



Travel Cost Method for Valuing Destinations and Attractions: The Paradox of Muslim-Friendly Tourism

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Travel cost method, Economic valuation, Tourism destination, Attractions.

Abstract.

This study compares the economic value of two tourist sites: Al-Jabbar, a single attraction, and the City of Semarang (CoS), a multi-attraction site, using the Travel Cost Method (TCM). The results show a significant difference in consumer surplus, with CoS generating about Rp. 6,289,308 per visit, far exceeding Al-Jabbar's Rp. 801,282 per visit. This highlights CoS's broader appeal and diverse offerings, attracting more visitors and maximising economic benefits. Al-Jabbar visitors are more sensitive to travel cost changes, affecting their visit frequency, while CoS visitors show lower sensitivity, likely due to the variety of attractions. The study also reveals a paradox in Muslim Friendly Tourism (MFT) services. At Al-Jabbar, MFT considers a decrease in visit frequency, suggesting limited appeal, whereas at CoS, MFT has no significant impact, possibly due to the destination's diverse attractions. These insights are crucial for destination management and tourism development.

Kata Kunci:

Metode biaya perjalanan, Valuasi ekonomi, Destinasi wisata, Daya tarik wisata.

Abstrak.

Studi ini membandingkan nilai ekonomi dari dua destinasi wisata: Al-Jabbar sebagai destinasi tunggal, dan Kota Semarang (CoS) sebagai destinasi multi-atraksi, dengan menggunakan Travel Cost Method (TCM). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya perbedaan signifikan dalam surplus konsumen, di mana CoS menghasilkan sekitar Rp. 6.289.308 per kunjungan, jauh melampaui Al-Jabbar yang hanya sebesar Rp. 801.282 per kunjungan. Temuan ini menegaskan daya tarik yang lebih luas serta keragaman atraksi yang dimiliki CoS, sehingga mampu menarik lebih banyak pengunjung dan memaksimalkan manfaat ekonomi. Pengunjung Al-Jabbar lebih sensitif terhadap perubahan biaya perjalanan yang memengaruhi frekuensi kunjungan, sedangkan pengunjung CoS menunjukkan sensitivitas yang lebih rendah, kemungkinan karena variasi atraksi yang tersedia. Studi ini juga menemukan paradoks terkait layanan Muslim Friendly Tourism (MFT). Di Al-Jabbar, pertimbangan MFT justru menurunkan frekuensi kunjungan, yang menunjukkan daya tariknya terbatas; sementara di CoS, MFT tidak memiliki pengaruh signifikan, kemungkinan karena keragaman atraksi di destinasi tersebut. Temuan ini penting bagi pengelolaan destinasi dan pengembangan pariwisata.

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1. Introduction

Post-COVID-19 pandemic, the Muslim-friendly tourism (MFT) market is predicted to fully recover in 2024 with 160 million Muslim travellers (Mastercard & Crescent Rating, 2023). Health, safety, personalised and travel experiences that conform with Islamic values have been critical for the Muslim tourist (Hanafiah et al., 2022). Moreover, Muslim travellers expect a total experience of new travel norms that provide dietary and religious needs of Muslim tourists, so the service providers need to adapt to fulfil their needs (Sutikno et al., 2023). Ensuring the MFT quality through halal certification products, services, and facilities will also increase the size of the market segment (Hidayat et al., 2022; Muflihini et al., 2023; Yuliaty et al., 2021).

Beyond all the positive trends, efforts, and regulations that have been published by the government regarding the MFT development, the authors encouraged clarifying whether the MFT really matters for the tourist. Despite the increasing initiatives, there are still significant challenges and uncertainties about the actual impact of Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) on tourist satisfaction and destination choice. Faidah (Faidah, 2018) emphasizes the need for adequate infrastructure and clear regulations to genuinely appeal to Muslim tourists. Furthermore, Wahyudin, Randa, and El Karimah highlight that misunderstandings and a lack of clear guidelines have led to obscurity in the concept of halal tourism, which can affect its perceived importance among travellers (Wahyudin et al., 2022). Santoso et al. discuss the regulatory challenges in implementing effective halal tourism practices, which indicate that there is still a gap between the government's efforts and the actual experience of tourists (Santoso et al., 2022).

