



An effort to enhancing consumer purchase intention post-COVID 19 in the pilgrimage and small-pilgrimage service provider of BONITA

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ABSTRACT

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In recent days, there has been an increasing interest towards achieving sustainable global tourism objectives specifically to Saudi Arabia. The benefits can be maximized if the government is successful in attracting current pilgrims and influence their future intention to visit the country as tourists through the service provider in Muslim countries. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to measure pilgrims' and small-pilgrimage's purchase intentions by the effect of electronic word of mouth, price, and brand image through mediating model on service providers in Indonesia. By the technique of purposive with two criteria, we received as many as 80 online questionnaires returned, and it then conducted data analysis by assisting Smart PLS latest version. Results stated that price didn't affect any outcomes, while E-WOM effects are in line with expectation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia is known for hosting the two most important Islamic religious gatherings (i.e. small-pilgrim and pilgrims'). In the past decade, the number of small-pilgrims' visitors to Saudi Arabia has tripled and reaching 8 million people (Alhothali et al., 2022). While pilgrimage is a yearly 10-day event that attracts while small-pilgrimage can be performed year-round to visit the Holy Mosque in Mecca to perform the Islamic ritual (Anismar et al., 2018). Managing such religious gatherings is a topic of crucial importance to the government of Indonesia as visitors provider. As long as pandemic crises, almost all the pilgrimage and small-pilgrimage service provider in Indonesia nearly collapsed due to social restriction that was enforced by Saudi Arabia Government as long as two years.

The enactment of these regulations certainly gives a sharp blow to businesses operating in the sector that serves pilgrimage and small-pilgrimage from Indonesia as sender of the most, where as long as social restriction, recorded BONITA sales is non-existent or 0% until early 2022 (Novis, 2022). Various efforts have been made by the national and regional governments to save this sector, such as freezing the payment of banking credit, support funding, and so on. The departure of pilgrim and small-pilgrim is

different with other overseas departures, because the government can control how many quotas will be dispatched (Kementerian Agama RI, 2020), and the performance is closely related to the trust (Games et al., 2022).

At the end of 2020, the Ministry of Religion has actually released that Saudi Arabia Government has allowed pilgrims from Indonesia to return with several terms and conditions (Handriana et al., 2020), and this information certainly provides golden opportunity to rise back from adversity due to COVID 19 crises. However, the cost of organizing small-pilgrimage and pilgrimage worship following the reference fee set by the Ministry of Religion Republic Indonesia may be a little bit irrational in the economic difficult situation (Ministry of Religion RI, 2020). The costs as intended are added to the cost of health checks in accordance with COVID 19 protocol, quarantine fees, and additional service fees (Ministry of Religion RI, 2020), in which the cost certainly affects the price offered and possibly higher than the previous price.

At present, BONITA is very focused on increasing sales and staying ahead, as well as making efforts to foster consumer purchase intention to entrust their pilgrimage and small-pilgrimage services again, then bring their colleagues and family. Study of Nuseir (2019) found that consumer purchase intention was significantly influenced by word of mouth electronic communication. The role of social media and internet in general has given impact on ease of access by a person to disseminate the experiences and information obtained (Guha et al., 2021). Word of mouth communication was also found assisted companies to improve their brand image, and it is close toward consumer confidence with information related to brands and the experiences of people they trust (Guha et al., 2021).

According to Juliana et al (2020), Companies that have a positive image will tend to be interested and trusted by consumers. The study of Arif (2019) found that brand image has a strong correlation with purchase intention. While Han Ji-Soo (2017) stated brand image will drives electronic word of mouth communication, means that the person who satisfied with any service tend toward sharing through electronic media as self-representation to recognize an expectation service quality. There are several studies put brand image as mediating variable in the relationship between electronic word of mouth and consumer purchase intention, and most of them found that partial contribution to enhance (Hien et al., 2020; Kazmi & Mehmood, 2016; Yulianto et al., 2021; Yunus et al., 2016).

