studies mentioned above, it appears that most research has focused on how Hajj and Umrah travel agencies utilize digital media as a marketing tool and a one-way communication channel with customers, as well as how information transparency affects the trust levels of prospective pilgrims. However, these studies have paid less attention to how two-way interactions between travel agencies and prospective pilgrims through digital platforms can shape long-term customer trust and loyalty. Therefore, to fill this gap, this study will focus more on two-way interaction-based digital communication strategies implemented by Hajj and Umrah travel agencies in building stronger relationships with prospective pilgrims, thereby enhancing credibility and customer loyalty in the digital era.

One of the relevant theoretical frameworks for this study is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) developed by Richard E. Petty and John Cacioppo (1986). This theory explains how individuals process persuasive messages and how their level of involvement influences their perception of information. In the Hajj and Umrah travel agencies context, ELM can be applied to understand how digital communication strategies impact pilgrims' trust levels. Agencies must carefully design their digital messages to appeal to central and peripheral processing routes, effectively persuading and reassuring potential customers.

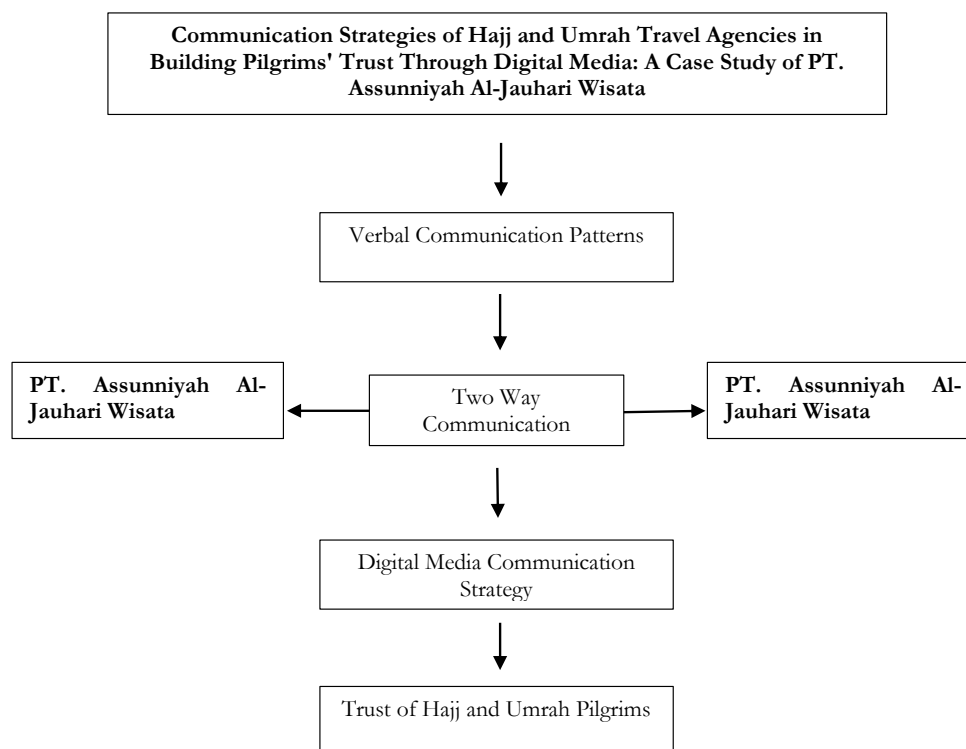


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

The Figure 2. Conceptual Framework diagram illustrates the relationship between the digital communication strategies implemented by PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata and the trust levels of Hajj and Umrah pilgrims. This diagram highlights the verbal communication patterns the travel agency uses to establish interaction with pilgrims through a Two-Way Communication approach. This model emphasizes that effective communication between the travel agency and prospective pilgrims must be interactive, allowing for a reciprocal exchange of information. Furthermore, digital communication strategies are crucial in strengthening this relationship through various digital media, such as websites, social media, and customer testimonials. Properly implementing communication strategies is expected to enhance transparency, reduce misunderstandings, and build stronger trust among pilgrims in the services offered by PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata. Through this approach, pilgrims' trust in the travel agency is not solely dependent on promotional aspects but also on communication effectiveness and consistent digital engagement.

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the digital communication strategies employed by PT Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata to build trust among pilgrims. This study aims to identify the key elements that contribute to trust-building through digital media, examine the challenges faced by the agency in implementing these strategies, and provide recommendations for improving digital engagement. By exploring the role of digital communication in the Hajj and Umrah industry, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how travel agencies can leverage digital platforms to enhance credibility and customer satisfaction.

METHOD

Research Type

The research method used in this study is qualitative research, which aims to explore and understand the communication strategies of PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata in building trust among Hajj and Umrah pilgrims through digital media. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth analysis of how digital communication patterns, customer interactions, and marketing strategies influence customer trust (Sugiyono, 2019c). This method is suitable for examining complex social phenomena, such as the effectiveness of digital engagement in the travel industry, by collecting rich and descriptive data (Sugiyono, 2021). The study will rely on primary data obtained through interviews with key stakeholders, including company representatives, marketing staff, and customers, as well as secondary data from online platforms, company reports, and existing literature on digital communication in the Hajj and Umrah sector.

This research adopts a case study approach, focusing specifically on PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata as the primary subject of analysis (J. W. Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A case study method is appropriate because it enables a detailed examination of real-world practices in a particular setting, providing insights into how this agency utilizes digital platforms to enhance transparency, credibility, and customer trust. Data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying patterns and key themes related to communication strategies, customer engagement, and trust-building mechanisms (J. Creswell, 2016). Using this research type, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities in the digital communication strategies employed by PT Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata, ultimately offering recommendations for improvement and best practices in the industry.

