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## The Role of Sustainable Tourism Development in Promoting Entrepreneurship in Religiously Themed Cities using Social Media: Peran Pengembangan Pariwisata Berkelanjutan dalam Mendorong Kewirausahaan di Kota-Kota Bertema Agama melalui Media Sosial

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### Abstract

**General Background:** The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed global economic structures and reshaped tourism development patterns. **Specific Background:** Sustainable tourism increasingly depends on the integration of digital platforms, social capital, and community participation to support long-term economic and social outcomes. **Knowledge Gap:** Despite growing attention, limited studies explicitly examine how digital transformation and social networks jointly contribute to sustainable tourism development. **Aims:** This study explores the role of digital transformation and social capital in supporting sustainable tourism practices and local economic development. **Results:** The findings indicate that digital platforms facilitate communication, collaboration, and participation, while social capital strengthens trust and cooperation within communities, contributing to tourism sustainability. **Novelty:** The study integrates digital transformation and social capital into a unified perspective for understanding sustainable tourism development. **Implications:** The results suggest that strengthening digital infrastructure and fostering social networks are essential strategies for promoting sustainable tourism and supporting local development.

**Keywords:** Digital Transformation, Social Capital, Sustainable Tourism, Community Participation, Tourism Development

#### Key Findings Highlights

Online platforms support community collaboration in tourism activities  
Trust-based relationships strengthen local participation dynamics  
Integrated socio-digital factors contribute to long-term development

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## Introduction :

As a result of the digital revolution and changing world economy, the role of social networks as a communication channel, has expanded to also serve as an essential foundation for today's entrepreneurs and sustainable development overall. For those sites which reflect religious or cultural heritage, these digital channels can also be used to provide connections between sacred traditions and modern business opportunities, creating the opportunity for small and micro businesses to enter the market and access opportunities by leveraging their unique spiritual character [1].

The rise of online marketplaces has caused a fundamental shift in how businesses operate, creating a vast number of ways for people to participate in creating content and many new ways for businesses to provide their products and services. Social networks have altered the entry barriers for entering into a marketplace by allowing businesses operated by individual entrepreneurs, to enter the marketplace without needing to have large amounts of investment capital to start up an actual business. Research conducted states that social networks are paramount to any entrepreneur's ability to acquire an understanding and develop a "green" (or sustainable) orientation to their entrepreneurial activity, which is key to achieving lasting success in today's marketplace. Social networks allow an entrepreneur to enter into a global marketplace at little cost and very little lead time, thus eliminating two of the major obstacles that historically have limited rural and heritage-based businesses from reaching their potential [2].

In today's hyper-connected world, the use of social networks as communication tools has changed from being merely peripheral to creating the very framework of economic activity. This change is particularly strong in religious and cultural centres, where digital platforms serve as pathways to the newly named "Digital Renaissance" of our time. By combining ancient spiritual traditions with some of the latest methods of digital entrepreneurship, social networks create a climate for the production of small and micro-sized businesses to have an opportunity for global success despite geographical and financial barriers [3].

The way social networks perform this function is largely explained through the lens of Social Capital Theory. While the referenced articles provide examples of Zhang et al. (2024) regarding the role of social capital in the quest for economic and environmental sustainability, independent academic references such as Granovetter's (1973) work, *The Strength of Weak Ties*, suggest that social networks provide an avenue for entrepreneurs operating out of religious centres to acquire "non-redundant" information from tourists and pilgrims, thus facilitating their innovation. Also, looking through the lens of Putnam's (2000) concepts of "Bonding" and "Bridging" social capital helps to illustrate how social networks provide connections for local religious communities to maintain their internal cohesion, while simultaneously creating links to visitors from around the world. These links ultimately lead to improved performance for entrepreneurs [4].

Religious identity has become a Sustainable Competitive Advantage integrated into business strategy instead of using religion as a limiting factor, just as [5] illustrate how embedding social networks into a firm's strategy allows the company to use its unique environmental and cultural context to compete more effectively than its competition. When business is conducted in places of a spiritual nature, business success is often driven by the type of entrepreneurial activity known as "Culture-Led Entrepreneurship" [6]. Furthermore, businesses that are able to express their cultural or religious identity via digital platforms develop what refer to as "spiritual resonance" with their audience, resulting in greater trust and loyalty among consumers.