Ahead of those efforts to enrich the MFT experience made by the government and industry, this study will reveal and compare the value of a tourist destination and a single tourist attraction using the Travel Cost Method. This method will clarify the use value of a site by using visitors' cost as a measurement of willingness to pay for a visit to a site (Wubalem et al., 2023). Comparing the destination and a tourist attraction's use value will contribute to a better understanding of how big the disparity of use value between the destination and a single attraction is, as well as to compare the economic impact on different scales.

Furthermore, recent research increasingly highlights the importance of Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) attributes in enhancing a destination's appeal and attracting visitors. Destinations that emphasise MFT characteristics tend to experience a notable increase in tourist visits, as these attributes play a significant role in influencing tourists' decisions and contributing to the sustainability of tourism numbers (Liu et al., 2018; Mohd Yousoof et al., 2023; Sarastiani et al., 2022). The focus on MFT is becoming an essential element in tourism strategies, especially for destinations looking to cater to a diverse and global audience.

This study aims to further explore the impact of MFT attributes on tourist visits by employing the Travel Cost Method (TCM). By incorporating MFT as a variable within the TCM framework, the research will evaluate whether the presence of MFT characteristics at a destination significantly drives tourist numbers. This approach seeks to provide empirical evidence on the positive contribution of MFT to visitation rates, emphasising its importance in the strategic planning and management of tourism destinations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *The Origin of Muslim Friendly Tourism Concept*

The history of Muslim Friendly Tourism begins with the awareness of the tourism industry that the size of the market for Muslim pilgrimage tourists could not be spurned. Along with the economic development of Muslim countries, the number of Muslim tourists increased. The growing economic strength of Muslim-majority countries has significantly contributed to the increase in the number of. With an increasing awareness and expanding numbers of Muslim tourists, many tourism destinations have started to realize the significant economic potential of this market (Organisation Of Islamic Cooperation, 2016). The development of Muslim tourists has become one of the new markets for the tourism sector, which is very important to be optimized by the government to encourage local and national economic growth through halal tourism (Akbar, 2021). The rise of Islamic tourism is closely linked to the economic development of Muslim countries, which has led to an increase in the number of Muslim tourists seeking destinations that cater to their religious and cultural needs (Fauzi et al., 2019).

However, this type of tourists has different behavior and needs. Every act and attitude of Muslim tourists will bow to their sharia values. These sharia values constrain and limit their choice of products generally. By this understanding, the tourism industry must limit their products to this Muslim value accordance while finding and creating alternative products that would be suitable for Muslim tourists (Muslim & Harun, 2022). Tourism activities are a concept that integrates sharia values, and Muslim tourists in the context of Muslim-friendly tourism are also constrained by these values (Rizqi et al., 2023).

Not as easy as it says, the effort to adjust tourism products means also extra budget to provide their prayer places, ensuring cleanliness, and obtaining halal certification not only for the foods but also for everything that Muslims eat or touch. Providing facilities in accordance with sharia values and ensuring the quality of halal tourism services requires significant investment (Keliat & Sentanu, 2022). Additionally, the need for halal certification extends beyond food to include all products and services that Muslims interact with, necessitating a comprehensive approach to meet these standards (Maghrifani, 2018). These efforts highlight the challenges and additional costs involved in catering to Muslim tourists effectively.

2.2. *The Basic Concept of the Travel Cost Method*

Beyond all those costs, this writing tries to reveal how the tourists value the MFT destinations by using the Travel Cost Method (TCM). The basic idea of the travel cost method is that the costs of travel are used as a proxy for the value of the place the tourist visits or the destination. This method also assumes that visitation rates or frequencies change with varying travel costs. The more expensive the cost, the fewer visits will occur, which is similar to the law of demand of economics (Champ et al., 2017).