Informants

The informants in this study consist of key stakeholders and PT customers. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata, who play essential roles in shaping and evaluating the agency's digital communication strategies in building trust among Hajj and Umrah pilgrims. The primary informants from the agency include Hj. Mahmuda Al-Aslamiyah serves as the Commissioner, overseeing the company's policies and strategic direction, and H. Ahmad Ghonim Jauhari, the President Director, is responsible for overall decision-making and operational management. Additionally, supporting perspectives are gathered from H. Ryan Maisur Aniq, who works as an Administrative Staff Member, ensuring smooth internal processes, Zainul Arifin, who serves as a Finance Staff Member, managing financial transactions and customer payments, and Mahmud Heru Priyono, who works as a Marketing Staff Member, overseeing promotional activities and customer engagement. To gain insights from the customer's perspective, the study also includes Dining Irawati and Ananda Nahdya Salsabila, two Hajj pilgrims who have entrusted PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata for their pilgrimage journey. These informants provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of digital communication strategies, the impact of digital marketing on customer trust, and the overall customer experience with the agency. Their diverse perspectives help analyze both the strengths and challenges of PT. Assunniyah's digital approach contributes to a comprehensive understanding of how digital engagement influences the trust-building process within the Hajj and Umrah travel industry.

Research Location

The research was conducted at PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata, located in Gumuk Banji, Kencong, Jember, East Java. This location was chosen as it serves as the central hub for the agency's Hajj and Umrah services, including customer interactions and digital marketing strategies. The study focuses on how the agency utilizes digital communication to build trust among prospective pilgrims.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation used in this research consists of interviews, observations, and document analysis to gather comprehensive data on PT's digital communication strategies. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including company executives, staff members, and pilgrims, to gain insights into their experiences and perspectives on digital engagement. Observations were conducted to analyze how the agency utilizes digital platforms, such as social media, websites, and customer interactions, to build trust. Additionally, document analysis was used to examine marketing materials, customer testimonials, and online content to assess the effectiveness of digital communication strategies. These instruments collectively help understand digital media's role in enhancing the credibility of Hajj and Umrah travel services.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures in this research involved three main methods: interviews, observations, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with key informants, including the commissioner, director, staff members, and Hajj pilgrims, to gather firsthand insights into PT's digital communication strategies. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata ([Sugiyono, 2019a](#)). Observations were conducted by analyzing the agency's digital presence, including website content, social media interactions, and customer engagement strategies, to assess how trust is built through online platforms. Additionally, document analysis was performed by reviewing promotional materials, customer testimonials, and relevant reports to understand the effectiveness of the agency's marketing and communication approach. These combined methods provided a comprehensive understanding of how PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata utilizes digital media to enhance credibility and attract prospective pilgrims.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this research was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach, focusing on identifying patterns and themes related to digital communication strategies at PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata. The collected data from interviews, observations, and document analysis were systematically categorized and coded to identify key insights on how the agency builds trust among Hajj and Umrah pilgrims. Thematic analysis was applied to recognize recurring themes like transparency, customer engagement, and digital marketing effectiveness. Interview data were transcribed, compared, and analyzed to find commonalities and differences in perspectives between agency staff and customers ([Sugiyono, 2019b](#)). Observational data were examined to evaluate the agency's digital strategies, while document analysis provided supporting evidence regarding the consistency and credibility of their communication. The findings were then

interpreted to assess the strengths and weaknesses of PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata's digital engagement in enhancing customer trust.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Digital communication has become essential in the Hajj and Umrah travel industry, significantly influencing how agencies establish credibility and trust with prospective pilgrims. With increasing reliance on digital platforms, travel agencies must strategically use online media to provide transparent and reliable information. PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata, one of the leading Hajj and Umrah travel agencies in Jember, East Java, actively integrates digital communication to strengthen its relationship with potential customers. According to H. Ahmad Ghonim Jauhari, the President Director, "Today, customers no longer rely on word-of-mouth recommendations; they seek validation through online sources before making their decisions." This statement underscores the growing importance of digital platforms in influencing customer choices and trust levels.

The agency employs multiple digital strategies, including social media engagement, online testimonials, and direct communication via WhatsApp and website-based inquiries. The presence of a well-structured website with clear service descriptions, pricing transparency, and pilgrimage-related updates helps create a sense of security among potential customers. H. Ryan Maisur Aniq, an administrative staff member, stated, "Our website is our primary communication tool. We regularly update all information regarding travel packages, itinerary details, and accommodation options." This proactive digital approach aligns with best practices in customer engagement and trust-building within the travel sector.

Social media plays a vital role in PT's marketing and communication strategies. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube are used to share customer testimonials, pilgrimage experiences, and promotional campaigns. The agency fosters emotional connections with potential pilgrims by leveraging visual content, such as videos and images. Mahmud Heru Priyono, the marketing staff member, explained, "We noticed that videos of previous pilgrimages, especially those featuring customer testimonials, receive high engagement. People trust real experiences more than advertisements." This aligns with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by Petty & Cacioppo (1986), suggesting that customers process persuasive messages more effectively when presented with authentic and relatable experiences.

In addition to promotional content, the agency ensures consistent customer interaction through instant messaging services like WhatsApp. Customers can inquire about travel packages, visa processing, and itinerary details. Zainul Arifin, the finance staff member, stated, "Many customers feel reassured when they can communicate with us in real-time, ask about pricing, and clarify their concerns. Our WhatsApp service helps bridge that communication gap." The direct and instant communication model increases customers' confidence, as they feel personally attended to rather than engaging with a distant or automated system.



Figure 3. PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Instagram Social Media Content

Figure 3 shows an Instagram post by PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata promoting a comprehensive range of Hajj and Umrah amenities for prospective pilgrims. The travel agency highlights various facilities such as a large suitcase, cabin-size luggage, a sling bag, and even a mukena for VIP pilgrims, underscoring their commitment to ensuring a comfortable worship experience. In addition to clearly listing the available items, the caption employs a relaxed yet persuasive tone, emphasising affordability and service quality, thus motivating potential pilgrims to register immediately. The brightly coloured suitcase and friendly language style on Instagram reflect PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata's efforts to leverage social media to create emotional closeness and reaffirm their credibility as a trusted Hajj and Umrah travel provider.