On the other hand, price stated as determinant of a consumer's final decision to buy a product/service (Pratama et al., 2021), and it also as reference of entrepreneurs to do innovative performance (Faisal et al., 2021). The intention of consumer can be reduced and even lost due to high and unaffordable prices offered (Zheng et al., 2021). Someone with low income will really consider the price in the buying process, while those with an upper middle income will be more concerned with the quality, and no worries to much about the price offered (Cravens & Piercy, 2009). In the research of Razy and Lajevardi (2015), price found has a strong correlation with consumer purchase intention, meaning that affordable and price match driven consumer to make decision to buy. Meanwhile, some expert also has tested price impact on consumer purchase intention and brand image, most of them found that price strongly correlated to both brand image and consumer purchase intention amid and post-pandemic crises (Bhutto et al., 2022; Khaleeli et al., 2021; Kim & Hong, 2009).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The current study employed a quantitative approach and the data were collected period of may 2022 to july 2022 by administering a questionnaire among consumer candidate at the object of the research, in which we identified target of participants through purposive sampling technique with two criteria includes: First, they must be Muslim person. Second, they should has a family or colleague that ever conducted pilgrimage or small-

pilgrimage by the service of our object. In the distribution of questionnaire, we use two methods including online and paper by referring to Faisal et al (2021) and Yuliani et al (2021). As many as 80 questionnaires returned to the authors, with the detail of 20 questionnaires by online and 60 of them by paper. In the techniques of analysis, we use smart PLS software latest version to assist structural equation model and one-tail test at bootstrapping analysis ($t=1,647$) (Hair et al., 2014), while IBM SPSS latest version used to descriptive analysis. Regarding to mediating contribution, variance accounted for formula by Dunn et al (2003) have chosen as calculation references.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Necessary to know that participants are the consumer candidate which never go to pilgrims and small-pilgrimage with BONITA, in which 73,75% of them are woman and 26,25% are man, with ages ranging 21 to 30 years as many as 47,50%, ages ranging 31 to 40 years as many as 31,25%, and ages more than 40 years as many as 16,25%, while other ages less than 20 are 5%. Recorded, as many as 56,25% participant recognize not yet married, 40% stated married, 2,5% widow, and 1,25% as widower. Most of them well-educated at bachelor's degree (56,25%), 33,75% are SHS/VHS, 12,50% are diploma III, 8,75% completed master, and only 1,25% has a doctoral. The majority of participant stated they have no dependent (72,50%), as many as 21,25% of them have 1 to 3, and 6,25% stated they have more than 4 dependents. Regarding to how long they knew the company, as many as 68,75% stated as long as 1 to 5 years, 25% stated less than a year, and 6,25% stated already knew more than 5 years.

In terms of descriptive analysis, purchase intention has a mean average value of 4.07, which the highest stated "If I want to go to pilgrimage or small-pilgrimage, I only want to go with BONITA" (mean= 4,11). In the variable of electronic word of mouth (E-WOM), the mean average value of 4.01 by the highest statement posited "I was collected a lot of information related BONITA service from family and colleagues before I decide to choose" (mean=4,09). Price has a mean average value of 3.89, with the highest response at the statement of "I think the service prices that offered by BONITA has competitive" (mean=3,94). And brand image recorded has a mean average value of 3.95, by the statement of "BONITA offers reliable service" is the highest response (mean=3,99).