The rates or frequency of visits will be the dependent variable of the estimation. Since the data is predicted to be skewed to 1, this research not only uses the Ordinary Least Squares regression, we also use the Poisson estimation (Solikin et al., 2019; Sukma Irdiana et al., 2022).

$$\Pr(y_i = n) = \frac{e^{-\lambda_i} \lambda_i^n}{n!} \quad ; n = 0, 1, 2, \dots$$

By using this equation, we calculate the probability of $y_i = n$, where n is the number of visits within a certain period for observation i . While λi would depend on variables that influence the decision to visit, such as the travel cost, income, and any demographic factors.

$$\lambda i = e^{X_i \beta}$$

Which means that the expectation of visits λi is the form of an exponential function of linear combinations of independent variables X_i influenced by β .

Therefore, to count the consumer surplus for a single visit to a tourist destination, we could use the inverse of the coefficient of the travel cost in the regression model (Blaine et al., 2015).

$$\text{Consumer Surplus} = -\frac{1}{\beta_2}$$

3. Research Methodology

The main purpose of this research is to find the consumer surplus associated with visits to the destination and to get a bigger picture of the factors influencing the number of visits to the destination. To fulfil those purposes, this research is a quantitative research (Mohajan, 2020). A structured questionnaire was employed to collect the data, a method widely used for its effectiveness in capturing visitor behaviour and preferences in tourism research (Veal, 2018). The questionnaire underwent rigorous pilot testing and was revised three times to ensure clarity, reliability, and validity. The survey included sections on demographic information, travel behaviour and travel costs.

The survey used on-site sampling, which means that every sample was a visitors of the sites, the risk of zero truncation was then solved by using the Poisson regression (Grilli et al., 2017). However, we also performed the OLS regression to compare the regression results. To understand deeply the MFT value, we chose a different tourist attraction site and a tourist destination. We selected this location because they were among the top 5 MFT destinations according to the Indonesia Muslim Traveller Index 2023 (IMTI, 2023). City of Semarang (CoS) have been chosen as the destination, while The Great Mosque of West Java, The Al-Jabbar, have been picked as a tourist attraction.

Limited information of the population size for both locations has led us to use a convenience sampling method (Juutinen et al., 2022; Marwulandari et al., 2019). The data collection process made 220 cleaned responses from the city of Semarang, while the Al-Jabbar made 200 cleaned responses.

4. Result

4.1. Statistical Descriptive

Significant variability was observed between the single-attraction site of Al-Jabbar and the multi-attraction destination of the City of Semarang (CoS). Al-Jabbar visitors reported higher visitation frequency, averaging three visits per month, compared with one visit per month for CoS. Clear differences also emerged in travel costs and visitor income. As shown in Table 1, the average travel cost per visit to CoS was Rp. 1,410,689, nearly four times greater than the Rp. 350,545 recorded for Al-Jabbar. Similarly, respondents visiting CoS reported higher monthly incomes, averaging Rp. 5.6 million, compared with Rp. 2.8 million for Al-Jabbar. These results indicate that CoS attracts a more affluent visitor base, while Al-Jabbar draws relatively lower-income but more frequent visitors. Age distribution also differed markedly. The median age of Al-Jabbar respondents was 26 years, with a

mode of 22 years, indicating a predominantly younger demographic. In contrast, CoS respondents had a median age of 48 years, with modal ages of 30 and 50 years, reflecting an older visitor profile.

The dummy variable analysis in Table 2 further highlights demographic and behavioral differences. Educational attainment was slightly higher among Al-Jabbar visitors, with 75% holding a bachelor's degree, compared to 68.18% at CoS. However, CoS attracted a more educationally diverse audience, with 31.82% non-degree holders compared to 25% at Al-Jabbar. Sports participation was minimal at both sites (6.19% and 4.09%, respectively), suggesting that neither destination is strongly associated with sports tourism. Visitor motivation was consistent across both sites, with 73% of respondents indicating the main attraction as their primary purpose of visit. Considerations of Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) were also significant, influencing 69.5% of visitors to Al-Jabbar and 74.55% at CoS.