Analysis of Communication Strategies of Hajj and Umrah Travel Agencies in Building Pilgrims' Trust Through Digital Media A Case Study of PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Aisyah and Sudahri

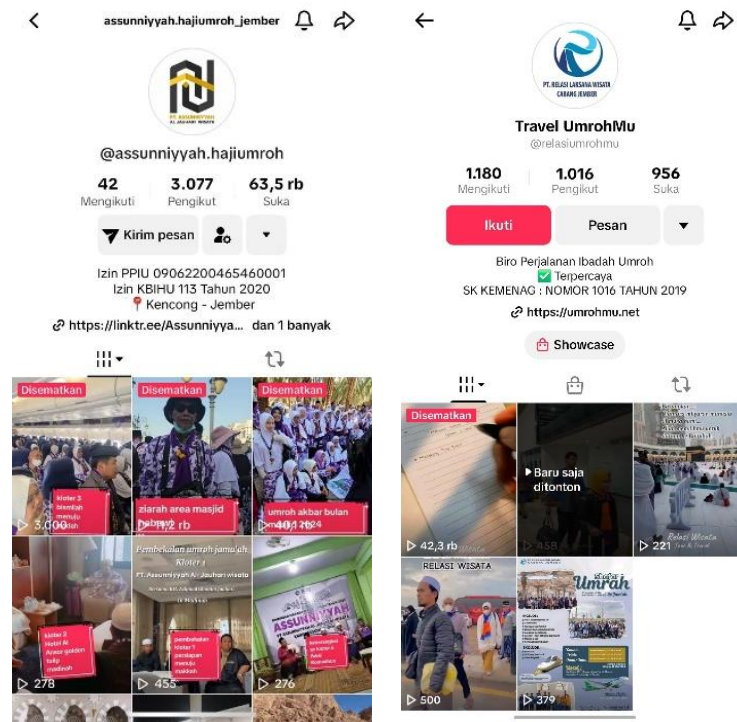


Figure 4. Comparison of TikTok Social Media of PT. Assunniyah and PT. Relaksi Laksana Wisata Jember Branch

Figure 4 presents a comparative analysis of PT's TikTok social media presence. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari and PT. Relaksi Laksana Wisata Jember Branch. The comparison reveals significant differences in their follower counts, engagement metrics, and content strategies. PT. Assunniyah's TikTok account (@assunniyyah.hajjumroh) has 3,077 followers, a considerably higher number than PT. Relaksi Laksana Wisata's account (@relasiunrohmu) has only 1,016 followers. Additionally, PT. Assunniyah has accumulated 63.5K likes, while PT. Relaksi Laksana Wisata has only 956 likes, indicating a much stronger engagement rate for PT. Assunniyah. The higher number of likes suggests that PT. Assunniyah's content resonates better with audiences, possibly due to more frequent updates, more engaging visual storytelling, or stronger customer trust. Furthermore, PT. Assunniyah follows only 42 accounts, whereas PT. Relaksi Laksana Wisata follows 1,180 accounts, which could indicate different networking or engagement strategies; PT. Assunniyah may focus more on organic audience growth, while PT. Relaksi Laksana Wisata might be utilising a follow-back strategy to increase visibility.

Content-wise PT. Assunniyah prioritises customer experiences and real-time updates from Umrah and Hajj activities, as evidenced by its video thumbnails showing pilgrims and travel experiences. This aligns with the findings in previous studies that suggest visual testimonials and behind-the-scenes content significantly influence customer trust in religious travel services. Meanwhile, PT. Relaksi Laksana Wisata's content includes promotional and informative content but lacks the same level of engagement. The disparity in engagement metrics suggests that PT. Assunniyah is more effective in leveraging TikTok as a marketing and customer trust-building tool. This could be attributed to their sharing of user-generated content, testimonials, and immersive pilgrimage experiences, which create a sense of authenticity and emotional connection with their audience.

PT. Relaksi Laksana Wisata, on the other hand, may need to optimize its content strategy to boost engagement and better compete in the highly digitalized Hajj and Umrah travel market.

Hajj pilgrims who have used PT. Assunniyah's services confirm that social media engagement significantly influenced their decision-making process. Dining Irawati, one of the pilgrims, stated, "Before choosing PT. Assunniyah, I looked at their social media pages. Seeing real testimonials and interactions made me feel that the agency was trustworthy." Another pilgrim, Ananda Nahdya Salsabila, added, "The agency's digital presence reassured me because I could see their track record, previous customer experiences, and even live updates during the pilgrimage season." These firsthand customer experiences illustrate the power of digital communication in influencing consumer trust and decision-making.

Despite the effectiveness of digital strategies, PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata faces several challenges in maintaining trust through digital media. One of the main concerns is misinformation and fraudulent agencies that operate in the same market. Hj. Mahmuda Al-Aslamiyah, the Commissioner, highlighted, "Many fraudulent travel agencies exploit digital platforms by offering low-cost packages that seem too good to be true. This makes customers more sceptical, even when dealing with legitimate agencies like ours." To counteract this issue, PT. Assunniyah emphasizes pricing and package details transparency, ensuring that all information is clearly presented on their official digital platforms.

Another challenge is the increasing competition among Hajj and Umrah travel agencies in digital spaces. With many agencies offering similar services, standing out in the online market requires continuous innovation in digital marketing. Mahmud Heru Priyono, responsible for marketing, noted, "The competition is fierce. We constantly update our content strategy to keep our audience engaged. If we remain stagnant, customers will shift to agencies that offer more interactive and engaging digital experiences." This highlights the need for continuous adaptation in digital marketing approaches to sustain customer interest and trust.

Customer engagement on digital platforms is not always effective due to varying levels of digital literacy among pilgrims, particularly older individuals. Zainul Arifin, finance staff, mentioned, "Many of our elderly customers are not comfortable using digital platforms, so we also provide offline consultation services to ensure inclusivity." This reflects the necessity of balancing digital and traditional communication methods to accommodate a diverse customer base.