Thus, the relationship between social networking and economic success is established through Sustainable Tourism and Socio-Cultural Identity. According to [7], social networking enables local actors to promote "Responsible Travel", and by using digital technology as a means of empowering the local economy, the increasing volume of visitors to sacred locations can support rather than compromise the integrity of the local community. Furthermore, Giddens' Structuration Theory, which is used as a reference for the above studies, demonstrates that the interaction between the digital actor (entrepreneur) and the social structure (value of religion) allows for the continual redefinition of local identity, thus creating a dynamic asset for development within the marketplace.

The modern-day literature also highlights the importance of social networks in developing Business Resilience. [8] show that social networks are critical to assist small companies in navigating through external shocks within the tourism and hospitality industry. Religious sites that have seasonal fluctuations or geopolitical issues utilize these networks as an instantaneous source of communication in order to remain present in the market and to obtain social support during a crisis.

In conclusion, the strategic use of social networks within religious and other cultural contexts forms an advanced confluence of technology, sociology and economics. By leveraging the worldwide reach of these social networks, heritage-rich locations can help to build an entrepreneurial ecosystem that is not only economically viable but is also culturally authentic and environmentally sustainable.

## Research Problem

The increasing intersection between sustainable tourism, digital media, and religious heritage sites has resulted in a considerable gap between knowledge and application of how sustainable tourism developments can drive entrepreneurial activity in religiously-themed cities. Although the rapid proliferation of social media platforms has created significant changes in the way that tourists interact with sacred sites, there remain few empirical studies investigating the mechanisms through which digital engagement results in entrepreneurial opportunity. The unique challenges faced by religiously-themed cities require a balance between maintaining cultural and spiritual identity within the context of developing tourism-based entrepreneurship. Further, the lack of a coherent framework connecting sustainable tourism policies, social media marketing strategies, and entrepreneurial ecosystems in these unique urban settings inhibits the ability of stakeholders to make informed decisions. Given this background, this study aims to explore the role of sustainable tourism development in facilitating entrepreneurship in religiously-themed cities, with an emphasis on social media as facilitative tool.

## Research objectives

The objective of this research is to assess the impact that sustainable tourism development can have on developing entrepreneurship (new businesses) opportunities located in or around religious cities and determine whether an entrepreneur has a conducive environment to create a tourism project.

Additionally, we aim to evaluate how social media marketing enables entrepreneurs to utilise digital channels for marketing their businesses and promoting awareness of religious tourism destinations.

The ultimate goal of this research will be to propose a framework that incorporates sustainable tourism development, social media, and entrepreneurship within religious cities; this framework will provide policymakers (government officials) and investors with a method for developing strategies to create a balance among all three factors listed above.

## Research questions:

First, do sustainable tourism development and entrepreneurship (economically) relate to each other in producing economic development within religious cities? Second, how can social media be utilised effectively in the development of religious tourism and facilitate entrepreneurial tourism projects within religious cities? Finally, what is the methodology for developing an integrated framework that links sustainable tourism development, entrepreneurship, and social media to promote overall growth and development within religious cities?

## Theoretical aspect

### Developing a Sustainable Tourism Industry

### Overall Conceptual Framework Within A Global Environment

### Defining Sustainable Tourism Development & Theoretical Models for It

Sustainable tourism is defined to be that type of tourism which satisfies the needs of both present day tourists and local residents, while at the same time supporting and maximizing future opportunities associated with tourism development, according to the Organization Mondiale Du Tourisme (OMT). The OMT definition of sustainable tourism development embraces the fundamental tension of the tourism industry: economic growth vs. protection of the ecological and social environments of the tourism recipient region.

Three theoretical models frame the concept of sustainable tourism as it applies today. The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) theory represents an assessment of sustainability that measures environmental impacts, economic impacts and social impacts simultaneously. Ecological Modernization Theory (EMT) posits that through technological innovations and green governance, we can decouple the economic growth of our society from ecological degradation. Finally, Diffusion of Innovations (DI) examines how the sustainable practices are disseminated throughout the tourism industry. A research article written by Mahmood, Chaudhry, Goh, Rajadurai and Chen (2025) provides an integrated literature review of TBL, EMT and DI as they relate to the assessment of sustainable innovations in the tourism industry and finds that the majority of sustainable innovations in tourism will lead to greater resource conservation; enhanced competitiveness in how businesses operate; and greater social equity amongst the communities that develop tourism[9].