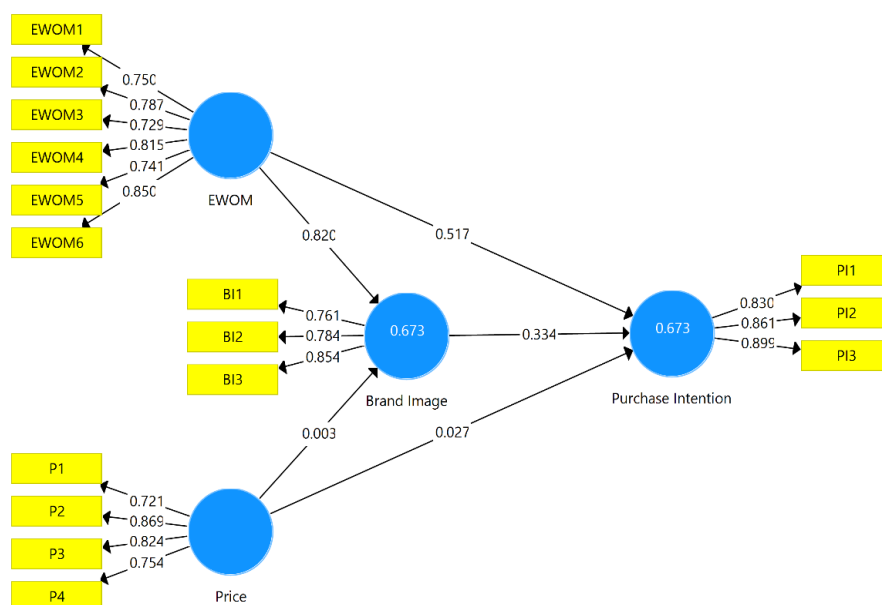


Figure 1. Model Outcome

The content validity of the questionnaire was assured by broadly reviewing related empirical and theoretical studies related to the research constructs. Construct validity was assessed using algorithm analysis with structural equation model (Hair et al., 2012). The objective was to ensure that all items related to one construct loaded onto one factor with factor loadings greater than 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted value greater than 0.50 (Heale & Twycross, 2015).

Table 1. Validity and Reliability

	Brand Image	E-WOM	Price	Purchase Intention	Composite Reliability	AVE
Brand Image	0,801				0,843	0,641
E-WOM	0,720	0,780			0,903	0,608
Price	0,202	0,243	0,794		0,872	0,630
Purchase Intention	0,763	0,797	0,220	0,864	0,898	0,746

Validity tests were announced for the overall constructs and the results showed factor loadings has in line (Figure 1), and also Average Variance Extracted ≥ 0.50 for the four overall constructs (Table 1). Figure 1 also showed the R² value of 0.673, it indicates that predictor variables can together explains 67.3 % of the variation in purchase intention. The reliability of the study constructs was tested using composite reliability. All the constructs showed a reliability of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ implying a good reliability and internal consistency (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Reliability tests were also performed for the overall constructs and the results also showed a reliability of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ for the four overall constructs (Table 1). Table 1 also shows the discriminant validity based on Fornell and Larcker Criterion. The proposed cut-off value is 0.70 in the goal construct to show that the respondents can differentiate each variable when identifying the variable based on the survey (Hair et al., 2010). The result shows that discriminant validity is established.

Table 2. Path-Analysis

	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics	P Values
E-WOM -> Purchase Intention	0,517	4,845	0,000
Price -> Purchase Intention	0,027	0,277	0,391
E-WOM -> Brand Image	0,820	18,248	0,000
Price -> Brand Image	0,003	0,040	0,484
Brand Image -> Purchase Intention	0,334	3,162	0,001
E-WOM -> Brand Image -> Purchase Intention	0,274	3,073	0,001
Price -> Brand Image -> Purchase Intention	0,001	0,036	0,486

The results of hipoteses stated that four are in lines, and three of them stated rejected. The cut-point recommended value of 1,64 one-tail test and p-value of $\leq 0,05$ to announce significant relationship, while lowest than those value announced rejected. In regard to Variance Accounted For, brand image has a significant contribution by 34,63% to the relationship between E-WOM and purchase intention, while didn't contribute to the relation of price and purchase intention.

Direct marketing by word of mouth that is accommodated by electronic media has a major impact on the level of consumer interest in choosing BONITA, this result is based on the evaluation of potential consumers before deciding to use BONITA services, which is relatively high, where they will collect more information from family and colleagues related experiences when traveling with BONITA. Likewise, we argue that the departure of pilgrimage and small-pilgrimage might not often carried out by consumers/congregants like they go on vacation to tourist attractions in the local area, therefore potential

consumers will certainly depend on the experience of family or colleagues who have visited the holy land of Mecca.

This findings are in lines with Guha et al (2021), Chetna and Amresh (2018) which stated that consumer intention to buy the same service strongly affected by electronic-word of mouth. Farzin and Fattahi (2018) also argue that most of consumer candidate being trust and belief to decide future consumption when the information came from their family or colleagues. In company side, positive E-WOM will be enhancing popularity and consumer trust, so that the company would efficiency on marketing cost (Rajaobelina et al., 2021). The researches of Farzin and Fattahi (2018), and Elseidi and El-Baz (2016) also supports our findings which stated E-WOM has a positive and significant effect on brand image.