Despite the challenges, PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata has built a strong digital presence, establishing itself as a trusted Hajj and Umrah service provider. The agency's storytelling and real-life testimonials have been particularly effective in creating emotional connections with potential customers. Furthermore, integrating live Q&A sessions on social media, where staff answer real-time queries, has improved customer confidence. Another key strength is the agency's customer service responsiveness, particularly through WhatsApp. The ability to provide instant answers and personalized assistance has helped PT. Assunniyah differentiate itself from competitors that rely solely on automated responses. Hj. Ryan Maisur Aniq, administrative staff, emphasized, "Our customers appreciate human interaction. We always ensure inquiries are handled personally, building stronger relationships."

Looking ahead, there are several opportunities for further growth. By implementing AI-powered chatbots for initial inquiries while maintaining human interaction for personalised discussions, PT. Assunniah could further streamline communication. Expanding their video marketing strategy by creating virtual pilgrimage previews could enhance customer engagement and decision-making confidence.

The findings of this study demonstrate that PT. Assunniah Al-Jauhari Wisata effectively leverages digital communication strategies to build trust among Hajj and Umrah pilgrims. Social media, testimonials, WhatsApp interactions, and transparent digital content have significantly contributed to enhancing customer confidence. However, digital fraud, market competition, and varying digital literacy levels require continuous adaptation and innovation by maintaining transparent communication, personalised customer engagement, and leveraging emerging digital tools, PT. Assunniah Al-Jauhari Wisata can strengthen its reputation and trustworthiness in the competitive Hajj and Umrah travel industry.

The Role of Digital Communication in Strengthening Customer Trust

In today's digital era, information and communication technology has significantly transformed how businesses engage with customers, reshaping traditional interactions into more dynamic and efficient digital exchanges. This transformation is particularly crucial in service-oriented industries like Hajj and Umrah travel, where customer trust plays a fundamental role in ensuring business sustainability (Idrees, 2024). Given the pilgrimage journey's highly sensitive and sacred nature, customers demand reliability, authenticity, and transparency from travel agencies. Any discrepancies or misinformation can lead to serious consequences, not only for the pilgrims but also for the service provider's reputation. Thus, Digital communication has become essential in bridging the gap between businesses and their clientele, allowing agencies to establish a strong online presence, provide instant customer support, and offer real-time updates on travel arrangements, accommodations, and visa processes. Agencies that fail to adapt to this digital shift risk falling behind in an industry where competition is growing and customer expectations continuously evolve.

Digital communication is a medium for information dissemination and a powerful tool for fostering interactive and personalised customer relationships. PT. Assunniah Al-Jauhari Wisata, one of Indonesia's leading Hajj and Umrah travel agencies, has strategically utilised digital platforms to enhance its credibility, transparency, and customer engagement through an integrated approach that includes social media marketing, website optimisation, and responsive customer service via WhatsApp, PT. Assunniah ensures prospective pilgrims receive timely and accurate information regarding their pilgrimage journey. The agency's online presence is not limited to promotions; it also involves educational content, customer testimonials, and interactive Q&A sessions that address common concerns. By actively engaging with customers through live chats, social media discussions, and real-time updates, the agency fosters a sense of reliability and trustworthiness, which is essential in influencing customer decision-making. This two-way communication model enhances customer satisfaction and allows the company to receive direct feedback, further improving its services.

PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata's commitment to digital transparency extends beyond customer interaction to crisis management and reputation building. Credibility is paramount in an industry where fraudulent travel agencies have caused significant financial and emotional distress to unsuspecting customers. PT. Assunniyah mitigates risks by consistently providing clear, verifiable, and honest information about its packages, pricing, and services. The company's digital strategy ensures that customers can verify details across multiple platforms, preventing misunderstandings and reinforcing confidence in its brand. Moreover, the agency employs a structured communication strategy that aligns with evolving digital trends, ensuring customers remain engaged and informed throughout their journey, by embracing a customer-centric approach that prioritises clarity, responsiveness, and ethical marketing. PT. Assunniyah has set itself apart in the competitive Hajj and Umrah travel industry, proving that effective digital communication is not just about technology but about building lasting relationships based on trust and integrity.

One of the key elements in building customer trust is delivering accurate and transparent information. PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata has adopted a digital communication strategy through its official website, social media, and WhatsApp customer service to ensure prospective pilgrims receive clear and accurate information. Some transparency practices implemented by PT. Assunniyah include:

1. Openly publish package prices on the website and social media, allowing prospective pilgrims to compare services without worrying about hidden costs.
2. Using customer testimonial videos and photos to strengthen the credibility of their services.
3. Providing real-time updates on departure schedules, visa processes, and accommodation arrangements to eliminate uncertainty for prospective pilgrims.

In the Hajj and Umrah travel industry, many cases have emerged where customers were deceived by agencies providing unclear or exaggerated promotional information. Therefore, PT. Assunniyah ensures that all published information is fact-based and verifiable by customers.

In the digital age, customers can access various communication channels such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and email. Therefore, the message conveyed must be consistent across all platforms (Lesmana et al., 2024). PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata has implemented a cohesive communication strategy by ensuring that information published on Instagram aligns with that on its website and WhatsApp customer service. This consistency is crucial in preventing customer confusion and ensuring the company's brand remains reliable. For instance, if a promotional Umrah package is posted on Instagram, the same promotional details should also be available on the website and confirmable by the customer service team via WhatsApp.

Customers in the Hajj and Umrah travel industry often require quick information and service assurance. To address this, PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata has leveraged WhatsApp customer service and live Q&A sessions on Instagram to ensure that prospective pilgrims can directly communicate with the agency. Fast responses in digital communication create the impression that customers are a top priority, thereby increasing loyalty and trust in the long term. Verbal communication patterns refer to how messages are delivered in written and spoken form across digital platforms (Muharram, 2024). In the Hajj and Umrah travel industry, word choice,

communication tone, and message structure greatly influence customer trust. PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata implements verbal communication patterns by:

1. Using professional, polite, and informative language in every digital interaction.
2. Adapting a more relaxed tone on social media while maintaining customer communication ethics.
3. Providing educational content in articles, videos, and infographics to help customers understand the Hajj and Umrah journey details.