The sustainable tourism academic field has seen exponential growth in the last decade. The systematic review of 1,400 articles published in Discover Sustainability[10] that were indexed in Scopus just in 2023 shows a huge increase in the number of articles published in this space. For example, only 24 were published in 2015. This growth suggests that there has been increased attention from the scientific community and urgency from a policy standpoint to research sustainable tourism. The research themes have also evolved from more broad, environmental issues researching tourism to specific concerns about community involvement, digital innovation/transformation, climate change adaptation/mitigation, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Among the SDG dimensions most frequently cited in tourism research, the top three are SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals); the social (SDG 10) and marine (SDG 14) dimensions are the least frequent [10]. This is concerning because coastal and aquatic ecosystems are among the most vulnerable to tourism.

The notion of sustainable development is of paramount importance in the current global context and is a guiding principle of worldwide planning. Sustainable development aims to attain equilibrium between the social, economic and environmental requirements of society. Consensus on definitions of sustainable development is that it is a process whereby the economic growth achieved is at all times cognizant of the amount of resources in which the environment is able to sustain the growing economy [11]. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism as tourism that takes into consideration the impact of tourism on the host country's physical, social and economic environment. Sustainable tourism also places an emphasis on using natural and cultural attributes of the host country efficiently, while considering the social and cultural values of the local community, and creating long-term benefits for all stakeholders involved with sustainable tourism [12].

### Dimensions of Tourism Development

Sustainable tourism development will be assessed through three primary interconnected pillars, which will serve as the basis for measuring dependent variables in this research.

- Environmental Dimension: This dimension of sustainable tourism development is focused on conserving and protecting natural resources and ecosystems while minimizing the impacts of human behaviours. Examples of protecting natural resources and ecosystems include protecting biodiversity, implementing sustainable resource practices (i.e. managing water and energy resources), reducing pollution, and addressing climate change and its impacts [13].
- Social Dimension: This dimension of sustainable tourism development is aimed at achieving social equity, promoting human welfare, and protecting the cultural and heritage values of the host communities. This would include supporting the development of local communities and protecting culturally significant sites, while providing a positive experience for visitors that engage in sustainable tourism development.

### Entrepreneurship in religiously themed cities

The association between religion and entrepreneurship is one of the fastest-developing intersections within both management and social science research. It is estimated that approximately 90% of the global population identifies with a religious faith or belongs to a religious institution. Therefore, religion will continue to play an essential role within individuals' lives. On the other hand, entrepreneurship has become a significant contributor to economic development globally, while religion itself has been increasingly identified as playing a major role in the development of social and economic welfare at both the macro and micro levels[14].

At the same time, "religiously significant cities" (e.g., Mecca / Medina (Saudi Arabia), Najaf / Karbala (Iraq), Varanasi (India)) represent a unique type of urban entrepreneurial environment. Such cities represent an assured stream of mass pilgrimage-based demand combined with many other complex institutional/cultural/regulatory factors. Despite the significant economic potential of these cities, this intersection is relatively unexplored even though billions of people worldwide consider religion to be a central

part of their lives and research at the intersection of religion and entrepreneurship is in its infancy.

## Religions Role In Entrepreneurial Intent

The major question in this literature relates to the extent to which religious identity has an impact on the propensity to engage in entrepreneurship. The most comprehensive answer to this question to date is provided via a quantitative meta-analytic study conducted at Management Review Quarterly (Springer, 2025) using 75 empirical studies and 306 effect size estimates obtained from Scopus. The study found a statistically significant positive but low correlation between overall religion and entrepreneurship with a degree of variation in the strength of the relationship dependent on religious group and country, as well as in the level of measured outcome or performance[14].

At the individual level, a cross-nationally representative sample of 740 university students published in the International Small Business Journal (SAGE, 2023) found an overall positive relationship between having a religious affiliation versus being Agnostic/Atheist, on the one hand, and entrepreneurial intentions, on the other. A more noteworthy aspect of this finding is that religiosity (versus religious affiliation) impacted entrepreneurial intentions differently by religious affiliation. Consequently, it is imperative to consider religiosity further than pure categorical membership[15].

An supporting research has also been examined through the lens of Ferras & Jaber (2022) in their article published in FYI: Family and Household Financial Economics Research -- which shows how the religious beliefs of Iranian entrepreneurs benefit their success as they are able to benefit from their values by being able to apply them in practice through their businesses. In addition, the findings of their research also show that entrepreneurs' use of religion provides them with the necessary foundation to develop socio-economic relationships with their communities. Therefore, the success of entrepreneurship in Iran is greatly influenced by the degree to which entrepreneurs practice their religion and are guided by their religious values[16].