Notably, CoS attracted a higher proportion of couples (17.73%) compared to Al-Jabbar (11.5%), which may reflect the wider variety of attractions and experiences available. Travel mode analysis showed that most respondents used paid transportation, with slightly higher usage at CoS (98.18%) than Al-Jabbar (95.5%).

In summary, the descriptive statistics indicate that Al-Jabbar attracts younger, more frequent, and highly educated visitors with lower income levels, while the City of Semarang appeals to older, higher-income, and more demographically diverse groups.

Table 1. Statistics Descriptive

			Descriptive Statistics	
Variables			Al-Jabbar	CoS
Travel Month	Mean		3	1
	Frequency/ Median		1	1
	Mode		1	1
	SD		7	1
Travel Cost/ visit	Mean*		Rp350,545	Rp1,410,689
	Median		Rp150,000	Rp1,600,000
	Mode		Rp300,000	Rp2,050,000
	SD		Rp603,237	Rp1,087,777
Income/ month	Mean*		Rp2,884,300	Rp5,652,045
	Median		Rp1,550,000	Rp5,000,000
	Mode		Rp1,000,000	Rp10,000,000
	SD		Rp3,690,222	Rp3,491,037
Age	Mean		35	39
	Median		26	48
	Mode		22	50 & 30
	SD		16	12

Table 2. Statistics Descriptive of Dummy Variables

Variables	Al-Jabbar		CoS	
	Freq	Per(%)	Freq	Per(%)
Bachelor=1	150	75	150	68.18
non-bachelor=0	50	25	70	31.82
Sport=1	12	6.19	9	4.09
non-sport=0	182	93.81	211	95.91
Main Purpose=1	146	73	161	73
Non-MP=0	54	27	59	27
MFT=1	139	69.5	164	74.55
Non-MFT=0	61	30.5	56	25.45
Couples=1	23	11.5	39	17.73
Non-Couples=0	177	88.5	181	82.27
Paid=1	191	95.5	216	98.18
Non-paid=0	9	4.5	4	1.82

4.2. Regression Result

The regression analysis, employing both OLS and Poisson models (Table 3), provides comprehensive insights into the determinants of visit frequency at Al-Jabbar and the City of Semarang (CoS). Overall, the findings demonstrate that visitor behavior at these two destinations is shaped by a different set of factors, reflecting the structural differences between a single-attraction site and a multi-attraction urban tourism hub.

For Al-Jabbar, travel cost is a particularly salient factor. Although the OLS model does not show statistical significance, the Poisson estimates confirm that higher travel costs significantly reduce visit frequency ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that visitors to Al-Jabbar are highly cost-sensitive, and even modest increases in travel expenditure serve as a barrier to repeat visits. By contrast, the effect of travel cost at CoS is also negative and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), but smaller in magnitude, suggesting that visitors to multi-attraction destinations are less deterred by cost because of the broader range of experiences on offer that justify higher expenditures.

Age provides another key distinction between the two destinations. At Al-Jabbar, the Poisson model shows a strong positive association ($p < 0.01$), suggesting that older visitors are more likely to visit frequently, possibly due to the religious or contemplative appeal of the attraction. At CoS, age is also a positive predictor ($p < 0.05$), though with a smaller coefficient, implying that the multi-attraction destination appeals to a slightly older demographic but in a more balanced way. These findings align with the descriptive statistics, which showed younger visitors dominating at Al-Jabbar and older visitors at CoS.

Educational attainment is particularly influential at Al-Jabbar. Both the OLS and Poisson results show a strong negative effect ($p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$, respectively), indicating that individuals with bachelor's degrees are less likely to visit frequently. This may suggest that Al-Jabbar's offerings are perceived as less appealing to more educated or cosmopolitan audiences, narrowing its visitor profile. In contrast, education is not a significant determinant of visit frequency at CoS, reflecting its broader reach across diverse educational backgrounds.