To build customer trust, PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata optimises verbal communication patterns across various digital platforms, such as:

1. Social media captions that educate and provide persuasive information.
2. Email marketing campaigns offering promotional information and travel updates.
3. Friendly and responsive WhatsApp chat support to personally answer customer inquiries.

Two-way communication is an essential component of modern customer engagement, particularly in industries that rely heavily on trust, such as Hajj and Umrah travel (Ridda et al., 2020). Unlike traditional one-way communication, which simply broadcasts information, two-way communication fosters an interactive dialogue between businesses and customers. PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata has effectively implemented this approach through various digital platforms, including social media, live chat, WhatsApp, and customer forums. These channels enable the agency to provide real-time responses to customer inquiries and complaints, ensuring that concerns are addressed promptly. Additionally, two-way communication allows PT. Assunniyah will gather valuable customer feedback, which will be instrumental in improving its travel services. The agency creates a sense of community and trust by encouraging open discussions and facilitating the exchange of experiences among past and prospective pilgrims. This interactive approach enhances customer engagement and reinforces the agency's commitment to transparency and customer satisfaction.

The implementation of two-way communication at PT. Assunniyah yields significant benefits in building customer trust and loyalty. One of the most crucial advantages is enhancing customer loyalty, as pilgrims who feel heard and valued are likelier to recommend the agency to others, thus strengthening its reputation. Furthermore, by allowing direct interactions, misunderstandings can be minimised, as customers receive immediate clarifications on any ambiguous information, preventing misinformation from spreading. This level of accessibility and responsiveness contributes to increased company credibility, as customers associate fast and professional responses with reliability and trustworthiness. In an industry where credibility is a key differentiator, PT. Assunniyah's proactive communication strategy sets it apart from competitors by fostering strong customer relationships through clear, transparent, and responsive interactions.

PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata has proven that digital communication is key in building customer trust in the Hajj and Umrah travel industry by implementing professional verbal communication patterns and responsive two-way communication. This travel agency ensures that customers receive clear and reliable service details through a strategy focused on transparency and accuracy of information, thereby reducing potential misunderstandings. Additionally, customer engagement is enhanced through social media and WhatsApp customer service, enabling real-time

communication and providing a platform for prospective pilgrims to ask questions and receive immediate responses. The commitment to responsive and open communication has fostered customer loyalty, as they feel more valued and confident in the services provided. In the increasingly competitive digital industry, travel agencies that effectively manage digital communication will have a significant advantage in winning customer trust. PT. Assunniah Al-Jauhari Wisata is a real-life example of how an effective digital communication strategy can build a strong brand image, enhance credibility, and ensure sustainable customer satisfaction.

Challenges and Opportunities in Digital Engagement for Hajj and Umrah Travel Agencies

The digital transformation of the Hajj and Umrah travel industry has fundamentally changed how travel agencies interact with prospective pilgrims. In the past, customers primarily relied on word-of-mouth recommendations, personal referrals, and physical visits to travel agencies to arrange their pilgrimages (Yusoff, 2024). However, the growing influence of digital platforms, social media marketing, and online customer engagement has significantly altered the business landscape. PT. Assunniah Al-Jauhari Wisata, as one of the key players in the Hajj and Umrah travel sector, has recognized the importance of strong digital engagement strategies in maintaining competitiveness, expanding market reach, and fostering customer trust. Despite its progress in utilizing websites, WhatsApp Business, and social media interactions, the agency continues to face significant challenges in digital adaptation while identifying emerging opportunities for innovation and growth.

One of the primary challenges that PT. Assunniah's encounters in digital engagement intensify competition within the Hajj and Umrah travel industry as more agencies shift their marketing efforts to digital platforms, such as PT. Assunniah must continuously enhance its online presence to differentiate itself from competitors. With the rise of digital advertising, influencer endorsements, and AI-driven customer service, new agencies can capture market attention quickly without necessarily having an established reputation. Many customers now compare multiple travel agencies online, assessing pricing, package inclusions, customer testimonials, and ease of communication before booking. This competitive landscape forces PT. Assunniah is more innovative in its marketing strategies, ensuring its digital communication remains engaging, transparent, and customer-oriented. Without a consistent digital presence and differentiated brand positioning, the agency risks losing potential customers to digitally dominant competitors. (Shambour & Gutub, 2022).

Another major challenge in PT. Assunniah's digital engagement is the growing distrust among customers due to fraudulent Hajj and Umrah travel agencies operating online. Over the past few years, there have been numerous cases where unsuspecting pilgrims fell victim to scams, paying for travel packages that were either non-existent or poorly managed. Many fraudulent operators use fake social media accounts, misleading advertisements, and unverified WhatsApp promotions to lure potential customers. As a result, customers are becoming increasingly sceptical about engaging with Hajj and Umrah agencies through digital platforms. This poses a significant obstacle for PT. Assunniah must work twice as hard to assure potential pilgrims of its credibility, reliability,

and transparency. To address this, the agency has been actively reinforcing its trust-building efforts by highlighting verified customer testimonials, showcasing real-time pilgrimage experiences, and providing clear pricing structures on its digital channels. However, despite these efforts, rebuilding trust in an industry plagued by fraud remains an ongoing challenge.

Another pressing issue faced by PT. Assunniah has varying levels of digital literacy among its target audience, particularly older pilgrims who are less familiar with online booking processes, digital payments, and virtual consultations. While younger generations are more comfortable using social media, instant messaging, and website-based transactions, older customers often prefer traditional face-to-face engagement and manual registration. This presents a challenge, as the agency must balance digital transformation and maintaining accessible customer service for all age groups. Many elderly customers feel uneasy about online transactions, raising concerns about data security, payment fraud, and miscommunication. PT. Assunniah has attempted to overcome this challenge by integrating hybrid customer service models and combining digital interactions with personalised offline consultations. The agency continues to provide WhatsApp-based customer assistance, phone consultations, and physical service options, ensuring that even customers with low digital literacy can still engage with their services effectively.