## Previous studies

Social networks, particularly in a cultural or religious context are becoming more than just a technology; they can also be a channel for developing social capital and developing cultural and religious identity, as well as create measurable socioeconomic impact:

Entrepreneurship and Culture in Local Communities: The study by Kim et al. (2022) found that when organizations are culturally driven within a local community, and use social networks for operational purposes, there is increased entrepreneurial success from using cultural and religious symbols as a basis for attracting visitors[6].

Social Capital and Sustainable Development: Zhang et al. (2024) assert that social networks create social capital which, when combined with the three dimensions of sustainable development—economic, social and environment—form the foundations for achieving sustainability in religious environments through the creation of trust between visitors and local communities and to ensure sustainable religious tourism[17].

Use of Social Media, and Community Involvement: Senyao & Ha's study (2022) demonstrated that the use of social media to participate in local communities has a significant impact on the involvement of residents to participate within tourism development at religious sites. They suggest that the use of social media connects the identity and values of the residents with the religious sites to enhance the experience of the religious sites from a simple tourism visit, to a spiritual and interactive experience through the activities of the residents[18].

The Business Resilience of Small Businesses in Hospitality & Tourism : Coles & et al. (2021) show that social networks have a significant impact on the resiliency of these small businesses in hospitality and tourism to external shocks. Social networks provide small businesses in the hospitality and tourism industry located in proximity to sacred sites with direct channels and various forms of social support that reduce their business risk levels[19].

The Impact of Socio-Cultural Identity on the Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises: Yeboah (2021) studies the effects of socio-cultural identity, as expressed through social networks, upon the growth of SMEs. Findings show that digital content produced by businesses reflecting the religious and cultural identity of the community in which they operate fosters a substantial level of consumer acceptance and sustainable competitive advantage [20].

The Role Of Sustainable Tourism & Socio-Cultural Identity: Findings demonstrate that the entrepreneurial performance of businesses at religious sites does not increase simply due to the influence of social networks but by way of the mediating effect of socio-cultural identity and sustainable tourism. These factors transform digital interaction into an emotional/spiritual connection resulting in repeat visitation to the destination and support for local businesses from tourists (visitors).

## Methodology of Research

1. Method of Research: This Research Employs a Combination of Descriptive and Analytical Methods of Research Utilizing a Mixed Method (Quantitative and Qualitative) Approach Which is the Most Appropriate to Answer the Research Questions (3) and to Achieve the Research Objectives.

2. Study Population: The population of this study consists of;

- Individuals who are considered Entrepreneurs In The Holy Tourism Sector;
- Individuals who travel as Tourists to Holy Cities;
- Decision Makers and Local Tourism Authority Officials.

3. Sample of Research: A stratified random sample will be utilized to represent each of the three groups in the Research Population. The sample size will be calculated using either Kregci and Morgan Formula or at least 200 Subjects To Provide A Sufficient Sample Size.

4. Methods of Data Collection: There are two primary methods for collecting research data;

- Questionnaires will provide Quantitative Data on Entrepreneurs and Tourists and will include the Following Areas;
- Sustainable Tourism;
- Use of Social Media;
- Entrepreneurship and Economic Opportunities ;
- In-depth Interviews will Provide Qualitative Data from Decision Makers and Local Tourism Authorities.

### Distribution of the study sample according to demographic variables (n=200)

Table (1) Sex

Sex			
Category	repetition	%	Cumulative percentage %
male	100	50	50
feminine	100	50	100
<b>total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>	

Table (2) age group

age group			
Category	repetition	%	Cumulative percentage %
36-45	65	32.5	32.5
25-35	55	27.5	60.0
Less than 25	47	23.5	83.5
More than 45	33	16.5	100.0
<b>total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>	

Table (3) Educational level

Educational level			
Category	repetition	%	Cumulative percentage %
Bachelor's	97	48.5	48.5
Master's	69	34.5	83.0
PhD	19	9.5	92.5
High school	15	7.5	100.0
<b>total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>	

Table (4) Nature of work

Nature of work			
Category	repetition	%	Cumulative percentage %
Entrepreneur	72	36.0	36.0
tourist	62	31.0	67.0
government employee	45	22.5	89.5
Other	21	10.5	100.0
<b>total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>	

Table (5) Years of experience

Years of experience			
Category	repetition	%	Cumulative percentage %
5-10	89	44.5	44.5
Less than 5	59	29.5	74.0
More than 10	52	26.0	100.0
<b>total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>	

An examination of the demographics of this research sample reveals a diverse and representative group of individuals belonging to the larger research population; therefore, the sample adequately represents a large number of individuals and has a small majority of males. Individuals between the ages of 25 and 35 comprise the majority of this sample, which is also representative of the highest rate of individuals employed in the tourism workforce. The high percentage of individuals possessing a bachelor's degree indicates that this demographic group is adequately educated to understand the themes of the study.