During the COVID 19 recovery period, price has played an important role and is one of the factors that consumers consider when making a purchase, but the high and low prices offered by BONITA regarding pilgrims and small-pilgrims services, do not necessarily discourage potential consumers from choosing to use their services. As it stands for, pilgrims and small-pilgrims are often carried out on the basis of personal intention to visit the holy land of Mecca to worship and fulfill the 5th pillar of Islam, so the price found has no effect, which is very reasonable in line with the quality of BONITA's services that can be trusted and the services categorized excellence. Our finding related price effects are in lines with Khaleeli et al (2021) which states that there is no effect of price on consumer interest in choosing, this is due to personal orientation.

Meanwhile, the majority of potential consumers stated that the price offered by BONITA was quite competitive, affordable and suitable between benefits and price paid. The price was also found has no effect on brand image of BONITA, this proves that the BONITA brand image classified popular, trusted and reliable. Agmeka et al (2019) which confirms that a popular and positive brand image will certainly set a price that is in accordance with the benefits of the service because most of them are very concerned about their business identity. Study of Cheah et al (2020) also emphasized that services from companies or brands that already have a positive image and categorized popular will be more careful to setting them prices.

Regarding BONITA brand image today, the image of BONITA tour has a big impact on consumer interest in choosing, several things as reasons, such as the majority of respondents stating that BONITA tour offers decent services with excellent quality. On the other hand, the majority of respondents who are young people are very sensitive to the company's image, because the brand image determines how much the company is known and trusted by consumers. This brand image is based on service quality or price suitability and the benefits of services that have been enjoyed by previous consumers. Some research also found similar result, and most of them stated positive and popular brand image has a significant impact on consumer preference to use the service (Benhardy et al., 2020; Mulyono & Pasaribu, 2021; Yulianto et al., 2021).

Brand image is an important component in encouraging consumer interest, because it is considered a representation of the performance of a brand in giving the impression and signal that a company is reliable, free from fraud, and trustworthy. The findings of this study confirm that brand image indirectly also strengthens the impact of E-WOM on the interest of potential consumers to choose BONITA. However, it does not contribute to the price effect. The result of this indirect influence confirms that the positive image and popularity of BONITA which is spread on social media, has helped convince potential consumers of the E-WOM they received from their family and colleagues. Furthermore, the positive image of BONITA also makes potential consumers less worried about the price issue, because potential consumers may assume that BONITA will always satisfy its congregation.

Our findings are in lines with Elseidi and El-Baz (2016), Kazmi and Mehmood (2016), and Yunus et al (2016), which stated brand image has a significant contribution to

enhance the intention of consumer candidates to buy/choice. Brand image encourages one's wisdom in conveying and proving their consumptive experience to others through digital-based applications (Arif, 2019). The role of brand image as mediation to enhance purchase intention was found to be partially contributed by several experts (Hafez, 2021; Hien et al., 2020), but its relation to price has not been widely tested or even very difficult to find. This study is one of the latest tests related to the contribution of brand image in mediating prices, but unfortunately we did not find any significant results even in the midst of the recovery period due to COVID 19 which has proven to be weakening the world economy (Games et al., 2022)

4. CONCLUSION

COVID 19 has given tremendous effects to almost all sector of business, it is not only small medium enterprise (Games et al., 2022), banking, and industrial (Hidayat et al., 2021), but also travel agent or service providers that serve pilgrimage and small-pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia. Re-increasing the intention of potential consumers to choose BONITA services requires various strategies, such as evaluating brand image, adjusting prices, and seeing the role of E-WOM on previous services. This study confirms that it is not the price which highly considered by potential consumers when they choose BONITA's to go for pilgrimage or small-pilgrimage. This study concludes that BONITA services in the past have made potential consumer be confidence with the information that they've got from their colleagues or families, and it in line with the consumer behavior to not really consider about price offered, even in the midst of economic difficulties. Meanwhile, the limited opportunities to go for pilgrimage and small-pilgrimage in unpredictable situation also strengthen why potential consumers ignoring the price offered to choose BONITA today's'.

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