Despite these challenges, PT. Assunniah also sees significant opportunities to enhance its digital engagement strategies, particularly by expanding its market reach, utilising AI-driven customer interactions, and strengthening its social media presence. One of the most promising opportunities lies in reaching a broader customer base beyond its immediate geographic location. Unlike traditional marketing, which relies on localized networks and referrals, digital marketing enables PT. Assunniah to attract customers from different regions, provinces, and even countries (Atikah et al., 2022). By optimising its website for search engine visibility (SEO), launching targeted social media ads, and collaborating with trusted religious influencers, the agency can position itself as a leading provider of Hajj and Umrah services for a global audience. This digital expansion increases customer acquisition rates and enhances brand recognition among international markets.

Another major opportunity that PT. Assunniah explores integrating artificial intelligence (AI) and automation technologies into customer engagement strategies. AI-powered chatbots, automated booking systems, and predictive analytics can significantly improve customer interactions by providing instant responses to inquiries, streamlining the registration process, and personalizing travel package recommendations. Many customers today expect quick and efficient communication, and agencies that leverage AI-powered customer service tools can enhance responsiveness while reducing operational workload. PT. Assunniah is considering implementing AI-driven chat support on its website and WhatsApp Business, allowing customers to receive real-time assistance without waiting for manual responses. These technological advancements will improve customer experience and reinforce the agency's digital credibility.

Social media engagement also presents a significant growth opportunity for PT. Assunniah, particularly in building trust, increasing customer engagement and creating a sense of community among pilgrims. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube provide an excellent avenue for sharing customer testimonials, live-streaming pilgrimage journeys, and educational content about Hajj and Umrah preparations. Many potential pilgrims feel more reassured when

they see real experiences from past customers, making visual storytelling a powerful marketing tool (Alshamrani, 2023). By implementing consistent and interactive social media strategies, such as weekly Q&A sessions, behind-the-scenes videos, and virtual consultations, PT. Assunniah can strengthen its connection with customers and establish itself as a trusted travel provider.

Additionally, the rise of digital payment solutions and financial technology (fintech) innovations provides another key opportunity for PT. Assunniah to improve its service offerings. Many customers today prefer secure, seamless, and flexible payment options, such as online banking, e-wallets, and installment payment plans, rather than traditional cash-based transactions by integrating reliable digital payment gateways into its website and WhatsApp Business platform, PT. Assunniah can enhance customer convenience and booking efficiency. Furthermore, flexible financing options, such as instalment-based Hajj and Umrah payments, can make pilgrimage travel more accessible to a wider range of customers, including those with budget constraints.

In conclusion, PT. Assunniah Al-Jauhari Wisata faces challenges and opportunities in its digital engagement efforts. The agency must navigate intense market competition, address customer skepticism due to fraudulent operators, and accommodate the digital literacy gap among its diverse clientele. However, by strategically leveraging AI-driven customer service, optimizing social media engagement, expanding its global reach, and integrating secure digital payment solutions, PT. Assunniah can further enhance its reputation, strengthen customer trust, and maintain a competitive advantage in the rapidly evolving digital travel industry. The agency must continue to adapt, innovate, and refine its digital strategies to meet changing consumer expectations while maintaining the integrity and quality of its pilgrimage services.

Analysis of Research Findings Based on Theoretical Framework

The findings of this research reveal that PT. Assunniah Al-Jauhari Wisata has effectively utilised digital communication strategies to build trust among Hajj and Umrah pilgrims. Using websites, social media, WhatsApp Business, and customer testimonials has significantly contributed to the agency's ability to establish credibility and gain customer confidence. However, to further analyse the effectiveness of these strategies, it is necessary to examine them through relevant theoretical frameworks. This section analyses the research findings using the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by Richard E. Petty and John Cacioppo (1986) and Two-Way Communication Theory. These theories help explain how digital engagement impacts customer trust, how potential pilgrims process information, and how communication strategies influence decision-making. By applying these theories, we can better understand the extent to which PT. Assunniah's digital strategies align with customer behaviour and trust-building mechanisms.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is a theory of persuasion that explains how individuals process information and make decisions based on two different cognitive routes: central route processing and peripheral route processing. According to Petty & Cacioppo (1986), people process persuasive messages in two ways ([Criswanto, 2024](#)):

1. Central Route Processing occurs when individuals carefully analyze information, engage in logical reasoning, and base their decisions on factual content. It requires high involvement and results in long-term attitude change.
2. Peripheral Route Processing – This happens when individuals rely on superficial cues such as visuals, endorsements, emotional appeals, or testimonials instead of deeply analyzing information. It requires low involvement and often results in short-term attitude change.

The findings of this study indicate that PT. Assunniah Al-Jauhari Wisata applies both central and peripheral route processing in its digital communication strategies, ensuring that it caters to a wide range of customer preferences and decision-making styles ([van der Bend et al., 2023](#)). Customers who engage in central route processing seek detailed and reliable information before making decisions. PT Assunniah supports this type of processing by providing comprehensive and structured content on its official website. The agency makes all relevant information about Hajj and Umrah packages, pricing breakdowns, accommodation details, visa application processes, and travel requirements easily accessible.

Many pilgrims, especially those planning their first Hajj or Umrah, prefer to carefully evaluate the details before committing financially. The research findings show that customers who are highly involved in the decision-making process tend to visit the agency's website, compare different packages, and read detailed FAQs ([Harun et al., 2024](#)). According to H. Ryan Maisur Aniq, administrative staff at PT, these individuals are more rational and require logical justifications before trusting a travel agency. Assunniah, many customers express their trust in the agency only after reading through detailed explanations on the website and verifying the legitimacy of the information. This aligns with central route processing, where decision-making is based on careful analysis rather than impulsive emotional responses.

While some customers process information rationally, others rely on peripheral cues such as visual representation, testimonials, social media engagement, and endorsements. ([Nasralla & Mollerup, 2023](#)). This is particularly evident in PT. Assunniah's social media marketing strategies, where the agency utilizes customer testimonials, influencer collaborations, and visually appealing content to attract and persuade potential pilgrims. The findings reveal that many customers make decisions based on the experiences of past pilgrims rather than an in-depth analysis of information. PT. Assunniah frequently posts video testimonials, real-time pilgrimage updates, and customer feedback on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, which are powerful persuasive tools for customers who prefer emotional and experiential cues.