### Descriptive statistics for the study's axes

Table (6) Sustainable tourism development

**First axis: Sustainable tourism development**

Paragraph	arithmetic mean	standard deviation	The mediator	The loom	Coefficient of variation %	Level
Tourism policies contribute to achieving sustainable development	3.90	0.63	4.00	4	16.1	high
The projects take into account the preservation of religious and cultural identity.	3.84	0.59	4.00	4	15.3	high
Tourism infrastructure is available that supports environmental sustainability.	3.82	0.61	4.00	4	15.9	high
The relevant authorities encourage sustainable investment.	3.86	0.56	4.00	4	14.4	high
There is a balance between tourism development and visitor requirements.	3.86	0.60	4.00	4	15.6	high
Development contributes to raising the quality of life for the local community.	3.94	0.61	4.00	4	15.4	high
<b>The overall average of the axis</b>	<b>3.87</b>	<b>0.6</b>				<b>high</b>

Table (6) Second topic: Social media

**Second topic: Social media**

Paragraph	arithmetic mean	standard deviation	The mediator	The loom	Coefficient of variation %	Level
use social media to promote my project.	3.73	0.57	4.00	4	15.4	high
Platforms help attract tourists to the city.	3.72	0.60	4.00	4	16.2	high

Digital content contributes to enhancing a destination's appeal.	3.77	0.59	4.00	4	15.7	high
Platforms enable direct communication with customers.	3.76	0.63	4.00	4	16.7	high
Digital marketing enhances competitiveness.	3.72	0.60	4.00	4	16.1	high
The platforms provide data for developing tourism businesses.	3.71	0.57	4.00	4	15.4	high
<b>The overall average of the axis</b>	<b>3.74</b>	<b>0.59</b>				<b>high</b>

Table (7) Third axis: Entrepreneurship

Third axis: Entrepreneurship						
Paragraph	arithmetic mean	standard deviation	The mediator	The loom	Coefficient of variation %	Level
Genuine entrepreneurial opportunities exist in the tourism sector.	3.96	0.60	4.00	4	15.1	high
Sustainable tourism encourages entrepreneurial projects.	3.92	0.61	4.00	4	15.5	high
Government support contributes to the development of entrepreneurial projects.	3.96	0.54	4.00	4	13.7	high
Religious cities are fertile ground for tourism businesses.	3.92	0.51	4.00	4	13.0	high
Innovation fosters leadership in these cities.	3.92	0.57	4.00	4	14.5	high
Partnerships contribute to supporting tourism entrepreneurship	3.97	0.57	4.00	4	14.3	high

<b>The overall average of the axis</b>	3.94	0.57				<b>high</b>
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Table (8) Fourth axis: The complementary relationship

Fourth axis: The complementary relationship						
Paragraph	arithmetic mean	standard deviation	The mediator	The loom	Coefficient of variation %	Level
Social media enhances the impact of sustainable tourism on entrepreneurs hip.	3.79	0.57	4.00	4	15.1	<b>high</b>
The integration of sustainability and digitalization creates a successful model.	3.78	0.56	4.00	4	14.9	<b>high</b>
Social media reduces marketing costs for entrepreneurs.	3.79	0.56	4.00	4	14.9	<b>high</b>
Religious tourism has a promising future with digital transformation .	3.78	0.59	4.00	4	15.5	<b>high</b>
<b>The overall average of the axis</b>	<b>3.78</b>	<b>0.57</b>				<b>high</b>

The sample's responses were all high according to the descriptive statistics for each of the measures used in this study, with overall mean scores ranging from 3.72 to 3.91 (on a 4175-point range [3.67-5.00]), and with low standard deviations, suggesting that the respondent's scores were homogeneous and closely converged or clustered around their means. Thus, there is a high level of recognition of sustainable tourism development and entrepreneurship within religious cities from this sample group.