The role of income is less consistent. At Al-Jabbar, income does not significantly affect visitation, suggesting that cost sensitivity is driven more by travel and transport expenses than by overall income levels. At CoS, however, income shows a small but significant negative effect ($p < 0.05$), which could suggest that higher-income groups prefer alternative or more exclusive destinations, while middle-income groups form the bulk of CoS visitors.

Behavioral variables further sharpen the contrast between the two destinations. Sports participation significantly reduces visit frequency at Al-Jabbar ($p < 0.01$), which implies that the site's activities and atmosphere do not resonate with individuals who prioritize active, sport-oriented lifestyles. By contrast, sports participation has a strong positive effect at CoS ($p < 0.01$), highlighting that the multi-attraction setting is likely to include amenities or recreational spaces that appeal to this demographic, thereby expanding its visitor base.

Visitor motivation, as expected, plays a central role but with divergent effects. At Al-Jabbar, alignment of the main purpose with the attraction significantly increases visit frequency ($p < 0.01$), confirming that the site primarily draws purpose-driven tourists. At CoS, however, the effect is negative ($p < 0.01$), reflecting the heterogeneity of visitor motivations in multi-attraction destinations, where individuals are not necessarily tied to a single focal activity but are attracted by the diversity of options available.

Table 3. OLS and Poisson Regression Result

Independent Variables	Al-Jabbar		CoS	
	Poisson	OLS	Poisson	OLS
Travel Cost/visit	-0.000001247 (4.20)***	-0.000003957 -1.320	-0.000000159 (2.49)**	-0.000000202 (2.49)**
Age	0.017075681 (5.32)***	0.049692967 -1.260	0.005374689 (2.13)**	0.007018198 (2.05)**
1=Bachelor Degree	-1.284029547 (8.95)***	-3.230412886 (2.46)**	-0.070393087 -1.310	-0.073863854 -1.010
Income	0.000000013 -0.990000000	0.000000059 -0.350	-0.000000021 (2.27)**	-0.000000022 (1.87)*
1=Sports	-1.132347515 (4.82)***	-3.494146100 (1.66)*	0.836166410 (5.33)***	1.707026913 (4.34)***
1=Main purpose attraction	1.279647661 (10.18)***	3.379659450 (3.05)***	-0.197327486 (2.68)***	-0.266528864 (2.47)**
1=Muslim Friendly	-0.426195285 (3.39)***	-2.769530646 -1.290	-0.101317537 -1.590	-0.126919046 -1.580
1=Couples	-0.622480631 (4.26)***	-1.992751502 -1.280	-0.013563840 -0.200	0.002090190 -0.020
1=Paid Transportation mode	-1.619577780 (12.52)***	-4.365340434 (3.81)***	0.015102942 -0.180	0.023100911 -0.230
Constant	0.742607160 (4.20)***	4.777992147 (2.01)**	0.354776841 (2.58)***	1.402172960 (7.94)***
N	200	200	220	220
R ²		0.150		0.420

The Muslim Friendly Tourism (MFT) variable also shows contrasting results. At Al-Jabbar, MFT has a significant negative effect ($p < 0.01$), suggesting that while the attraction is highly valued by Muslim visitors, this focus may narrow its overall appeal, leading to fewer repeat visits compared to more general leisure destinations. At CoS, however, MFT is not statistically significant, reflecting the fact that the multi-attraction destination dilutes the influence of religiously specific considerations by offering a wider variety of experiences.

Finally, transportation mode emerges as a critical determinant, particularly for Al-Jabbar. Reliance on paid transportation significantly reduces visit frequency ($p < 0.01$), underscoring the importance of transport costs as a barrier to repeat visitation. This is consistent with the finding that Al-Jabbar visitors tend to have lower incomes and are more cost-sensitive. At CoS, the variable is insignificant, likely because visitors have more transport options and because higher-income visitors are less constrained by travel costs.