According to Mahmud Heru Priyono, marketing staff, many new customers contact the agency after watching testimonial videos or seeing positive comments from past travelers. This suggests that peripheral route processing is highly effective in building trust, especially among individuals who rely on social proof and emotional engagement rather than logical evaluation ([Bullock et al., 2021](#)). Furthermore, PT. Assunniah strategically employs visual elements such as pilgrimage photos, behind-the-scenes content, and interactive social media engagement to create a sense of authenticity. This aligns with ELM's argument that persuasive messages do not always require deep cognitive effort—sometimes, attractive visuals and positive emotions are enough to establish trust.

The Two-Way Communication Theory explains how interaction between businesses and customers fosters trust, engagement, and relationship-building. Unlike traditional one-way communication, where businesses broadcast information, two-way communication allows for direct customer interaction, feedback exchange, and real-time engagement ([Aldahawi, 2021](#)). The findings indicate that PT. Assunniyah effectively implements two-way communication through various digital channels, ensuring that customers feel heard, valued, and reassured throughout their engagement with the agency. One of the most impactful strategies is using WhatsApp Business for direct customer communication. Customers prefer real-time responses when inquiring about packages, visa processing, and travel arrangements. The agency ensures that all inquiries are addressed promptly and professionally, reinforcing a sense of reliability and trustworthiness ([Rahman et al., 2024](#)).

Many respondents emphasized that quick and clear responses from PT. Assunniyah's staff played a crucial role in their decision to book Hajj or Umrah packages. According to Zainul Arifin, finance staff, most customers feel more confident after directly WhatsApp conversations rather than relying on automated website content alone—additionally, PT. Assunniyah enhances customer engagement through social media interactions. The agency actively responds to comments, messages, and customer feedback on Instagram and Facebook, ensuring that all concerns are addressed transparently. This type of direct engagement strengthens customer trust by demonstrating that the agency is approachable, responsive, and customer-focused ([Azis et al., 2021](#)).

Another key finding is that PT. Assunniyah utilises live engagement strategies such as virtual consultation sessions, live Q&A sessions, and interactive social media discussions. These real-time interactions allow customers to directly communicate with agency representatives, ask questions, and receive immediate clarification about their concerns. For many first-time pilgrims, the Hajj and Umrah process can be overwhelming. The availability of live digital consultations provides a sense of security and assurance, making customers feel more comfortable with their decisions. This aligns with the principles of two-way communication, where trust is built through open dialogue rather than passive information consumption. ([Aina et al., 2023](#)).

The findings of this research demonstrate that PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata's digital communication strategies align closely with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Two-Way Communication Theory. The agency effectively utilises both central and peripheral routes of persuasion, ensuring that it caters to both rational and emotional customer decision-making styles ([Wang et al., 2023](#)). By providing transparent, structured, and informative content, PT. Assunniyah appeals to customers with logical evaluation (central route processing). Meanwhile, through social media engagement, visual storytelling, and testimonials, the agency influences customers who rely on emotional and experiential cues (peripheral route processing).

Moreover, the agency's strong implementation of two-way communication strategies, including WhatsApp interactions, live Q&A sessions, and social media engagement, reinforces a customer-centric approach, ensuring customers feel valued, reassured, and confident in their decision-making process. By aligning its strategies with proven theoretical models, PT. Assunniyah has strengthened customer trust, enhanced brand credibility, and positioned itself as a reliable and transparent Hajj and Umrah travel agency in the digital era.

In the context of Hajj and Umrah travel agencies, applying the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) in PT. Assunniah Al-Jauhari Wisata's digital communication strategy plays a crucial role in building customer trust through two main routes: central route processing and peripheral route processing. Central route processing occurs when prospective pilgrims make decisions based on in-depth information analysis. PT. Assunniah leverages this route by providing transparent and detailed information on its website, including package prices, visa processes, travel schedules, and accommodations. By presenting structured and clear data, rational customers can easily compare options before deciding. On the other hand, peripheral route processing is used to attract prospective pilgrims who are more influenced by emotional elements such as visuals, customer testimonials, and recommendations from others. PT. Assunniah optimises this route by utilising social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to share customer experiences through travel documentation videos, worship photos, and positive reviews from previous pilgrims. This strategy effectively engages potential customers who rely more on emotional aspects in their decision-making process.

The application of the Two-Way Communication Theory in PT. Assunniah's digital communication strategy is crucial in fostering closer relationships with customers. This theory emphasises the importance of interactive communication between the travel agency and prospective pilgrims, ensuring that communication is one-way information dissemination and a responsive dialogue that actively engages customers. PT. Assunniah implements this strategy through WhatsApp Business, where prospective pilgrims can directly inquire about travel packages, departure preparations, and any potential issues they might face. Additionally, through comment sections and direct messages on social media, PT. Assunniah can respond to questions, clarify arising issues, and address customer complaints promptly. This approach enhances transparency and customer trust and strengthens loyalty as customers feel more valued in the communication process.

Combining ELM and Two-Way Communication Theory provides a strong foundation for PT. Assunniah to develop a more effective and customer-oriented digital communication strategy. They attract customers who require in-depth and reliable information by utilising central route processing. In contrast, through peripheral route processing, they reach prospective pilgrims who are more easily persuaded through visuals and emotional experiences. On the other hand, implementing two-way communication ensures that customers receive information and interact, provide feedback, and gain direct service assurances. With this approach, PT. Assunniah successfully builds credibility as a transparent, responsive, and trustworthy Hajj and Umrah travel agency in an increasingly competitive digital era.

Despite the valuable insights obtained from this research, several limitations must be acknowledged, along with necessary cautions in interpreting the findings. One of the primary limitations of this study is its focus on a single case study, namely PT. Assunniah Al-Jauhari Wisata is the sole subject of analysis. While the findings provide in-depth insights into the digital communication strategies employed by the agency, they may not be fully generalisable to all Hajj and Umrah travel agencies, particularly those operating in different regions or with varying levels of digital adaptation. The digital engagement strategies and trust-building mechanisms observed in PT. Assunniah might be unique to its operational context, customer base, and market positioning,

meaning that similar agencies in larger markets, urban areas, or with different target demographics might experience different outcomes. Future research should consider comparative studies involving multiple travel agencies to determine whether similar digital strategies are equally effective across diverse market conditions.