Table (9) Pearson correlation coefficient matrix between the study axes

**Pearson correlation coefficient matrix between the study axes**

Axis	M1: Sustainable Development	M2: Communication	M3: Entrepreneurship	M4: Complementary Relationships	Medium
<b>M1: Sustainable Development</b>	<b>1.000</b>	0.436**	<b>0.559**</b>	0.475**	<b>3.87</b>
<b>M2: Communication</b>	—	<b>1.000</b>	<b>0.511**</b>	0.446**	<b>3.74</b>
<b>M3: Entrepreneurship</b>	—	—	<b>1.000</b>	0.394**	<b>3.94</b>
<b>M4: Complement</b>	—	—	—	<b>1.000</b>	<b>3.81</b>

ary Relationships				
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**\*\*Statistically significant at the 0.01 level**

**\*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level**

Statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ) positive correlations for all four constructs were evident and validated their closeness in terms of being logically related to each other. Social media (X2) and entrepreneurship (X3) were the strongest of the four correlations with a Pearson correlation coefficient of .511, indicating that the use of social media had a positive influence on an individual's ability to produce entrepreneurial opportunities. Furthermore, the first variable (i.e., entrepreneurship) and the third variable (i.e., social media) exhibited a moderate to strong positive correlation of .559, further supporting the original hypothesis.

Table (10) Multiple regression analysis — Dependent variable: Entrepreneurship (M3)

**Multiple regression analysis — Dependent variable: Entrepreneurship (M3)**

First: Model Summary					
R	R <sup>2</sup>	Rate R <sup>2</sup>	Standard error of estimation	F	Sig.(F)
0.636	0.404	0.395	0.303	44.266	0.000

Second: ANOVA regression Table					
Source	Sum of squares (SS)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Mean Squares (MS)	value of F	Sig.
<b>Regression</b>	12.1626	3	4.0542	44.2656	0.000 **
<b>Residue</b>	17.9513	196	0.0916	—	
<b>Total</b>	30.1139	199	—	—	

Third: Transactions Table					
independent variable	B (non-uniform)	standard error	Beta (unified)	t value	Sig.
Constant	1.3222	0.2399	---	5.5106	0.000 **
Sustainable Tourism Development (M1)	0.3490	0.0585	0.3899	5.9614	0.000 **
Social Media (M2)	0.2700	0.0560	0.3097	4.8187	0.000 **
The complementary relationship (M4)	0.0670	0.0625	0.0705	1.0723	0.2849

Regression equation:  $M3 = 1.3222 + 0.3490 \times M1 + 0.2700 \times M2 + 0.0670 \times M4$

**$M4 \times 0.0670$   $M3 = 1.3222 + 0.3490 \times M1 + 0.2700 \times M2 +$**

This study has established that, as a whole, there is an overall statistical significance associated with the multi regression analytical technique ( $F=44.27$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) including three independent variables which jointly account for 40.4% of the variance in the entrepreneurship variable ( $R^2=0.404$ ). There are three independent variables that have demonstrated a statistically significant effect with sustainable tourism development ( $Beta=0.390$ ) being the highest and most significant with respect to entrepreneurship followed by social media ( $Beta=0.310$ ) having a lesser effect and complementary relationship (M4) not having any statistically significant effect ( $p=0.285$ ) which requires more exploration in terms of what previous researchers could explain based upon previous studies.

Table (11) Reliability test — Cronbach's alpha coefficient

**Reliability test — Cronbach's alpha coefficient**

Axis	Number of paragraphs	Cronbach's alpha	Level of stability	Decision
Axis 1: Sustainable Tourism Development	6	<b>0.893</b>	Very good	<b>acceptable</b>
Axis 2: Social Media	6	<b>0.849</b>	Very good	<b>acceptable</b>
Axis 3: Entrepreneurship	6	<b>0.849</b>	Very good	<b>acceptable</b>
Axis 4: Complementary Relationships	4	<b>0.810</b>	Very good	<b>acceptable</b>
The questionnaire as a whole	22	<b>0.907</b>	Excellent	<b>acceptable</b>

**Accepted value: Cronbach's alpha  $\geq$  0.70 (Nunnally, 1978)**

The outcome of the reliability testing shows that the research tool has excellent reliability; with the Cronbach's alpha values (for each of the axes of the study) ranging from 0.810 to 0.893 (all of which are above the minimum acceptable value of 0.70). The overall reliability of the questionnaire was 0.907 which confirms that the instrument has high internal consistency and therefore is appropriate for field use and for making research decisions based on its results.

## Results

The results obtained from this study will be evaluated (analysed, interpreted) and discussed in light of existing literature and previous studies, related to the research question/s which were the impetus behind this research project. The data collected from the study participants, which included entrepreneurs, tourists and decision-makers in religious Cities, were analysed using a variety of statistical techniques (such as descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis). In addition, the researcher conducted reliability testing on the data collected from the instrument and sample based on these four main themes; the 200 participants that completed the questionnaire all completed a 22-item questionnaire that was broken down according to these four main themes.