Taken together, these results reveal distinct behavioral dynamics. Al-Jabbar is characterized by higher cost sensitivity, educational selectivity, and reliance on purpose-driven motivations, with significant deterrents linked to transportation costs and limited appeal to more educated or sport-oriented audiences. In contrast, CoS attracts an older, more diverse, and less constrained visitor base, with visitation shaped by broader motivations, recreational amenities, and relatively lower sensitivity to travel costs. These findings underscore the importance of distinguishing between single- and multi-attraction destinations when developing tourism policies and marketing strategies, as the drivers of repeat visitation differ significantly across contexts.

4.3. Consumer Surplus of a Tourist Attraction and a Multiple Attraction Destination

The consumer surplus estimates provide a clear contrast in the economic value derived by visitors from the two destinations. At Al-Jabbar, the consumer surplus per visit is approximately Rp. 801,282, reflecting a relatively modest level of perceived benefit. This limited surplus aligns with the site's specialized and niche character, which may attract visitors with specific cultural or religious motivations but is less successful in appealing to broader market segments. The strong cost sensitivity observed in the regression models further reinforces this interpretation: visitors to Al-Jabbar are more likely to reduce their visits if travel or transport costs increase, underscoring the vulnerability of the site's economic performance to changes in affordability and accessibility.

In contrast, the City of Semarang (CoS) generates a far higher consumer surplus of approximately Rp. 6,289,308 per visit. This figure suggests that visitors perceive substantial economic benefit from the multi-attraction destination, owing to the diversity of experiences on offer. The lower sensitivity to travel costs observed among CoS visitors indicates that their willingness-to-pay is more robust. Visitors appear willing to incur higher expenditures because they derive greater utility from the wide array of cultural, leisure, and recreational opportunities available. This highlights the advantage of multi-attraction destinations in sustaining high perceived value and capturing more diverse demand segments.

The contrast between the two destinations underscores an important distinction in tourism economics: single-attraction sites face limitations in generating broad-based consumer value, while multi-attraction destinations are structurally better positioned to attract and retain higher-value visitors. For Al-Jabbar, this finding points to the need for strategic enhancements, such as improving complementary facilities, diversifying activities, and developing targeted marketing to broaden its appeal beyond its current niche. Enhancing accessibility and mitigating transport costs could also help reduce barriers and improve repeat visitation. For CoS, the high consumer surplus not only demonstrates its current success but also suggests opportunities for further optimization.

Differentiated pricing strategies, bundled packages, or the introduction of premium experiences could allow CoS to capture even greater economic returns without undermining visitor satisfaction.

Taken together, these results confirm that consumer surplus is a powerful indicator of destination value and provides actionable insights for tourism planning and management. While Al-Jabbar highlights the challenges of sustaining high economic impact with a narrowly defined attraction, CoS exemplifies how multi-attraction destinations can generate substantial value by catering to heterogeneous visitor needs. The findings suggest that policymakers and destination managers should adopt differentiated strategies: enhancing inclusivity and affordability at single-attraction sites, while leveraging diversification and strategic pricing at multi-attraction hubs to sustain and maximize their economic contribution.

4.4. *The Paradox of Muslim Friendly Tourism (MFT) and Its Negative Impact on Tourist Visits*

Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) attributes are commonly expected to enhance destination attractiveness, particularly in contexts with predominantly Muslim populations. However, the regression results reveal a paradoxical pattern at Al-Jabbar. The Poisson regression indicates a significant negative association between MFT considerations and visit frequency (-0.426 , $p < 0.01$), suggesting that, rather than stimulating repeat visitation, MFT-related factors are associated with fewer visits.

Insights from field observations and informal interviews conducted during the survey period suggest that this pattern does not reflect rejection of religious tourism, but rather reflects the limited role of MFT as a primary motivation for visits. Several visitors indicated that their decision to visit Al-Jabbar was driven mainly by its status as one of the largest mosques ever built in West Java and by its novelty as a newly established landmark, rather than by specific Muslim-friendly services. For these visitors, the attraction's architectural scale, symbolic significance, and curiosity value outweighed considerations related to formal MFT facilities.