Another key limitation is the dependence on qualitative data, primarily collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. While qualitative methods provide rich, descriptive insights into customer trust-building processes, they inherently lack quantifiable measures of effectiveness. The study does not incorporate statistical analysis, customer satisfaction surveys, or behavioural analytics, which could have provided a more concrete measurement of how digital communication impacts trust. For instance, interview respondents expressed a strong sense of confidence in PT. Assunniyah's digital communication, the absence of quantitative indicators such as engagement rates, conversion statistics, or retention metrics limits the ability to assess the true effectiveness of these strategies. Future studies should integrate qualitative and quantitative methods to comprehensively evaluate digital engagement in the Hajj and Umrah travel industry.

Additionally, the study is subject to potential biases from the informants and the researcher's interpretation of the data. Informants, particularly the agency's staff members, may have presented an overly positive view of their digital strategies, minimizing or omitting challenges and shortcomings that could affect customer trust. Likewise, while customer testimonials were included, the study primarily relied on customers with positive experiences, potentially neglecting those who faced difficulties or dissatisfaction. This introduces a selection bias, where the sample does not fully represent the entire customer experience spectrum. Additionally, as the research was conducted through interviews and observations, interpretative subjectivity may have influenced how the findings were analyzed. Future research should employ broader data collection techniques, such as randomized customer feedback surveys, sentiment analysis on social media, and independent audits of agency communication strategies, to reduce bias and enhance the reliability of the findings.

A final caution in interpreting the results is the rapidly evolving nature of digital communication. The strategies that are effective today may not necessarily remain effective in the future, given technological advancements, changing customer preferences, and new digital marketing trends. Social media algorithms, consumer trust factors, and the competitive landscape in the Hajj and Umrah travel industry are constantly shifting. Additionally, external factors such as regulatory changes in Saudi Arabian pilgrimage policies, global economic conditions, and travel restrictions could significantly impact the relevance of the findings. To ensure ongoing applicability, future research should continuously monitor emerging trends in digital engagement; customer behaviour shifts, and advancements in AI-driven communication tools, allowing agencies to adapt their trust-building strategies to an ever-changing digital environment.

Given digital communication's limitations and evolving nature in the Hajj and Umrah travel industry, future research should focus on technological advancements and AI-driven innovations to enhance customer trust and engagement. Instead of solely exploring comparative studies across different travel agencies, future research should delve deeper into the integration of AI-powered

marketing strategies and their impact on customer decision-making. For instance, implementing AI-driven chatbots for PT. Assunniyah could improve real-time customer service by responding instantly to inquiries about visa processes, travel packages, and itinerary updates. AI-based predictive analytics could also be utilized to analyze customer behavior patterns, allowing the agency to create personalized travel package recommendations based on customer preferences, browsing history, and past interactions.

Future research should investigate the effectiveness of virtual consultation and immersive digital experiences in the context of Hajj and Umrah travel services. PT. Assunniyah could explore virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR) simulations to provide prospective pilgrims a realistic preview of the pilgrimage journey, including accommodations, prayer areas, and rituals performed in Mecca and Medina. These technologies could enhance customer confidence and reduce uncertainties, particularly for first-time pilgrims. Additionally, live-streaming Q&A sessions and interactive customer webinars on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube could further strengthen customer engagement by offering real-time consultations with travel advisors and past pilgrims.

To optimize digital marketing efforts, future studies should analyze the impact of AI-powered content creation tools in enhancing social media engagement. PT. Assunniyah can leverage automated social media analytics tools to track content performance, audience engagement, and conversion rates across multiple platforms. Research could also focus on the role of influencer marketing and AI-driven sentiment analysis in improving trust-building efforts. AI-powered tools like natural language processing (NLP) algorithms can monitor online reviews and detect early signs of customer dissatisfaction, allowing the agency to address issues proactively before they escalate into reputational risks. By integrating these advanced digital strategies, PT. Assunniyah could stay ahead of competitors, enhance customer loyalty, and build a more data-driven approach to digital trust-building in the Hajj and Umrah travel industry.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the digital communication strategies that Hajj and Umrah travel agencies employ to build pilgrims' trust, specifically focusing on PT. Assunniyah Al-Jauhari Wisata. The research aimed to analyze the effectiveness of digital engagement in fostering customer trust, examine the challenges faced by the agency, and explore opportunities for improving digital communication strategies. The findings demonstrated that PT. Assunniyah effectively utilizes websites, social media platforms, WhatsApp Business, and customer testimonials to establish credibility and transparency, highlighting the importance of a two-way communication approach in strengthening customer relationships. Notably, the study revealed that both central and peripheral processing routes, as explained by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), play a crucial role in influencing customer trust levels. These results underscore the significance of clear, interactive, and responsive digital communication in addressing customer concerns and ensuring reliability in the Hajj and Umrah travel industry, suggesting that enhanced customer engagement, AI-driven communication tools, and strategic digital marketing can further reinforce trust and service credibility.

While this study provides valuable insights into how digital communication fosters trust in Hajj and Umrah travel agencies, limitations should be noted, such as the focus on a single case study, the reliance on qualitative data, and the evolving nature of digital communication trends. Future research should focus on comparative analyses across multiple travel agencies, incorporating quantitative metrics such as customer conversion rates and engagement analytics to measure the effectiveness of digital strategies more comprehensively. Additionally, further studies could explore the long-term impact of digital engagement on customer loyalty and investigate how emerging technologies such as AI-powered chatbots, blockchain for secure transactions, and immersive virtual experiences can enhance customer confidence in pilgrimage services. These research directions would potentially enhance our understanding of digital trust-building mechanisms and inform more effective digital marketing strategies, policy frameworks, and best practices for travel agencies in the Hajj and Umrah sectors.

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