According to the above table, the sample consisted mainly of youth (ages 25-35) who represented 35% of the total participants. The nature of entrepreneurship for the young (ages 25-35) makes sense because this group is mainly involved in the tourism and digital work environment. Additionally, the fact that 50% of the respondents had at least a bachelor's degree indicates that most will have sufficient understanding of the questionnaire's questions to adequately and accurately provide answers.

The first axis relates to sustainable tourism development. The arithmetic mean obtained for this axis is 3.85 with a standard deviation of 0.45, which places it firmly within what may be considered the high range (3.67-5.00) based on the five-point Likert Scale.

The results indicate that the sample group is aware of the value attributed to sustainable tourism policy by the respondent sample group regarding religious cities specifically in relation to preserving religious and cultural identity and balancing development needs with maintenance of the cultural heritage. Further, this result is supported by (Timothy & Olsen 2006) who noted that communities located within religious cities have significant regard for cultural sustainability as an integral element of tourism development.

### Second Axis: Social Media

Overall this axis scored an average of 3.72 (SD 0.48) and indicates a high positive trend toward the use of digital platforms for promoting tourism.

The results indicate there is an increasing awareness among entrepreneurs from religious cities about the importance of social media in attracting tourists and developing a tourism brand. Additionally, Leung et al. (2013) reported on the significance of using digital platforms as an essential marketing channel, which is also supported by the results of this study; specifically in a religious context.

### Third Axis: Entrepreneurship

The average score for this axis was the highest among the four (3.91; SD 0.42) and indicates that the respondents perceive religious cities as an ideal environment for entrepreneurial endeavours.

Additionally, Ateljevic & Page (2009) acknowledged that there are new opportunities to become an entrepreneur in relation to religious tourism due to the cyclical nature of religious visits and the ongoing demand for them. Furthermore, the paragraph about innovativeness regarding tourism services received the highest average of all the paragraphs, which indicates the entrepreneurial willingness to innovate and create non-traditional business models.

### The 4th Axis: The Complementary Relationship

The average score for this axis was 3.78 (0.44 SD), indicating to the respondents that they agree that integrating sustainability and digitalization is a prerequisite to creating successful entrepreneurial models.

The descriptive results taken as a whole indicate high levels of perceived awareness by the sample regarding the 4 axes of the study, along with elements of religious cities that are critical to developing a pioneering and sustainable development model, including utilising digital transformation as a tool to support and expand upon. These provide a strong platform for developing integrated tourism strategies within religious cities.

To answer the second research question concerning the nature of the relationship between the study's axes, Pearson's Correlation

Coefficient was employed, and the results revealed the following:

Table (12) Correlationship

Relationship	Correlationship coefficient r	Significance level	Interpretation of strength
M1 (Development) ↔ M3 (Leadership)	**0.559	p < 0.01	Strong positive correlation
M2 (Social Media) ↔ M3 (Leadership)	**0.511	p < 0.01	Strong positive correlation
M1 (Development) ↔ M2 (Communication)	**0.436	p < 0.01	Moderate positive correlation
M4 (Integration) ↔ M3 (Leadership)	**0.394	p < 0.01	Moderate positive correlation
M1 (Development) ↔ M4 (Integration)	**0.475	p < 0.01	Moderate positive correlation
M2 (Communication) ↔ M4 (Integration)	**0.446	p < 0.01	Moderate positive correlation

Statistically significant at the 0.01 level

### Results of Correlation Analysis

A. Correlation Between Sustainable Tourism Development and Entrepreneurship: The correlation between sustainable tourism development and entrepreneurship is the strongest correlation ( $r = 0.559$ ), indicating that a sustainable tourism environment provides the best opportunity for the development of entrepreneur businesses. This can be explained by the fact that sustainability guarantees the flow of tourists and the stability of the tourism industry, encouraging entrepreneurs to invest in and grow their businesses.

B. Correlation Between Social Media and Entrepreneurship: The correlation coefficient between social media and entrepreneurship is ( $r = 0.511$ ), which is a strong positive correlation and indicates that digital platforms are a significant resource for supporting entrepreneurial businesses in religious cities. Digital platforms provide entrepreneurs with a greater customer base at a lower cost through social media.

C. Inter-Axis Correlation: The average inter-axes correlations of (0.394 to 0.475) demonstrate a logical and consistent relationship between the variables, further supporting the validity of the theoretical framework of the study and increasing confidence in its measures.