This suggests a segmentation effect in which MFT attributes resonate strongly only with a specific subset of highly observant Muslim visitors, while remaining largely irrelevant for a broader segment of visitors whose motivations are experiential rather than service-oriented. In such cases, emphasising MFT as a defining feature may inadvertently narrow the perceived appeal of the destination without adding meaningful value for visitors whose religious needs are already met in everyday settings.

A further explanation relates to expectation alignment. When destinations are promoted as Muslim-friendly, visitors may anticipate a comprehensive set of high-quality, seamlessly integrated services. If these expectations are not matched by the on-site experience—either due to inconsistent service delivery, limited supporting facilities, or insufficient communication of available services—the perceived value of MFT attributes may decline, reducing the likelihood of repeat visits.

In contrast, MFT considerations are statistically insignificant for the City of Semarang (CoS) in both the Poisson and OLS models. This outcome reflects the multi-attraction nature of CoS, where visitation is motivated by a diverse portfolio of cultural, recreational, and leisure experiences. In such environments, niche features such as MFT do not function as decisive factors, as visitors' choices are shaped by a broader set of attractions rather than a single thematic identity.

From a destination management perspective, these findings highlight the limitations of relying on MFT as a stand-alone strategy for increasing visitation. At Al-Jabbar, early demand appears to be driven primarily by landmark novelty and symbolic significance rather than by service-based religious amenities. To sustain and expand visitation over time, MFT attributes should be positioned as complementary rather than central, embedded within a broader strategy that emphasizes architectural

value, inclusive public space, visitor comfort, and diversified experiences. Engaging visitors through surveys, focus groups, and ongoing feedback mechanisms would enable destination managers to better align MFT offerings with actual visitor motivations and expectations, thereby transforming MFT from a neutral or limiting factor into a supportive element of long-term destination appeal.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that visitor behaviour, economic valuation, and demand sensitivity differ markedly between single-attraction and multi-attraction tourism destinations. Using the Travel Cost Method, the analysis shows that the City of Semarang (CoS) generates substantially higher consumer surplus than Al-Jabbar, reflecting the greater perceived value and broader appeal of destinations offering diverse cultural, recreational, and leisure experiences. In contrast, Al-Jabbar's more limited scope constrains its economic valuation and positions it as a niche destination with narrower visitor appeal.

The regression results further reveal that visit frequency at Al-Jabbar is highly sensitive to travel costs, indicating that even modest increases in transportation expenses can significantly deter repeat visitation. By comparison, CoS exhibits greater demand resilience, with visitors showing lower cost sensitivity, consistent with the ability of multi-attraction destinations to justify higher travel expenditures through bundled and complementary experiences. These findings underscore the critical role of accessibility and affordability in shaping visitation patterns, particularly for single-attraction sites.

A key contribution of this study is the identification of a paradoxical relationship between Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) attributes and visitation at Al-Jabbar. While MFT is commonly promoted as a mechanism to enhance attractiveness in Muslim-majority contexts, the results suggest that when such features are not aligned with visitor motivations and experiential expectations, they may fail to stimulate demand and may even reduce visit frequency. In multi-attraction settings such as CoS, the insignificance of MFT reflects the dominance of other experiential factors that dilute the influence of niche attributes.

Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of context-specific destination strategies. For single-attraction sites, enhancing accessibility, reducing travel-related barriers, and integrating niche services such as MFT within a broader and more inclusive visitor experience are essential to increasing perceived value and sustaining demand. For multi-attraction destinations, policy efforts can focus on optimising pricing structures, maintaining experiential diversity, and leveraging destination complementarities to preserve their strong economic performance.

Overall, this study illustrates the value of combining consumer surplus estimation with behavioural modelling to assess destination competitiveness. By recognising that different attraction types are driven by distinct economic and experiential mechanisms, policymakers and destination managers can design more nuanced, evidence-based tourism strategies that maximise economic benefits while responding to the heterogeneous preferences of contemporary tourists.

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