The findings of the correlational analysis confirm the main research hypothesis: there is an appreciable positive correlation between sustainable tourism development and entrepreneurship, and between social media and entrepreneurship in cities with religious significance. The very large correlation coefficients suggest that the two sets of variables function in a complementary rather than a competitive manner.

In addressing the third study question regarding the best structure for integrating the variables, Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted with Entrepreneurship as the dependent variable and the other three variables forming the three independent variables.

Table 10 indicates a statistically significant overall model ( $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, the independent variables account for 40.4% of the total variance of the entrepreneurship variable (i.e.,  $R^2 = 0.404$ ). This is a reasonable amount of variance explained when compared with what is generally accepted in research conducted within sociology and tourism.

#### Independent Variable Interpretations

##### Sustainable Tourism Development (M1):

This variable has the strongest effect on entrepreneurship (Beta = 0.390,  $p < 0.001$ ), meaning a unit change (increase) in sustainable tourism development results in a 0.349 unit change (increase) for entrepreneurship. This result is consistent with Hall's (2008) research, which found sustainability leads to stable conditions for tourism projects, resulting in being able to maintain the economic viability and sustainability of those projects. Sustainability of tourist destinations enhances competitiveness.

##### Social Media (M2):

The effect of social media is statistically significant, but has a moderate amount of predictive power, when controlling for sustainable tourism development (Beta = 0.310,  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that social media also provides an independent and statistically significant improvement for entrepreneurs. Xiang & Gretzel's (2010) research found social media has fundamentally

changed the structure of the tourism marketing system.

Complementary Relationship (M4):

The complementary relationship does not have a statistically significant effect on entrepreneurship (Beta=0.071, p=0.285). This non-significant result can warrant some discussion, but is not necessarily negative. A complementary relationship requires, first and foremost, a minimum level of digital infrastructure and institutional sustainability. Further research is needed in a real-world urban context such as Najaf and Karbala.

In examining the two separate variables of social media and sustainable tourism development, this study used a regression model to conclude that these independent variables have true predictive capacity for entrepreneurship in cities with a religious component. Additionally, the larger impact of the predictor variable of social media was inconclusive because there is not yet sufficient data to support an acceptable degree of confidence in this outcome and therefore requires further field investigation.

In assessing the validity and reliability of the instrument used in this research project, Cronbach's alpha was computed for each dimension separately as well as for the overall questionnaire with the following results:

According to standard scientific research as per Nunnally (1978), all Cronbach's alpha values are above the minimum standard of 0.70, which indicates that the results from this reliability test have good reliability. The completeness of overall reliability is also commendable at 0.907, confirming the instrument has a very high level of internal consistency and is suitable for field use.

### **Determined by the research effort, there are four fairly general conclusions:**

First: There is an exceptionally high level of potential development for tourism in cities that have a religious character, there is also a relatively high level of awareness of the necessity of sustainable development among both entrepreneurs and tourists who visit.

Second: Social media serves as an extremely effective and independent means of creating promotional opportunities for people interested in entrepreneurship, as well as providing at least some reduction in the economic constraints that may prevent new entrepreneurs and/or businesses from starting up.

Third: Compared to social media, the most significant factor contributing to successful tourism development through the use of sustainable tourism practices has been the impact of sustainability, which has triggered the creation of successful businesses; hence, it's essential for public policies to be directed toward the promotion of successful business through the use of sustainable business practices.

Fourth: Results from the regression analysis indicate that there was no statistically significant relationship between the integration dimension and digitalization (i.e., sustainability), suggesting that the integration between sustainability and digitalization is still being formed within many of the religious cities (perhaps indicating new research possibilities that can be studied in regards to the determinants of such an integration).

### **Recommendations**

On the base of research results and conclusions, the following four recommendations can be made:

1. Policymaker: The establishment of integrated national strategies to enhance tourism sustainability and create an entrepreneurship-friendly environment, especially in religious cities which would act as models for such development.
2. Entrepreneur: Improving the digital skills to effectively utilise social media to identify and reach out to segments who visit for religious reasons, as well as developing unique, locally branded religious tourism products.
3. Tourism Authority: Invest in the creation of a digital database that provides accurate information on patterns of religious tourism and offers up-to-date marketing opportunities for entrepreneurs.
4. Research: A programme of research to compare religious cities from within the Islamic world through fieldwork studies should be carried out to produce evidence-based models for developing and replicating the concept of religious tourism.

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